**H is for Hamilton**

**Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at** [http://archiveofourown.org/works/12179658](http://archiveofourown.org/works/12179658).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Teen And Up Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>No Archive Warnings Apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M, M/M, Gen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Hamilton - Miranda, Hamilton - Miranda (Broadway Cast) RPF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Angst, Humor, some anxiety, Family, Introversion, Black Humor, Modern AU world, Office AU, Surrogate mother, Homophobic Language, but i don't agree with it, Don't worry, a lot of craziness, and it's gonna get worse..., The Orphanage, Dark Comedy, Very dark sometimes, like if you watch it for too long you'd think you'd become blind, crackfic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2017-09-24 Updated: 2019-06-03 Chapters: 54/? Words: 685226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**H is for Hamilton**

by [Smaragd_Witch](http://archiveofourown.org/users/Smaragd_Witch)

**Summary**

A series-sitcom-type AU in the modern world, where they work in a law firm and live daily
things with a bit of a lot of craziness because none of them can stay out of trouble. 
WARNING of dark humour.

Notes

WARNING: Swearing and black (almost jet) humour. This story was based on the pilot episode of the TV series "F is for family"

"Hamilton" and "F is for family" belong to their respectively creators.
Who broke it?

Chapter Summary

Hamilton bought a laptop only to find it broken not even one day after in his office.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing and black humour
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda. This is based on the pilot episode of "F is for family", which belongs to its creators.

Today was going to be one of those days. Eliza had a feeling about it. Her suspicions turned into reality when her sister, Angelica, sent her a message which read: “The lion is out of his cage… again”, along with that sarcastic smiley emoji they both tend to use when they were too pissed about whatever they were talking about.

Eliza sighed and looked at the clock in the kitchen. It was five past ten already. Alexander usually got home at ten. Except for those days when he decided to write like a maniac all night in his office until Washington or Angelica told him he had to go home. Usually they were answered with a fake promise of only one paragraph more, and they had to wait by the door, watching the clock and seeing the minute hand going too slowly for their liking. More than one time, Angelica confessed her, Washington and she wanted to leave him there. “He wouldn’t even notice” Eliza had remarked. Angelica laughed, saying she was absolutely right.

Ten past ten. Twenty-five past ten. Quarter to eleven… Eliza wouldn’t be this worried if it weren’t for Angelica’s message. In a normal night, she would’ve been asleep already, but something was keeping her eyes opened. A feeling that told her she wasn’t allowed to go to sleep until she saw Alexander coming in the front door. So, she served herself a glass of wine, sat on the couch in the living room (where she had a perfect sight of the front door by the corner of her eye) and resume the book where she had left it the last time she read it. *Pride and prejudice*. Angelica told her she would like it. Back in March. Now, there she was in November and she still was stuck in the tenth page, and hoping to catch up to where she had told her sister she had read before Angelica found out. Not that she didn’t like the book, though, but reading was a difficult task when she had given birth to three children and was married to one. Tiredness was part of her life.

That was why, maybe, she didn’t even remember when she fell asleep on the couch, letting go of the glass, breaking the glass and staining the carpet in dark red. She didn’t even want to think if it was healthy to not have been awaken by the sound of glass breaking but by the sound of the slam of the front door.
Eliza jumped in her seat and looked at the entrance, seeing her husband with a bag on his right hand. Alexander seemed to not even notice her until she got up, stepping on something. Looking down she saw the poor page ten wrinkled and stained in red.

“Shit…” she muttered, picking up the book. “Angelica is going to kill me…”

“Oh, Eliza, didn’t know you would be awake!” said Alexander, putting the bag on the table with a thump.

“Hush, keep it down!” said Eliza in a whisper. “The children are sleeping, and you know it’s hell to put them to sl…”

Before she could finish, her worst fear came true: Philip and little Angelica came in the living room, rubbing their eyes in slumber. Eliza scratched her nape with a frustrating expression adorning her features meanwhile Alexander took a box out of the bag. Their children went immediately by their father’s side, eyes wide in excitement.

“What is that, Dad?” asked Philip, standing on tiptoe to see better. His sister imitated him, but, with less success.

“A laptop” he answered. Then, he looked at the two kids, with a frown. “What are you two doing awake?”

“We heard a noise”

“Go back to sleep, kids” said Eliza, approaching the table. “Come on”

“Aaw, mum!” Philip complained.

“To bed” she said, firmer. “Take your sister and put her in bed. Then you do the same. I’ll give you another kiss of goodnight when I… Alexander, what have you bought?” she stopped mid-sentence when she saw the logo on the box and on the laptop.

“A laptop” Philip and Angelica managed to say.

“To bed” their mother repeated. Her order was ignored right away. “Alexander, is that an Apple?”

“What a strange apple” Angie commented, tilting her head.

Alexander gave her a warm smile. “No, sweetie. Your mother is referring to the brand of the computer” and he stroked her hair affectionally.

“How much did it cost you?” Eliza asked, with an arched eyebrow.

“Don’t worry about that, Eliza” Alexander waved his hand, nonchalantly.

“How much?” Eliza pressed.
“Two-four-zero-zero” Angie had picked the receipt she found on the floor and read the numbers her brother had taught her the other day.

“Two thousand?” Eliza felt her blood running cold. She inhaled slowly through her nose. “Philip, go put your sister in bed”

“Are you and Daddy going to fight again?” the boy asked, taking his sister’s hand.

“No” said Eliza.

“Yes” answered Alex at the same time.

“Alexander!” she reprehended him.

“Don’t lie to the children, they will be spoiled in a near future” he simply said, shrugging.

Eliza gave her husband a dirty look, before looking more tenderly to their children. “Dad and I are going to discuss, which is different. Now, go to bed. It is too late and you have to go to kindergarten tomorrow”

“Yees…” the two kids said, going back to their rooms.

Once she heard the door being closed, Eliza looked at her husband. Alexander was smiling as a child who was given new shoes. Yes, definitely she had four children.

“Alexander…” she began to say, in a low and calm voice.

“I know what you’re thinking, Eliza, but it is alright” he stopped her, surprisingly looking at her while he talked. “I am paying in instalments”

“We still have to pay it”

“But it will be a good investment. Weren’t you always complaining at how my old laptop was too old and loud?”

“Well, yes, but… Where is it, by the way?”

“Yes… I kind of… Broke it”

“How?”

“With my fist”

“How does it happen?”

“Well, I just came back for a meeting and Burr and I get into a sort of an argument. Few things were said and…”

“And the poor computer paid for it. Did it choose Burr’s side or something?”

Eliza had crossed her arms and was looking at Alexander with eyes half closed. She was too used to
this kind of behaviours. She had lost count on how many chairs and doors she had to fix due to Alexander’s short temper. That was why she had decided to buy him a boxing bag. She truly thought she had solved the problem and no other innocent object would be damaged… She thought wrong. Maybe she had to repeat the gift, but this time put it in Alexander’s office. She had already put a pillow and a blanket in his desk for the nights he spent there, though she knew they would be brand new as a lack of use.

Alexander shook his head, not wanting to recall the fight and the anger when he saw the old laptop not working. He didn’t want to get mad now that he had to see how to use the new PC and get used to it. Thank God Angelica was there to help him calm down before he could make holes in the walls… again.

“I promise I can compensate you. If my financial plan gets through, I could rise above my station, and we’ll indulge ourselves in our anniversary”

Eliza rolled her eyes, then gave the hint of a smile. “A whim a year can do no harm, I guess… Alright, if you’re so sure this is what you want…”

Alexander had gotten up and Eliza was surprised when she felt a rapid kiss on her cheek. “You’re the best of women and the best of wives”

Eliza giggled. “Flatterer” she said, kissing him on the head. “Don’t spend all night up playing with that. You also have to get up early in the morning”

“Don’t worry”

Both knew he was going to fall asleep on the table…

Going to kindergarten wasn’t, precisely, Philip’s favourite thing to do, especially because he had to get up early. But since his new baby brother arrived, his mother found herself at the verge of a mental breakdown. Taking care of a baby wasn’t an easy task, and when you add two naughty kids that are always fighting over every little thing to the equation, then the difficult task became impossible. Luckily for his mother, his aunt Angelica talked to her about this kindergarten where she and uncle John took their son when he was Philip’s and Angie’s age. Eliza was never so glad to have Angelica as a sister.

His mother came to wake him up for the fourth time, now throwing back the blinds. He complained and covered entirely with his sheets, hoping he could steal a few more minutes before getting dressed. When he heard his mother screaming at his father to get ready, and then telling him off for getting asleep in the living room, Philip knew today was not the day to piss her mother off.
He got up, went to the bathroom and get dressed in the clothes his mother had prepared. He even helped little Angie with her braids, a thing he could do but tried to avoid. But, again, today was not the day to make her mother angry, and Angie was having, as well, one of her days, which consisted in “do as I say or I’ll throw such a tantrum the neighbours will have to call the cops”. So, he combed her hair, braided it as well as he could, and then told her to behave for their morning’s sake. Angie seemed to understand when she began to pay attention and heard her mother going on and on about how she was sick of taking care of a fourth child she had never asked for and how lonely she felt while raising their children.

“It’s our usual morning song” said Angie, shrugging.

“Yes, but it doesn’t have to be about us” Philip told her, taking her to the living room and sitting her on the couch. “I’ll bring our backpacks. Mum is talking about that time Dad promised her he would take her to dinner but was late for working. We still have a few minutes”

For being five and three, the two siblings were clever beyond their ages, partly because these scenes, which they found both comical and annoying, and they learned to take advantage of it. Especially Angie, who was the most curious of the two. So, when Philip left for taking their backpacks, and surely would make a stop to steal a pack of cookies from the kitchen, Angie got up and ran to the table where his father’s laptop was.

It was white, thin and rectangular. It was fine and elegant, and she loved fine and elegant. With sparkly eyes, she jumped to the chair, climbed it and sat on it, admiring the gadget in awe. She tilted her head. She looked right, she looked left, she looked at the beautiful and shining gadget. Biting her lower lip, she dared to lift the screen, which shone showing a Word document that was abruptly interrupted. She didn’t understand half of it, but was impressed by how bright the screen was. She looked at the keyboard, so clean and shiny as well. She wanted to touch it. She reached her hand to touch it.

“Angelica!”

The little girl jumped and bent down, to hide from the owner of the voice. Thankfully, it was only Philip. Her mother was still rambling in the distance. Philip had their two backpacks in one hand and the stolen cookies in the other. He slid the packet inside his backpack and then came closer to his sister, frowning.

“What are you doing? That is Dad’s! You know how he hate when someone touches his things!”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I just…” Angie felt tears in the back of her eyes. A habit she hated but couldn’t help doing. She hated disappointing loved ones, especially her older brother, who she looked up to.

“Is it as cool as we thought?” Philip changed his tone and softened his features. Angie felt the tears
disappearing. She nodded. “Let me see…” he jumped twice, trying to get a better look. But then, Eliza’s voice came from the hallway, getting closer.

“Philip, Angelica, we’re leaving!”

“Coming, Mum!” the two siblings said in unison.

“Close it, close it!” Philip urged his sister in a whisper.

Angelica did as she was told, jumped out the chair, get her backpack and put the chair in. She nodded, feeling satisfied with her work. No one would be able to tell they were there.

“Do you think we will have something like that?” she asked her brother, walking to the entrance, where their mother was looking for the keys inside her purse while cursing under her breath.

Philip shrugged. “Don’t count on it. We’re too little”

“But George Icker has a tablet” she said, frowning in disappointment.

Philip rolled his eyes in annoyance. “He’s a prick”

“Philip Hamilton, where did you hear that ugly word!?” Eliza asked with wide eyes in horror.

“Remember that morning Dad had to take us to kindergarten?”

“…Yes”

“Well, we were late and spent the morning with him at work”

“… Good. Beautiful. Splendid” said Eliza, finally reaching the car keys and stepping out the door. Her two kids followed her. “Perfect team work” she muttered, slamming the door shut.

“Why did you tell her? Dad told us not to” Angie whispered.

“Well, now they would have another thing to discuss and we’ll have more time when the next rambling comes”

Aaron Burr didn’t like confrontations. He was a peaceful soul. Always in a corner, prudent, observant, and formal. Not a fan of raising his voice or to attack other people, either they agreed with him or not. It was a rare occasion when he got involved in something. Angelica joked saying that, when that happened, it may be because the planets had lined up. Burr rolled his eyes at the comments, though he knew she was right. He even thought it was even possible. The planets had lined up yesterday afternoon when he and Hamilton argued about something so stupid he didn’t even remember. Hamilton remembered, of that he was sure. That man stored every little thing said to throw it at anyone’s face when the right moment arrived. Aaron didn’t know how he did it, but he
did, and that was why he came to work resolute to bury the hatchet by being polite and nice to the immigrant. He discovered that was a way to make his offense almost invisible.

Aaron entered the rest room, went to the coffee machine and served himself a mug with two teaspoonfuls of sugar. While stirring it, a voice asked from across the table.

“Didn’t know you drink coffee”

“Peggy! Since when are you here?” he asked after a little jump of surprise.

Peggy shrugged, a bit offended. “I’ve been here the entire time. I even greeted you with a wave of hand”

“Oh… I’m sorry, I’m a little mind-absent today” he apologised, returning his gaze to the mug, uncomfortably.

“That’s what everybody always says” the youngest Schuyler sister muttered, taking one sip of her own coffee.

Aaron left, waving goodbye to Peggy, who decided to ignore him. And Aaron didn’t push it, because he saw Peggy scratching her nose and, as both Angelica and Eliza had told almost everybody in the office, that meant problems.

Aaron advanced through the hallway until he reached Hamilton’s office. The man had arrived, there were his briefcase and a laptop on the table he hadn’t seen before. Washington must have called him, he thought, feeling a stabbing sensation in the guts. Shaking his head, he decided to ignore it and walked towards the table. He could wait, but his sixth sense told him the best option was to let the mug on the table along with a note and then wait for Hamilton to come to him. That was the best that could happened. The worst that Hamilton ignored him and threw away the coffee. Well, no, he didn’t waste food or drinks. He would give it to one of his friends.

As he convinced himself that the best could happened, he got distracted, and bumped into some wire that laid on the floor. He could avoid meeting the floor thanks to the wooden desk. But it was also thanks to the wooden desk that he was leaned forwards, not stopping the coffee from flying and landing on the keyboard, staining the white computer. He saw the laptop sparking and the screen turning completely black. Aaron froze, the world around him disappearing…

…Until a knock on the door woke him up from his trance.

“Burr, what are you doing here? You know Angelica told us we can only steal one thing a month from here”

“God, I was bringing some coffee to make amends with Hamilton for what happened yesterday” he began to explain in a whisper, the other two men approaching him to have a better listen. “And then, I bumped into something and spilled the coffee on the keyboard and… And the thing just turned off!” he finished, paling.

“See? That’s what being nice to Hamilton gets you” said Thomas, sitting on the chair and getting a better look on the laptop. “James, guard the door and let us know when Hamilton comes back. I’ll try to clean this”

“I only wanted to have a nice detail, I didn’t want any of this to happen, I swear!” Aaron was panicking now. He looked in both directions, Madison at the door and Jefferson on the chair, opening drawers. “Please, don’t tell on me, you know how tetchy he is”

“Don’t worry” James assured him.

“We know; what the man lacks in height, he has it in bad temper” Jefferson chimed in.

“That’s why the entire office calls him chihuahua”

Jefferson stopped, looking at the inside of one of the drawers. “What is this man doing with a blanket and a pillow in his office?” He shook his head and decided to ignore it. “He can’t be weirder even if he tried” he said under his breath, finally finding some paper towels.

“He’s coming” Madison warned.

“Please, hurry up” Aaron begged, turning paler.

“Oh, no, wait, false alarm” said James immediately. “He stops to talk to Maria… Or is that Peggy…? No, he noticed her, it’s must be Maria… Jeez, you can feel the sexual tension from here. His poor wife…”

Aaron rolled his eyes: “Did Maria or Eliza break his new laptop? No? We’ll focus on them later” he said, gritting his teeth.

“Now he’s talking to Laurens… Oh, Angelica joined as well” James kept explaining, ignoring Burr. “That dwarf has more ships than a fictional character from a teenage tv series”

“Don’t worry, Burr” Jefferson said suddenly, almost finished cleaning the keyboard. “Something like this happened to me once”

“Really?”

“Yes, one time when I was trying to read my older daughter’s browser history and I spilled some tea. Fortunately, the PC survived because it wasn’t a laptop but a desktop tower. I had to buy her a new keyboard, though” he explained, now cleaning the floor.

“You never told me if she noticed” James said.

“Nah, I bought her a new mobile as well and she was too excited to notice”
“Did you invade your daughter’s privacy?” Aaron asked with an arched eyebrow.

Thomas shrugged. “She refuses to talk to me”

“Maybe because she knows you don’t trust her”

“Hey, your daughter is still a toddler, isn’t she? When she is a teenager with more hormones than neurons, call me”

“Now he’s really coming!” James warned.

“This is clean” Jefferson picked up the mug and passed it to Burr. “Bury this when no one can find it and open the window. He would think it was Angelica”

“Come on, come on!” Madison urged.

The three men went down the hallway, trotting.

“But the laptop is still not working!” Aaron reminded them in a whisper.

“Not our problem. As long as we know, none of us were there today” Jefferson told him seriously, going directly to his own office, across from Aaron’s. Madison following close behind.

“But…”

“If he asks, you were never there”

“But I can’t lie!”

“Everyone can”

“No, I start to stutter”

“He’d think is for lack of practice” He entered his office, and James was left behind.

“Pretend to be working, that’s what we’re going to do” he advised him before closing the door.

Aaron groaned, feeling bad. When he heard footsteps getting closer, he entered his office and closed the door with a thump behind him. He sat on his chair, shaking. He took a pen and tried to read the papers Washington had given to him yesterday, but was too focus on what was going on at the other side of the door. The footsteps crossed just right behind the door and Aaron contained his breath, expecting Hamilton to burst into his office. But his co-worker kept walking.

“Ugh, there goes Angelica again… Tiresome woman, always opening the window”

He heard Alexander complaining and closing the window he had opened. Poor Angelica… he thought, feeling more regretful. He started to do that annoying noise with the push button of his pen
his two Thedosias hated so much. He passed a hand through his face, all sweaty. His heartbeat began to match the sound of the push button, until he couldn’t recognise which one was which one.

And so, he couldn’t hear the tapping – more insistent and rapid at each second – that came from Hamilton’s office. He couldn’t concentrate in any other sound until his co-worker’s voice broke the silence of the office.

“What the hell…?” And he stopped moving, his eyes fixed on the papers spread all over the table. More tapping. “WHAT THE HELL??”

Aaron got up from his chair, prepared to confess, but a paper on the floor with a message in Madison’s handwriting telling him to “Play dead or you will be” convinced him otherwise.

“Come on, this gotta be a joke!” Hamilton’s screams from outside resounded through the walls. Aaron heard footsteps going directly to Hamilton’s office. “Alex, what happens?” Angelica.

“Son, is everything alright?”

“How many times…?! I’ve got no time for this. My laptop is not working!”

Aaron could imagine perfectly clear Hamilton passing a hand through his hair and walking from left to right and vice versa. He put the hand on the knob, prepared to go out, when he heard Angelica’s voice, trying to reach Alexander’s volume.

“What?! What do you mean it’s not working?!” Footsteps. She wanted to see it for herself, Aaron knew her too well. “WHAT THE HELL? What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything!” Hamilton defended himself.

“Then, why isn’t working? Are you sure is not because the battery died?”

“Can’t you see the wire? It is plugged to the wall!”

“Maybe you used too much? Eliza told me you spent the whole night with it” Angelica’s voice trembled. Aaron then understood Eliza would be fiery about a new computer being broken being only one day old.

“For Christ’s sake, I HAVEN’T USED IT TOO MUCH, IT’S BRAND FUCKING NEW!”

“Language!” Washington said, the frown clear in his voice.

“Don’t yell at me!” Angelica complained, clearly offended.
Aaron couldn’t help but flinch and felt his heart beating faster when he heard Angelica and Hamilton screaming at the same time.

“Why do you two always do this?”
“I am trying to help you!”
“Your sister and you always think it’s my fault!”
“Eliza is going to kill you if she knows!”
“Why does it have to be always my fault? You saw me at the rest room five minutes ago!”
“Sweet Jesus… Are you sure the wire is plugged in??”
“And are you sure you haven’t done anything??”
“What is that supposed to mean?!”
“The window was opened, you were here! Maybe you hit it unintentionally?”
“I haven’t put a foot in your office until now! I haven’t opened any window!”
“Well, somebody was here, because I never opened the window!”
“Why are we fighting over the window?”
“Because you don’t believe me when I say it wasn’t me!”
“The laptop is the problem. Why it isn’t working, what’s wrong with it?”

And Hamilton’s voice finally spoke on its own: “YOU PREFER TO BE ON THE SIDE OF A INANIMATE OBJECT BEFORE TAKING MY SIDE!”

There was a pause. Aaron sharpened his hearing. He could hear Angelica inhaling slowly, and Washington sighing.

“No one is on anybody’s side, Hamilton” George said calmly. “Look, we can try to…”
“I know what happened here”

“How to make a grown-up man almost collapse with just five words”, by Alexander Hamilton.

“I can’t go on like this” Aaron said to himself, opening the door.
“What are you doing?” Madison said, blocking his path. “Don’t get out!”

“Jump out of the window” Jefferson suggested. “The aftermath can’t be worse than what would happen if you go out here”

“I can’t keep doing this, I’m going to…”

“I know exactly what happened here!” Hamilton said again, closing the laptop with a thump. “That man over the store thought he could have some good laughs selling me a lemon!”

They saw Hamilton storming out of his office, laptop in hand. Angelica followed close behind, nodding at Washington, who knew it was better if Alexander get out to fresh his mind and get this solved as soon as possible. And with Angelica’s company nothing could go terrible wrong. Jefferson, Madison and Burr were left a few meters away, looking the scene with perplex eyes.

James was the first one to broke the silence: “… You were sooo lucky. God really must love you” he told Aaron, totally impressed.

Eliza was going to pick up her children in company of Theodosia when her phone sounded. She double parked and told Theodosia she would be staying in the car while she went to greet their children. Theodosia nodded in understanding and thanked her, for the fifth time, that she offered to give her a ride to the kindergarten that day, before getting out the car. Eliza dismissed it with a wave of hand and a warm smile.

Once Theodosia was out of view thanks to the tide of mothers that were trying to get into the building at once, she took a rapid look at her phone. The latest message was from Angelica. Call me asap.

“He started my day on the right foot and he wants to keep it that way…” Eliza said sarcastically, going to her contacts and pressing Angelica’s photo.

The phone didn’t ring twice before she had her sister on the other line: “Eliza”

“Angelica, what…?”

“Eliza, listen, how fast can you come to the electronic store?” her sister interrupted her.

“The electronic store?” Eliza repeated, blinking. “Angelica, slow down, what…?” She was interrupted again, this time by the sound of a jam on the brakes and a loud horn. She heard a few swore words. “Is that Alexander?” she asked, worried. “Angelica?”
“It was amber, I could pass!” she heard her husband screamed.

“Not when amber turned to red fifty kilometres away and there is a mother crossing with her son!” Angelica reprehended, clearly overwhelmed.

“Angelica?” Eliza asked, more worried. She saw Theodosia coming back with the three kids, talking animatedly.

Angelica sighed. “Please, Eliza, try to come to the electronic store before a homicide happens”

“But what is happening?” she almost screamed. Her four companions looked at her, with interrogative glares.

“Mum?” Angie asked, tilting her head. Philip hushed her, knowing it was rude to interrupt their parents when they were on the phone.

“What? What do you mean is not working?” Eliza asked in an almost-cream. Theodosia jumped, looking nervously at every corner of the car. She decided the best was to put her attention on the kids, telling them to fasten up their belts. “Are you sure?” Eliza kept talking. “And is he sure he didn’t hit it or… Alright, alright, don’t scream at me! I want to help! Maybe… I don’t know, maybe he poured water or something like that down it? I told you to not scream! Aha, aha, yes, I’ll be there in a minute. Bye-bye” she hung up and inhaled. How she wished to be alone in the car right now.

“Eliza…?” Theodosia called, trying to stay as far as possible.

Eliza looked at her with an apologetically look: “Theo, I’m sorry for asking you this, but, would you mind staying with the kids at my house until I can get back? Alexander and Angelica need some…”

“Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it” Theodosia promised with a smile.

Eliza smiled as well. “Thank you. I promise you I’ll drive you to your house when we’re back”

“It won’t be necessary” she told her with a wider smile.

“Yes, it is” Eliza said, starting the car. How lucky she was to have someone as Theodosia when things got out of hand.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yes… I don’t know. Alex’s laptop is not working, and he lost it” None of the adult women realised Philip and Angie tensing up in the backseat. “He bought it last night, for Heaven’s sake! What kind of curse this is?” she shook her head.

“Don’t worry, dear, I’m sure things will be okay. The people at the store will know what to do. Besides, it’s new! With the warranty, you’ll be given a new one”

Again, Eliza was glad to have someone as Theodosia at hand.

The kids thought the same when they found themselves in their bedroom, at the verge of a
“So, was it you?” little Theo asked, watching Philip going from left to right, a habit, he heard, he had inherited from his father.

“No, it couldn’t be. We barely touched it!” the kid said. “Because you didn’t touch it, did you, Angie?”

“No, I swear! You caught me before I could!” Angie had tears in her eyes.

“Don’t cry” Theo said, feeling bad for her friend. “If it wasn’t you, then you don’t have to feel guilty”

“Maybe you closed it too hard?” Philip tried again.

“No… I don’t know…” Angie shook her head, playing with her hair.

“Dad is going to kill us. I know he is going to kill us”

“We can’t tell him, you know tetchy he is!”

“But they will find out!”

“Maybe Mum is right and it was just wrong” Theo tried again to be positive.

“But Dad says that people never want to be responsible. What if they see something strange?” Philip turned again to his sister. “Are you sure you didn’t touch it?”

“No!” Angie exploded, letting her bad temper get out. Her mother used to say she inherited it from her father and aunt. “I didn’t touch a thing!”

“Lower your voice, Mum could hear you!” Theo said, putting a comforting hand on her friend’s shoulder. Suddenly, Angie’s eyes grew wide. “What?”

“Oh… What if I look it for too long?”

“What?” Philip and Theo looked at her as if she was crazy.

“Yes, just like the tale the teachers read us today”

“That man didn’t turn crazy because he looked at the carpet” Philip corrected her. “He turned crazy because he looked at it, simply”

“Stop, I wanted to forget about that story, it’s too scary” Theo complained, clapping her ears.

“Why did he ever read that to us? The older in that class is six and a half!” Philip complained, angry at everything. “Why do adults have to be so irresponsible?”

“Knock, knock” Theodosia joked while entering the bedroom. “Is everything alright, kids? I heard your voice volumes a bit too loud”

“…” They looked at each other. “Yes”

“Really?”
The assistant who listened to Alexander’s story was the same young boy who had convinced Alexander to buy that laptop, Angelica told her. Eliza knew she should be feeling bad for the poor boy, but he had some strange vibe in him she didn’t like a bit, and she didn’t feel a bit of pity for him. Angelica was by her side, both two steps away from Alexander, who was showing the assistant – Chuck, as she read in his nameplate – how the laptop didn’t turn on or respond to anything he would do.

“There you have it, all of a sudden, it stopped working” Alexander said, putting both arms in akimbo. “So, um... How are we going to do this? Refund? New set...?”

The assistant took one look with an arched eyebrow to the laptop. “Alright, so, what happened here? Did you pour water, or something like that, down it or...?”

Eliza and Angelica tensed when they saw Alexander frowning. “Why is everybody asking me that? Why on earth would I, or any rational man, pour water down their own new laptop?”

“Listen, sir...”

“Now, call me ‘sir’ only if you mean it” Alexander interrupted, feeling his blood boiling. Eliza took Angelica’s arm, nervous.

“...Yes...” Chuck rolled his eyes. “Listen, the laptop was working perfectly fine when it left the store. We have no obligation to be responsible” he explained, putting both hands up.

“Not responsible?” Alexander echoed. “How come you’re not responsible? I spent 2400 dollars in this piece of junk!” he added, angrier, and hitting the laptop with the fist.

“Maybe you should have spent five bucks more for the warranty. Haha” said Chuck with half a smile, gaining a dirty look from Angelica, and a death glare from Alexander.

“You didn’t pay the warranty??” asked Eliza, feeling her heart beating faster.

Alexander just clenched his teeth and took one step closer to the assistant: “Now, you listen to me, goddamn son of a bitch...”

Eliza got closer and put a hand on his shoulder. “Now, Alex, dear...” she tried to say.

“‘Now, Alex, dear’?? ‘Now, Alex, dear’ nothing, Eliza! ‘Alex, dear’ is going to talk!”
Eliza took two steps away. Angelica put her hands on her shoulders. The two women looked at how Alexander’s face turned redder and his voice grew louder as the seconds went by. And, also, witnessed at how everybody around turned their heads to look in their direction.

“You think you can put on slacks and talk to a grown man like that, young boy? Do you? This is not how business is done! I’ve been a customer of this store for a very long time, I bought here a coffee machine when I first moved on my own, and, also a TV when I got married! Those were good times for this store… You, sir, were living the carefree life of a spermatozoon in your father’s balls, who knew how to treat his clients with respect! Now, you inherited this from him because your University Entrance Exam marks were so low you couldn’t even study for be a Physical Education teacher! I’VE BEEN WRONGED IN THIS TRANSACTION! Get off me, Angelica! Eliza, move to the side, love, I can handle this! I’VE BEEN WRONGED IN THIS TRANSACTION! I’VE BEEN SOLD A RIP-OFF SHAMELESSLY! And now I’ve got to re-do all my fucking work for the third time because some useless bastard with airs refuses to do his job right! Well, I want to do my job right! For your information, a whole office, maybe the whole fucking country is depending on me! So, you better rectify this situation! Now, what do you plan on doing about it?!”

The whole store fell silent. Eliza and Angelica were holding hands, not wanting to look at the hundred pairs of eyes that were paying attention to them. Someone coughed in the distance. Alexander was breathing heavily. Chuck looked at him with eyes half-closed. He waited a few more seconds before let a smile appeared on his face and talk.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do” he said, approaching to the door. “I’ll open the door for you with good manners and wait patiently until you’re done getting out my store with the laptop you broke”

“… …”

Eliza and Angelica had a spot prepared just for them up in Heaven. They knew. Alexander would agree once he calmed down. If it hadn’t been for them, they didn’t want to know how bad the situation would have turned in the store. Eliza took Alexander’s hand and told him it was alright, though her low tone delated her faked reassurance. Angelica packed the laptop and dedicated the young assistant one of her “beware” glares, which the boy ignored.

None of the three talked in the way back home. Angelica decided to spend the night with Alexander to help him get the job done. Two heads worked better than one, especially when one of them knew how to handle the other. Eliza spent the whole ride looking out the window, suddenly remembering she had left Theodosia at their house taking care of their children. There wouldn’t be enough actions to thank that woman all the times she deserved it. She and Burr were the only decent people she knew.
When they arrived, Theodosia stopped Eliza before she could talk. She only smiled, took her
daughter’s hand, and told her to have a good night and to be positive because everything would turn
our right, and that, if she needed it, to send her a message or even call her because she would be
there. Yes, they weren’t enough ways to thank Theodosia enough…

Eliza was suspicious when she saw no sign of her children coming out. She thought maybe
they were too tired for a full afternoon playing with a friend and let it go. She went to Alexander’s
side, caressing his head while he had his face between his hands, distressed. Angelica was at his
other side, with a comforting hand on his arm. Both women were looking at the laptop. Eliza sighed.

“You should’ve gotten the warranty…” she commented, shaking her head. She felt Alexander
tensing up and heard him growling like a rabid dog.

“Where are the children?” asked Angelica, stopping her brother-in-law before he tried to repeat the
scene at the store back in his house.

Eliza shrugged. “Maybe they’re sleeping” she rubbed her temples. “We should imitate them…”

Angelica frowned her nose. “I’m going to see if they’re fine”

Eliza gave her a weak smile. “Thank you, Angie…”

Angelica walked towards her sister’s children’s bedroom, slowing down when she reached a
prudent distance and stopped in front of the wooden door. She pressed one ear against it and heard
the muffled voices of the two children, arguing about something.

“No, we have to tell him!” Angie’s voice was shrill and desperate.

“He will ground us until our hair turn grey!” Philip argued in an angry tone.

“But…”

“No!”

“But…”

“No! We have to stick together…!”

“Why for?” said Angelica, interrupting her nephew. “Is everything alright, kids?”

“Aunt Angelica…” Philip looked at his sister, clearly telling her to let him talk. “Yes, everything’s
fine”

“Are you sure?” Angelica insisted.

“Yes”

“And you, Angie? Are you sure?” she took a few steps closer, crossing her arms.
“… Yes” said her namesake, less secure.

Angelica knelt down, to be on her same level. “I see you a bit nervous”

“She just ate a lot of sugar” invented Philip.

“Theodosia didn’t tell us anything about it”

“Because she ate it when no one was looking”

“She told us you spent the whole afternoon playing and watching TV with her” she said, arching one eyebrow.

“… Well, there was a moment when she had to go to the bathroom” Philip had crossed his arms as well.

“You don’t say…”

“Yes, I do…”

“Mmh” Angelica looked at her niece once again. “Angie, have you already written Santa’s letter?” Philip dedicated her a deathly glare that resembled him too much to his father.

“… No…” answered the little girl, with a tiny voice.

“It’s alright, there is enough time… We’re in the middle of November, anyway, but… I feel I have the obligation to tell you that Santa is always watching”

Angie swallowed. “Always?”

“Always” repeated Angelica in a harsh tone. “And Santa is not fan of a lot of things” She started to count with her fingers. “Like… bullying, cheating, stealing… lying…” Angie was already shaking, and Philip passed a hand through his face. “There is a fine line that separates good and bad. But you are good kids, you surely don’t do any of those th…”

She and Philip jumped afraid, not expecting Angie to burst out crying. Her baby brother was scared as well and started to cry, trying to reach the volume on his sister’s crying.

“Jesus! You have the lungs of your father, God have mercy of your classmates!” said Angelica, covering her ears.

“That’s what Mum always says” said Philip, cringing for his loud siblings.

Eliza came running from the living room along with Alexander. She entered her and Alexander’s room, where their baby’s crib was, more than prepared to rock and comfort him. Alexander stopped mid-way when he saw the noise was also coming from his daughter’s room.

“Angie? What’s wrong, sweetheart?” he asked, kneeling beside Angelica and in front of his
daughter. Angie didn’t hesitate in hugging her father with all her might, babbling words. “What?”
“Aunt Angelica told her Santa wasn’t going to bring her presents this year” accused Philip right away.
“Philip!”
“Angelica!” Alexander and Eliza, already with John in her arms and at the door, looked at her with fire in their eyes.
“What did I tell you about not scaring my children?” asked Eliza, entering the room. “Wasn’t enough to scare Peggy and I with that ‘Violeta’ short film?”
Angelica rolled her eyes. “You’re too sensitive…” she saw Alexander picking her niece in his arms and sitting on the bed, trying to calm her down. “Besides, this time it was justified”
“Yeah, right…”
“They know what happened to the laptop”
“You do?” asked Alexander looking at his daughter.

Angie looked at her father, then at her brother – who shook his head violently. She sniffed and hugged her father tighter. She eventually nodded.

“What was it?” asked Eliza, approaching them.
“I broke it…” she admitted.
“What?” her parents said.
“We both broke it!” said Philip suddenly, jumping on the bed. “We both”
“No, it was only me”
“No, we both”
“Me”
“Both”
“Me”
“Both”
“How can’t you even agree whose fault is?” said Eliza, tired.
“You’re not going to win a price. Tell us who was it” added Angelica, getting on her feet.
Angie looked at her father. “It was me, Daddy. I looked it too much”
“You looked it?” repeated Alexander, sharing a shocking glare with his wife.
“But did you touch it?” asked Eliza gently.

Angie shook her head. “No. Philip caught me before I could”

“And I told her to close it before you or Dad could see us” explained the older. “It was my fault, we shouldn’t have…”

“Alright, alright” Alexander put Angie on the floor. “Honey, computers don’t break because you look them too much”

“No?”

“No”

“If they did, then your father would have broken it the minute it was his…” joked Angelica. Eliza bit her lip to suppress a laugh.

“Whatever…” Alexander rolled his eyes. “None of you did anything. But, if someday you do, you have to tell me or your mother right away, understood?”

“Yes, Dad…” both children said.

“It was very brave to confess, Angie” said Eliza with a warm smile.

“And it was brave to blame yourself to save your sister, Philip” added Alexander, tossing his son’s hair.

“So, who’s hungry?” Eliza changed the subject, looking at her watch. “It’s eight already, I’m sure you want dinner. Or did Theodosia let you eat too much cookies?” she joked.

“We weren’t that hungry” said Philip going to his mother’s side.

Eliza laughed. “Come on, I’ll let you help”

“Poor little ones” said Alexander once the children had left with their mother to the kitchen. “I feel so bad for them, carrying the blame all day…”

“Yes, you really should improve your parenting skills” commented Angelica, gaining a dirty look from Alexander. “Oh, my God, I forgot to call John and tell him to pick our son from his football class!” she said suddenly, running out of the room.

“I thought he was out at seven!” shouted Alexander.

“He is!”

“Go call your husband, pot…”
three, getting into bed with a moan.

“Everything turned out fine?” his wife asked in a whisper.

“Eliza, sorry, I didn’t want to wake you”

“I was already awake” she said, turning around to face him. “So?”

“Angelica and I could re-do most of it. I wrote it down paper, just in case” He passed a hand through his face. “A one-eyed must’ve looked at me when I was born. I couldn’t understand half of this shit if that weren’t the case”

Eliza hugged him and rested her head on his chest. “Come on, it’ll be alright. You always come up with something…” she tried to comfort him.

“Hm”

“If it wasn’t you, if it wasn’t a lemon and if it weren’t the kids, then what could’ve happened?” Eliza wondered.

“Jeez, Eliza, I’ll be damned if I kn…”

Not used to hear her husband stop in the middle of a sentence, she looked up, seeing him looking directly at the ceiling. She began to feel his body shaking beneath her. “Alex?”

“Those fucking, amoral, envious and shitty beasts…” she heard him mutter.

“Your co-workers?”

“Who else?” he punched the mattress. “They have crossed the line, Eliza, they have crossed the fucking line. Our children felt guilty all day, and that’s enough. No one can hurt my family in the slightest”

“Aw…”

“Only I can, because it’s my fucking family”

“… Yeah…” she lied down facing the ceiling. “I kinda felt that…”

“Tomorrow morning, I’m going to discover which one was it. They don’t know who they fucked up with”

“If they really did, I doubt it…” Eliza agreed. “But, honey, tomorrow is Sunday”

“… Is it?”

“Yep”

“… … Don’t care, I’ll keep this anger inside until Monday arrives”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. You know, I’m getting better at classifying and choosing my emotions”

“… Do you?” she asked with scepticism. She shrugged. “Well, if that makes you happy”
“Goddammit, Eliza, thank you for your constant support, I love you!” he screamed suddenly, giving her a rapid kiss on the lips. “Goodnight, sweetie” he whispered, turning to the opposite side to sleep.

Eliza looked at him for a moment. “I wonder what happened with that suitor I had in college… Would he still have hair?” she wondered with melancholy. “Thinking about how I refused to date him because he was too shy… Dumb, Eliza, dumb” and she closed her eyes, trying to sleep.

Monday morning, Angelica received a message from her sister before leaving to work.

Eliza:
Alex thinks 1 of his co-workers broke the PC. LOL, God save your souls.

Angelica:
The person who said working with your family was a curse didn’t know alex

Eliza:
Ikr?
Hey, you know what you gotta do.

Angelica:
Yea yea I’ll send voice messages 2 u

Eliza:
Good sister, good sister <3

George Washington liked his job, denying that was lying, but there were days when he wondered if he had chosen the correct career. There was no day he didn’t hear his mother’s piercing
voice reminding him the disappointment he was for all his mistakes in life. Again, wasn’t she the one who criticised every career chose he made until he decided to pick this due to lack of nasty comments? Things had started to go well. As well as they could. His mother still seemed unsatisfied and so she let all their acquaintances know every time she could, but he didn’t mind that much. Now, he had Martha and a new life, and he only had to stand her on Christmas as all normal men do.

Maybe he should thank his mother for all her comments, because he became immune to others’. His friends used to talk about every little detail of his life, and with no filter. Some days, like today, he heard them telling him he had made the right decision going for politics and business instead of doing the other jobs he had in mind like psychologist or teacher.

“Standing people’s problems all day, what a trouble’ the said” George complained under his breath, making his way to his office, where almost all his employees were already crowded together, murmuring with one another. George made his way to his desk, where Angelica was standing next to. They both nodded as a greeting, and he managed to smile a little to be polite. “Standing a bunch of brats all day, with their whining’ they said…” he mumbled once again, putting his folder on the table with a thump that made the whole room fall silent. “Sir, he stole my pencil; sir, he ate my brownie; sir, she hit me; sir, he broke my things…” he kept muttering nonetheless, this time faking a childish voice, gaining a curious glare from his employees. Rumbling his temples, he added: “Yes, I get away from such a horrible job…”

“Sir?” he looked forwards, seeing Lafayette with his arm raised.

“Yes?”

“Can I go to the toilet, please?”

“… Such, such a horrible job…” he muttered. “Can’t you wait a few minutes?”

“Non…”

He sighed. “Alright, but be fast”

“Merci” he said, smiling nervously.

Once he left, Washington cleared his throat: “Alright, we wait until we all…” Another hand raised. “Yes, Madison?”

“Can I go to the toilet as well?” asked the short man, coughing in a kleenex.

“… Alright…” George waved his hand.

“And me?” asked Hercules, raising his hand.

“I think I need to go as well” Jefferson joined in.

Angelica rolled her eyes. “Tight it in a knot, misters”

“Schuyler” said George with a grave tone. She only shrugged. “Whoever wants to go, go, but be fast” he said, seeing in surprise how everyone left the room, talking to themselves or to the closest person at hand. George saw Angelica walking to the door as well. “Didn’t you tell them to tight in in
“knot?” he asked, arching one eyebrow.

Angelica shrugged. “I have nothing to make a knot with” she answered with a smile.

Laurens laughed in the distance: “Hahaha, dang!”

George took advantage of the silence to read the paperwork he couldn’t do because the problems he had to take care of yesterday. He thought after Hamilton were gone, he would have a bit of peace, but that afternoon John Adams had decided to finally break completely the automatic vending machine. A knock on the door returned his attention to the actual world.

“Good morning, sir” greeted Hamilton. “Uh, where is everybody?”

“They went to the washroom”

“All of them?”

“Aha”

“Hm…”

“…”

“…”

“…” an uncomfortable cough.

“You can go as well”

“Thank you, sir” and he left in a rush.

Yes, he had been so lucky not choosing Education as a career…

“So, the issue is on the table” said George, reclining on his chair. “Yesterday, Hamilton’s laptop was found broken in his office. He had gone to the store and they are more than affirmative that the laptop was working well” His eyes fell on the gadget on his table, then on his employees, one by one, starting by Peggy on the corner, to Angelica and Alexander, right beside him. He saw Angelica doing something with her mobile, but decided to not say nothing about it as her attention was back on the matter rapidly. “So… Who broke it?” Silence. Madison coughed. More silence. Margaret pressed her back on the wall and took a rapid glare to her nails. More silence. Laurens bit her bottom lip as a bad habit. More silence. Jefferson crossed both arms. More silence… George frowned. “We are not mad” he promised, calmly. “We just want to know” Peggy raised her hand. “Yes, miss?”
“I didn’t pour anything down it” Hamilton said quickly, before she had the chance to speak. She shrugged, and looked out the window.

George drummed his fingers on the wood. “So, nobody knows anything?” he asked, starting to lose his patience. “Am I going to have to look at what the cameras recorded, as I had to do with Adams yesterday?”

“Where is he, by the way?” asked Alexander.

“Home. I told him not to come here in all week”

“That was his third vending machine victim…” added Peggy.

Alexander shrugged, very indifferent. “Not that his absence is ever a relevance…” The Schuyler sisters suppressed a laugh, even Eliza, on the other side of the line of Angelica’s phone. She had called her older sister to let her know she wanted to hear the mess in live.

“Before you start, Hamilton, no, it couldn’t be Adams. He was late yesterday for work”

“Surprising…” commented Angelica.

“I don’t want to go to the record videos, ladies and gentlemen” said George in a warning tone, coming back to the main matter. “You won’t like it if I have to do this to know what happened”

“Just confess already, I know it had to be some of you!” Alexander exploded.

George saw Angelica moving a bit closer to him, trying not to smile. Why did that family have to be so weird? “Now, Hamilton, calm down…”

“You know as well as I do they are hiding something. It had to be them!” Alexander began to point at random colleagues. “Was it you?”

“No” said Madison.

“Was it you?” Peggy shook her head. “Was it you??”

“It wasn’t me, Alex, I swear” said John Laurens suddenly, smiling gently and blinking.

“Aw, I know it wasn’t you, Johnny, I believe you” said Alex with a foreign calm tone of voice. “You can leave, sorry for make you lose your time”

“No prob” said Laurens with a wide smile, walking to the door. Mulligan cleared his throat louder than he normally would. “Oh, yes” Laurens turned around. “It wasn’t Hercules or Lafayette, either”

“I believe you, Johnny, you three can leave”

“Oh, come on!” complained Jefferson. “What kind of democracy this is? He’s letting them go without any true evidence!”

“Well, they’re friends, they wouldn’t break him anything” agreed George, shrugging.

Jefferson passed a hand through his face. “Unbelievable…” he looked at his back, seeing Laurens flipping the bird at him before closing the door. “Mr. President, Laurens is doing obscene gestures to me” he accused.

“Not true!” said Laurens from behind the door.
“You were dismissed!” shouted George to be heard over the hallway. “Jefferson, this is not a classroom of an elementary school”

“Yes, sir…”

“Or that is what I want to tell myself before going to bed”

Eliza’s muffled and distorted laugh was heard, and everybody looked in all directions, confused. Angelica coughed a bit, giggling afterwards.

“Hehe, a cold…” she excused herself. George looked at her suspiciously.

Hamilton looked at her other sister-in-law: “Peggy, dear, I know it couldn’t have been you as you were sick yesterday and missed work. You can also leave”

Peggy frowned. “I didn’t miss work yesterday”

“Peggy, Peggy, you don’t have to defend it. Being absent worked fine this time for you. Take advantage of it”

“But I…!” she sighed, defeated. “To the hell, I am not interested in any of this, anyway” and she left slamming the door shut.

Maria raised her hand, timidly. “I wasn’t at Hamilton’s office yesterday” she said in a low voice.

“Maria, you can leave as well, I know it wasn’t you” said Alexander with a smile.

Maria returned the gesture and left. For a brief moment, George saw the four persons who were dismissed at the other side of the door, supressing laughs. They were snooping. Am I sure to not be in an Elementary School? He wondered, saddened.

“Now, look what we’ve got here: Satan’s triad” said Alexander, crossing his arms and looking at the three persons left in the room. “You, misters, either think I’m dumb or you simply don’t respect me”

“Or both” said Angelica.

“… …Thank you, Angelica…” he stood up straighter than before. “This laptop was fine when it left the store and I sure as hell didn’t break it, neither did my wife or my children, so it must be one of you”

Angelica raised her hand and took two steps forwards. “Now, whoever it was, I want to let you know that, thank to you, Alexander made a fool of himself in the electronic store yesterday”

“Alright, Angelica, you don’t…”

“No! They have to know this!” Angelica put herself in front of Alexander and put her arms in akimbo, facing the three men. “My poor brother-in-law made himself look like a lunatic thanks to you!”
“For God’s sake, Angelica…”

“And now, I’m very sure lots of people had recorded him with their mobiles and a few videos might’ve spread all across YouTube…”

“They got it!” interrupted Alexander. He inhaled.

“Please, people, just tell the truth” insisted George one more time. “Who did it?”

“We don’t know” said Jefferson, looking at the right.

“The hell you don’t” said Alexander with teeth clenched. “Did he break my laptop?” he asked them, pointing at Madison.

“No” said Thomas and Aaron.

“Did he break my laptop?” he asked again, now pointing at Jefferson.

“No” said James and Aaron.

“Did he break my laptop?” now, pointing at Burr.

“No” said Thomas and James.

“Who the hell broke my laptop?!” screamed Alexander, losing the patience.

“I told you we don’t know” said Jefferson, frowning.

“Some of you is lying to me!” accused Alexander. “Is he a liar?” he asked, pointing at Burr.

“No” said James and Thomas.

“Is he a liar?” Now, pointing at Thomas.

“No” said James and Aaron.

“Then, he is the liar!” Now pointing at James.

“Nope” said Thomas and Aaron.

“Alright, so that’s how it’s gonna be” said Angelica, starting to be impatient as well. “We’ll be here until some of you confess. All day if it’s necessary!”

“Well, all, all day…” said George, paling at the thought. “Adams’ office is vacant”

“Why did it have to be one of us?” asked Jefferson suddenly. “Angelica haven’t said anything about herself in all this time”

“Really, Thomas??” asked Angelica, rolling her eyes. “It wasn’t me and that was left clear yesterday!”

“What did you do to prove it? Saying it? Acting like a maniac? That is you in every day basis”

“For your information, by the time Alexander was discovering the mess, I was in the restroom writing the list of what is lacking there, like coffee, tea and some snacks. Something that you were supposed to do this month, but it has been my responsibility”
“Jesus, Jefferson…” said George, weary.

“That’s what happens when you trust this man to write down anything” chimed in Alexander. “He doesn’t even bring a sad pencil to the meetings”

“What should I? I already know what I believe in, and your thoughts are not worthy to be repeated more than once”

“Enough, enough!” said George, immediately. “Let’s focus on the important matter”

“Sorry, sir, but it’s unfair. I would never break my family’s things” said Angelica, offended.

“I never said it was on purpose” clarified Jefferson. “Accidents do happen, you know?” Aaron moved uncomfortably at his side. “Maybe when you opened the window…”

“How do you know about the window?” asked Alexander, arching one eyebrow.

“With your yelling, I’m sure the whole continent knows about the window”

“I didn’t open that window!” complained Angelica.

“I’m only saying that if, you did it by accident, it shouldn’t have the same repercussions as if you did it intentionally”

“Why are you so comprehensive all of a sudden? Did the Virgin appeared to you or something?” asked Alexander, tapping his shoe on the floor.

“No, I…”

“Because” he interrupted “is either that or that it was you who broke it and now you’re saying those things to make you the victim and I, the executioner if I got mad if it was really you who broke my laptop by accident”

“I was only…”

“Though I hardly swallow it”

“If you can’t swallow it, then choke, asshole!”

“Jefferson!” reprehended George.

“Mr. President…!” he begged.

“You know he isn’t like this!” said Alexander, outraged. “We all know how he let one of his gardeners be deported only because he broke his birdbath!”

“I didn’t deport him! He lied to me, I had to fire him, he wanted revenge, he stole some of my jewellery and I had to call the police!” told Jefferson, hitting the carpet with his foot at each sentence. “What was I supposed to do? Applaud him? If he didn’t have papers, it’s not my problem!”

“He was working for you, fucking walking mop!”

“Alexander!” George reprehended once again.

“Mr. President, what does this have to do with…?”
“For Heaven’s sake, why can’t you understand…?”

“Why can’t we talk things as civilized…!”

Angelica, Alexander and Thomas started to talk at the same time, gesticulating exaggeratedly, and raising the volume until the limit of their lungs. Madison coughed in his kleenex and rumbled his temples while he shook his head, thinking that was ridiculous. Aaron was all sweaty and wanted to go home as soon as possible. He hit his bottom lip. A part of him wanted to confess, but the other was telling him to follow his own advice of “talk less and smile more”. That part was winning force at the screams got louder.

He glared at Washington and felt even worse. The poor man had his head lowered and between his hands. Madison and Aaron shared a look of worry. Just when Burr was about to get up and ask his boss if he was feeling fine, George got up from his seat with a stern look. He hit the table with one fit that silenced the three screaming adults.

“Alright, that is enough! I have a grandson who is six and he knows how to dialogue better than any of you! If I were in that position I’d feel completely ashamed of myself!” he screamed, making the five persons who were in the room look at the floor. “I am going to ask this for the last time: who broke this laptop? If no one answers, I will see the videos recorded from yesterday, and I was serious when I said you wouldn’t want that option, ask Adams if you don’t believe me!”

When Washington raised his voice, you had to take him seriously. That was what made Aaron decide that he preferred to be in trouble because he admitted his mistake – no matter how late – than because he was caught red handed in a video. He cleared his throat and straightened himself.

“Sir…”

“I did it!” said James Madison suddenly, taking one step closer to the desk. “I broke Hamilton’s new laptop”

“You did, Madison?” asked George, calming down.

“Yes”

“James…!”

“No, Thomas, it’s alright. I broke it. Thank you, but I broke it”

James was small but imposing, and if he said something that had to be done. Aaron looked at Thomas, who just shrugged and pointed at Hamilton with the head. And Aaron remembered: Alexander already hated Madison for that time he didn’t want to be on his side on an important decision and Madison’s plan ended up winning. If you look for “resentful” in the dictionary, a
Hamilton’s photo would appear. And a Madison’s one as well, for that matter. Because neither of them wanted to let it go.

Hamilton’s sarcastic laugh broke the tension and the silence in the room, and Aaron stepped backwards, fearing for the worse.

“Ha! Was it you, then?”

“Yes”

“I knew it: if it wasn’t Bert it had to be Ernie… How?” he asked, getting closer to the man, his arms crossed.

“I…” James looked at the left. “I poured coffee down it”

“Poured coff…?” Alex was red in the face in a matter of seconds. “AND WHY THE FUCK DID YOU POUR COFFEE DOWN A NEW AND SOMEBODY ELSE’S LAPTOP? DID YOU THINK IT WOULD HELP IT TO CHARGE FASTER OR WHAT? AND IF SO, WHAT KIND OF MENTAL PROBLEM DO YOU NEED TO HAVE TO THINK SUCH AN IMBECILITY! FUCKING AND RESENTFUL HOBBIT, DID YOU EVEN END ELEMENTARY SCHOOL? WHY WOULD A MAN WITH MINIMAL INTELLIGENCE DO SUCH A STUPID STUNT ACCIDENTALLY!”

“Oh, yes, genius?” blurted out James, redder in the face as well. “Well, guess what, I didn’t break it!”

“You didn’t?” echoed Alexander, with scepticism. “Then, why did you tell me otherwise?”

“Are you a masochistic?” asked Angelica.

James simply exploded, looking bigger than he actually was: “BECAUSE I FREAKING HATE YOU ALL AND I’M ANGRY I WASN’T THE ONE WHO BREAK THAT FUCKING SHIT!” he screamed.

Aaron gasped. Thomas muttered an almost inaudible “Sweet Lord…” and Angelica clapped a hand on her mouth. Even Eliza was heard saying a soft “Damn” on the other side of her sister’s phone, but no one paid her attention. There was a moment of complete silence. No one moved or talked or thought. James was the first one to move, turning around and leaving the room. The other workers jumped surprised at the other side of the door and let him pass, afraid of what he would do if they refused to do so. Thomas looked at George, who nodded, and he left the room, worried.

All eyes fell on Alexander, who was petrified, looking at the door. Angelica and George shared a worried glare, waiting for an answer. Alexander was more dangerous when he was silent than when he spoke. Aaron knew this as well, and decided to press his back against the wall. The rest of people looked at him from the door. Finally, Alex moved. He nodded his head, put both hands behind his back and exited the place without a word or a last glare to anything or anyone in particular.
“Alex…?” said Angelica with tiny voice.

George and she followed him. They reached the exit door, seeing Alexander looking at the sky at the verge of the sidewalk, the air gently moving his hair. The other witnesses decided it was time to go back to their office and locked up there until they had to go home. They didn’t notice John Laurens was missing from the crowd until they saw him passing by Alexander, with a burger in one hand and a soda in the other. They talked a few words, and then John went directly to the office.

“Where did you go?” asked George.

“I woke up late and decided to go for a meal” he answered.

“It’s not lunch break yet, Laurens”

“Hehe… I really thought the fight would last longer” he admitted, shrugging.

“What did Alexander tell you?” asked Angelica, worried.

“Bah, nothing. I asked him what happened and he only told me he wished smoking inside the buildings were still allowed”

George nodded with a sad expression. “I miss those days when I could smoke here…” He sighed and turned around, seeing Aaron Burr still at his door. George arched an eyebrow. “Do you have something to tell me, Burr?”

__________________________

Hamilton was told to get back inside once Burr finished telling the story. Angelica was fuming mad by that point, and only contained her rage to let Burr tell the story for the second time so Alexander could hear it. She even forgot about Eliza, who was still listening everything through her phone back at home, now eating popcorn in the living room and enjoying the solitude and silence the lack of children and husband gave her.

Washington was sat on his desk, arms crossed and a glare fixed on the broken computer right in front of him. Aaron was sitting by his left, while Angelica stood by his right, throwing daggers at Burr with her glare. Alexander was behind them, looking through the window, both hands still on his back and lips sealed. Aaron was told when he was little by his grandparents than telling the truth was good because it lifted a heavy weight from your shoulders, but, right then, he was feeling the pressure about to crash him. He was, also, looking at the laptop, totally regretting what he was retelling.

“I’m sorry, Alexander” he apologised when he finished, scratching the back of his neck. “I’m really sorry. I promise it was an accident”
Angelica kept her eyes fixed on the table, Alexander didn’t move, either. Washington, on the contrary, turned around in his swivel chair, chin supported by the palm of his hand. Aaron bent over himself when the silence wasn’t broken by anyone. A sigh of relief leaving his voice when Alexander finally talked, still facing the window. His voice too calm to be taken slightly.

“I don’t want to look at you, I might kill you… Not that I haven’t thought about it before, but now the idea is too tempting and I don’t know if I could control myself” Aaron swallowed and looked at Washington, looking for help, but their boss was still looking at his well-trusted employee with an illegible expression. “It’s not so much that you lied to me, but that you let Angelica scare my children, and that is something I can’t ignore”

“I… What?” he asked, confused.

“I hope you’re satisfied, Burr” Angelica spoke, with a harsh tone, pressing the bridge of her nose. “You made Alexander look like a madman who needs to be taken away forever in a mental asylum”

“Gosh, Angelica…” Alexander rolled his eyes, too tired.

“There were so many people in that store…” she kept talking, now with a broken voice. “And all of them were looking at us… Taking photos, recording videos… I’m sure that poor though conceited assistant was left with a depression for all the shit Alexander said to him”

“Buf…” Alexander pressed his face against both hands.

“Come on, Schuyler, don’t be too harsh on him” said Washington, sitting straight and looking at Burr for the first time in all the time they entered the room. “He’s clearly feeling bad about it and to me it was a pure accident”

“Sir, he needs to know actions have consequences!” said Angelica regaining her confident voice. She pointed at Burr with one finger. “Thanks to you, young man, hundreds, maybe thousands of videos are now free on the Internet!”

“Angelica…” said Alexander.

“You turned my brother-in-law into a meme!!!!”

“FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST, ANGELICA, WE ALL GOT IT ALREADY: I’M THE AMERICAN JOKE, NOW DROP IT!”

Angelica finally stopped, looking at the side with an angry expression. George sighed.

“Please, Schuyler, Hamilton, go back to work”

“Yes, sir” said Alexander. Angelica followed close behind.

When both were gone, George turned to face Aaron. “Go home for the day, Burr, I think it will be the best…”
“Me too, sir. I’m sorry” he apologised once more, getting up.

“Oh, take this” he pointed at the laptop “with you. I don’t think it’d be wise to show it to Hamilton ever again”

“Agreed” Aaron took the gadget in his hands, feeling more regretful for being him the one who was going to throw it away. *Thinking about how I only wanted to have a nice detail*, he thought, saddened. Before getting out the room, he heard Washington saying:

“Gosh, I’m exhausted and it’s only Wednesday…”

“Um… It’s Monday, sir” corrected Aaron.

George hit the desk with fury: “Dammit, Burr, can’t a man dream for one minute in a row?!”

Aaron apologised for what seemed like the zillionth time and closed the door behind him.

“You really messed up, Aaron” said a voice from behind.

“Peggy, I didn’t…”

“You didn’t see me, I know” interrupted the youngest Schuyler sister. Crossing her arms, she said: “Now, what would you do?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are you going to move? Change your job? Pretend your death?”

“I already apologised, there’s not much I can do”

“Hm… If you say so…” Peggy accompanied him to the parking lot. He was glad by the silent company. “You know, I know Alexander as I know myself: if you want to make amends, an apology won’t be enough”

“I already knew that…”

“But maybe you can redeem yourself”

Aaron opened the door of his car and put the laptop in the co-pilot’s seat: “How? He won’t talk to me, that’s a non-starter”

“Maybe he will if he sees you did something for him” Peggy started to play with her short hair and, when Aaron looked at her with an interrogative look, she pointed the laptop with her head. “Madison was right, God really must love you. George let you have the laptop”

And with that, she left. Aaron looked at the laptop, thinking about his options. Finally, he sighed, defeated.
“It won’t harm me to try…”

Finding the store wasn’t that difficult. He only had to talk to Theodosia, who was told by Eliza. He had confessed it to her and she supported and congratulated him for his bravery at confessing as soon as possible… He didn’t have to tell the entire truth, he had had enough for one day.

As it was a Monday afternoon, the store was almost empty. He saw a young boy in a counter, and he approached it, laptop in hand. He read “Chuck” in his nameplate and prayed for him to be the same one who Hamilton had screamed at, to kill two birds with one rock.

“Um, excuse me, sir?” Aaron showed him the laptop. “A frie… One of my workmates bought this computer the other day and… Well…”

Chuck immediately paled and raised both hands in surrender. “Look, sir, I don’t want more problems because of it”

“No, no, my intentions…”

“Look, I’ve already had enough with it. He didn’t do anything to the laptop, it was broken when it left the store” he said in a rush.

“No, I broke it” said Aaron, a bit confused. “Look, I poured coffee down it and didn’t tell him because… Well, as I can see, you already can imagine why”

“… Yes” Chuck looked at him with narrowed eyes.

“I just wanted to know if you could fix it or… if I’d have to buy a new one?”

Chuck looked at it for a brief moment, then at the store, seeing it now completely empty. “Coffee?”

“Coffee”

“Give me a minute”

“Thank you, sir”

Aaron was surprised when he saw fixing a computer was almost as expensive as buying a new one. Surely doing things right didn’t harm him, but it did leave him penniless. Chuck could fix it, he paid him, and they both said goodbye. Aaron didn’t want to think about he had spent his whole
savings to do this. He would have to start again, but it would be worth it. Not only because he
wouldn’t be an important part in Hamilton’s black list, but because he had done everything wrong
and this was the last thing he could do. Besides, Theodosia was supportive and their daughter didn’t
have to start school in two years. He had time.

The next morning, he tried to convince himself this was the right thing to do. He inhaled as he
entered the office, noticing everybody looking at him with the corner of their eyes. He tried to see
if Peggy was there to encourage him, but he didn’t see her. Not even when you wanted to find her,
she was anywhere to be seen.

He stopped in front of Hamilton’s office door, closed. He swallowed, looking at the bag in his
hands.

“There’s no sin in trying” he convinced himself for the millionth time, and he knocked.
“Come in!” said Hamilton’s voice from the inside.

Aaron was relieved when he heard him in, apparently, good mood. He decided to not say a word
until Alexander saw it was him. So, he pressed his lips and entered the little office his once-friend
worked in. And he froze.

Alexander was working, Peggy by his side and a laptop on the table. The same laptop he had in his
bag, brand new as well. Hamilton looked up when he heard nothing.

“Oh, Burr, good morning” he said. “What do you bring there?”
“I…” he shook his head. He pointed at the laptop. “What…?”

“Oh, do you remember Angelica saying I screamed at the assistant?” began to explain Alexander.
“Well, it’s a small world, because that guy went to college with Peggy. So, she went to the store and
told him either he would give her a new computer as the one I bought for free, or she would tell his
father all the secrets he had told her and had as text messages”

“… No way…” said Aaron, feeling his body shaking.

Peggy smiled mischievously at him: “Yes, you know? If you piss somebody I love off, I will piss
that somebody off even more” and her smile grew.

Aaron started to have a tick in his right eye. “You…”

“Did you come for something, Burr?” asked Alexander. “What’s in the bag?”

Peggy approached him and took the bag in her own hands. “Oh, Alexander, it’s your old computer!”
she said, pretending to be surprised.
“Oh, so you had it!” said Alexander. Peggy put the bag on the table and Alexander took it out.

“I went to fix it…” said Aaron, not to explain it but to recapitulate all the things he had done. “I went to fix it and apologised to the man at the store… I spent all my savings…” the tick in his eyes was getting more evident.

“Oh, really?” said Alexander, impressed. “You didn’t have to do it. I know it was an accident”

Aaron was shaking. “Of course, you do…”

“But thank you very much, now Eliza can have this. I’m sure she will be happy!” he put the computer back in the bag and continued to tap.

“Well, Alex, I’m glad to know you’re happy” said Peggy, kissing him on the head. “I’ll go back to work” she passed Aaron by, with an evil smile on her face. If glares could kill, Peggy would’ve ended up dead in that moment.

“Burr, are you going to stand there all day?” asked Alexander, without looking at him.

Aaron looked at him, then at the bag, then at him again. He clenched his fists and inhaled deeply, before turning around and slamming the door shut. He pressed his back against it, trying to think correctly.

“What a strange man” he heard Hamilton from the other side, which provoked him to groan.

Aaron went directly to his own office, wanting to be locked up for the rest of the day. Maybe the whole week. Before getting in, Jefferson’s voice, from behind, said:

“Told you: that’s what you get for being nice to Hamilton or anyone close to him”

Aaron dedicated him a death glare: “WORK!” he shouted, before slamming his own door shut as well.

That afternoon, Eliza invited Angelica over. She wanted her sister to teach her how to use her new computer, she was so excited she almost felt hypocrite for criticising Alexander a few nights ago. Almost.

“And now… You go there… Click. Alright, you’re downloading it”
“And I can see that on the TV?”

“If you have a pendrive, yes. You can borrow mine whenever you want”

“Thank you!” Eliza click in a few more things, before returning her attention to her sister. “By the way, why did all of this start?” she asked, curious.

“Hm, what?”

“This. The fight, the reason why Alexander had to buy a new laptop”

“Oh, yes, that… Well…” Angelica frowned. “Honestly, I don’t remember”

“Angie…”

“It’s true, I don’t” Angelica shrugged.

“Well, it’s not like you can’t find out”

Angelica took out her mobile from her purse. “You know me too well” she said, smiling, and began to look for the audio.

“I wonder what Burr could’ve said to Alexander to make him mad” commented Eliza, meanwhile. “I mean, that man is a walking monosyllable”

“Hm… I kinda remember we were discussing something and then… Alexander said something”

“I knew it had to be him” Eliza shook her head.

“Oh, here it is!” said Angelica with a triumphant smile. “The audio from Friday”

Angelica pressed the screen and turned on the volume as much as she could. Both sisters bent down to listen better and clearly. At first, they only heard a bunch of people screaming at once. Eliza distinguished Alex’s and Thomas’ almost immediately. Then, Washington’s voice made everybody fell silent, telling them the meeting was over and that they would continue tomorrow, and was hoping he would hear adults and not toddlers.

“I almost lost it when I heard him today, saying he felt like he was working in an Elementary School” commented Eliza with a smile.

“I know, I had to pretend to have a cold” laughed Angelica. “Now, now, listen up! This is when it happens I guess…”

Eliza and Angelica sharpened their hearing. Aaron and Alexander’s voices were distant at first, but they got closer to the recording Angelica from Friday as the conversation went on.

“Being nice from time to time won’t kill you” said Aaron with a calm voice.
“Being nice to Jefferson certainly would” contradicted Alexander. “What haven’t killed anyone is letting people know your opinion, you know?”

“I’ve got enough problems in my personal life, I don’t need to have enemies in my workplace”

“You can’t be liked by everybody, Burr, you’re not a bed” Angelica’s laugh was almost inaudible thanks to hers and her sister’s current laughs, hearing the conversation.

“Listen, I understand you’re angry because of what happened today, but can’t you let it go? It’s been a really long day”

“I’m sure listening lets you exhausted” mocked Alexander.

“Listening to you surely does” Aaron sighed.

“Though I can admit I prefer silence to stupid words”

“Thank you!” said Aaron, relieved. “See? Between me and him, I’m the lesser of two evils. Jeez…”

There was a pause. Angelica was now trying to suppress her laugh, remembering what happened. Eliza looked at her with a smile, took the phone in her hands and pressed her ear against it.

“Between him and me” said Alexander all of a sudden.

“… … What?”

“It is said ‘between him and me’, Burr” there was a silence, only broke by the sound of a pencil writing down something. Alex’s for sure. “If you are only going to talk once a week, at least, do it fine” More silence. Eliza sharpened her hearing and could even hear Aaron inhaling dangerously. Then, the last straw. “Grammar, Aaron”

The rest was history.
Group therapy (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

There was a day of the month George Washington feared the most.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: swearing, extremely black humour.
DISCLAIMER: the musical "Hamilton" belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda; the character of Loki belongs to Marvel and Stan Lee.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Charles Lee parked the motorhome in front of the cabin he liked to spent Christmas holidays with his family, and raised an eyebrow when he saw no lights and heard no noises from the inside. Who could’ve thought it? No screaming at all. This actually worked, he thought with half a smile. He got out the huge vehicle and stopped a moment to look at the Sun, descending slowly in the sky. He felt the soft and chilling breeze and inhaled.

“There’s nothing that can do more good to a man…” he began to say, walking to the entrance and opening the door with a smile. “…than spending some time with natu… Oh, my God!”

Lee stopped mid-sentence when he saw the state his cabin was in: the curtains were stripped off, covering the three emerging figures of Hamilton, Laurens and Angelica Schuyler, who were getting on their feet while moaning; pieces of what once were chairs spread across the floor, were Burr and Maria were lying, hands on their heads and more moaning; the handrail was destroyed as well, letting a clear vision of Washington sitting on the stairs, clothes ripped off and a hand over his shoulder, teeth clenched; dishes and glasses were broken on the floor as well, being watched by Mulligan, Jefferson and Margaret Schuyler, who were sat on the floor, gasping and clearly in pain. Eventually, Lee dared to look forwards, seeing the swing door of the kitchen detaching because the upper hinge was broken. Inside, Lafayette had his back against the fridge and Madison was holding onto the counter, kneeling on the floor. They were all bruised and gasping for air, clearly too exhausted to move from where they were.

“What the hell happened in here?” asked Lee. He feared to put a foot in when all the eyes dedicated him a death glare.

TWO DAYS BEFORE:
There was a day of the month George Washington always feared the most. He looked at his calendar, seeing the number 17 circled by him since the beginning of the month in red. All months were the same: he sat in his office, did his work, and looked at the calendar, counting down how many ‘peaceful’ days he had left until the occasion. He looked at his watch, seeing he had three minutes left until half past eight. His eyes fell on the closed wooden door of the room. He sharpened his ears, trying to hear something, but the whole office was in complete silence. Though that was something he would have dreamed of so many times – complete and absolute silence in his job – today was making him feel more nervous than usual.

He got up from his chair and made his way out of the room. Down the hallway, all doors were closed. Passing by them, he could hear some tapping or muttered words behind the woods, but the environment was quiet. Today was not the day to be relaxed. He stopped by Hamilton’s door, waiting to hear him complaining under his breath, but he only heard accelerated tapping. George narrowed his nose. Now, something was wrong.

He trotted until the entrance of the building, finding Maria Lewis in her counter, reading some magazines. He approached her, clearing his throat to make her notice him.

“Oh, sir!” she said, embarrassed, closing the magazine rapidly and blushing. “I’m sorry, it’s just that…”

George stopped her by waving his hand. “Don’t worry. Have you seen Mrs. Schuyler today?”

“Which one?”

“Angelica”

“Oh, Angelica, yes. She had a reunion with us all before even you arrived”

“She had?”

“Yes, she sent us a message by the group chat saying she wanted to see us all at six in the meeting room to tell us that today was the day”

George blinked, perplexed. Not only Angelica did what she had to do, but she also made sure everyone came making clear it was a special occasion as they had to come to work one hour before normal and without his presence. That would certainly would worry him if he were in his employee’s place. George let a small laugh escape his lips. Moments like this reminded him why he had chosen Angelica as his vice president.

“I saw it so weird there weren’t screams already” said George, trying to contain his laugh at the image of Angelica threatening everybody. “Do you know where is she now?”
“She told me she was going to the pub around the corner”

George nodded. “I think I’d do the same”

“Um, but we only have…” she tried to remind him, timidly.

“I know, but it will be a moment. Call me or Angelica when he comes” he asked her for.

“Of course” she nodded.

The phone at her right, on the wall, rang suddenly, startling both of them. George put his coat on while eyeing the receptionist picking up. Maria said the name of the company almost automatically, with her polite tone. George waited, knob in hand, just in case.

“Yes, he is here” Maria mouthed ‘Hamilton’, and returned her attention to the phone. “Yes, I’ll put you on hold and tell him to come, ma’am”

“Everything’s alright?” he asked in a whisper.

“I’m not quite sure. It’s his wife” explained Maria, walking to Hamilton’s office.

George eyed the phone and hesitated for a minute. He sighed. To the hell, he wasn’t going to be that long, anyway, and he deserved to relax before the problem arrived. “I’ll come back with Angelica in a bit” he informed her once again.

Maria only nodded in the distance, knocking on Hamilton’s door, who gave her permission to enter. George gave the phone a last glare, shrugged, and left. *It’ll only take me a minute, two as much. Nothing can happen in two minutes.*

But neither George, Angelica or Maria were able to know that the countdown had started.

Charles Lee had longed for the post of president at the company for too many years. When the company still was part of George King’s, he longed for it; when the two Georges had a confrontation and Washington decided he had had enough of the mistreatment of his co-workers and started a “war” to become an independent company (which lasted eight long and tedious years going to court and filling what seemed like endless paper work), he longed for it. Even when Washington got assigned as the president he didn’t lose hope and waited for being elected vice president, only to be disappointed once again when Angelica Schuyler had had the honour, one that she still had even to this day.

Saying Lee hated George was a fact more than an opinion, and though he never knew if it
was right to despise him without George doing any actual harm to him, he still did. Some say you
don’t choose who you love; Lee said you can’t choose who you hate either. But still, in spite of that
personal matter that George himself knew and accepted as if it was something normal… Lee wasn’t
complete heartless. That might be why when he entered the office to talk about the problems he was
informed during the month and saw what he saw, he was both speechless and empathetic towards his
enemy in the work field.

The first thing he witnessed, though that was not a big surprise, was Hamilton screaming at
the phone, fighting against the wire, which tangled him from all the walking from side to side he was
making. Maria and Aaron were at the opposite wall, seeing the scene with worried glares. Lee
couldn’t help to stop and see the show before going to do his job.

“Well, Eliza, what do you want me to do? I am working!” screamed Hamilton through the phone.
“It’s not my fault Philip bit that child in the day care! … … What do you mean it is my fault?? Oh,
right, right, the child has learned that violent attitude from me, not from your sister who broke our
squeezer… Why her outbursts of rage are justified and mine aren’t??! You… … … Yes, yes, I know
you have looked forwards this relaxing morning at the spa the whole month, Eli, but… … … I’m at
work, Eliza, I told you! Oh, there we go again! Yes, I am always working, do you know why I’m
always working? Because I have two sisters-in-law who come to our fucking house all the fucking
weekends to have free lunch and three dependent children! … …” Alexander’s face was red as
scarlet by now. “Well, if I haven’t raised our children because I’m always working, HOW THE
FUCK DID PHILIP LEARN ANYTHING FROM ME?!”

“Please, Alexander…” tried to say Burr, who had seen Charles Lee paying attention to the
conversation with a quizzical expression. “Look at…”

Hamilton raised one finger to silence him. “No, no, Eliza, now you listen: if I’m such a bad father,
then you go to talk to the teacher and pick Philip up, I wouldn’t want the school to think I’m a
kidnapper. You know, because everybody knows Philip and his siblings have no father!” he
screamed at the phone, resentfully.

This time, Eliza screamed so much, the three witnesses could hear her through the receiver: “I HATE
YOU! I HOPE YOUR WHOLE FUCKING OFFICE BURNS WITH YOU INSIDE!!!”

Hamilton screamed even louder: “I HOPE IT EVEN MORE, DAMN!!!!!!!”

And they saw Hamilton fighting to hang up with a thump, but he couldn’t do it correctly. He
moaned a few times before losing it, screaming and, simply, stripping the whole phone off the wall
and throwing it to the floor, breaking it in a few pieces. Maria screamed when the phone hit the floor
and Aaron covered her, just in case one piece could fly to them. Thankfully, nothing like that
happened. Charles Lee looked at Hamilton, mouth opened in a small ‘o’, the short man gasping and
with his face buried in his hands.

“Who was the imbecile who thought putting the phone on the wall was a good idea? I just don’t get
it. I don’t… I DON’T GET LIFE ANYMORE!” he complained, trying to contain his voice, and
failing in the process. He sighed heavily and passed a hand through his hair. “Idiots… It’s to go, find
them and sue them so bad that they’d have to spend the fucking rest of their shitty lives under a bridge, I’m sure then they will learn to have good ideas!!!”

Charles Lee looked at his right when he heard hyperventilating. He saw Maria, hand on the chest, breathing faster than normal. Aaron put a hand on her shoulder and helped to sit down on her chair. He looked at Hamilton with a frown.

“Alexander, calm down”

Hamilton looked daggers at his workmate. “Oh, yes, the other one as well… ‘Alex, calm down, Alex, calm down’… Why is it always me??? Why is never the world???”

“You’re overreacting, please, just chill. It’s for your own good” said Burr, quietly, wanting to get closer to him.

“I already have a wife who criticises all my fucking moves, Burr, I DON’T NEED ANOTHER AT MY WORKPLACE!!” he screamed, running to his office and shutting the door with a thump.

Burr looked at the door. A tick in his right eye. He sighed. “Go to your happy place, Aaron, to your happy place…” he told himself, closing his eyes. He smiled when he imagined himself dancing on a tomb which read “Alexander Hamilton”. He stopped wondering if this was mentally healthy or not when it served to not do it in real life.

“A CELL???” a voice screamed down the hallway, waking him up from his day dream and making him panic.

“No, please, I didn’t do it, I just enjoyed it!” Aaron defended himself, gaining an interrogative look from Lee and Maria.

The voice, Thomas, screamed once again from inside his office. “What do you mean you’re in a cell?? What do you think about life! You… Hello?”

A pause. Maria swallowed and twisted her hands as a nervous habit, while Aaron and Lee looked the Thomas’ office, expectantly. The door opened violently and Jefferson got out of his office, fuming mad, walking by strides. Madison was right behind, sweating from fear, a handkerchief in his right hand.

“Thomas, for the love of God, calm yourself” he tried to say, coughing a bit.

Jefferson seemed to not hear him or see anyone around him, as he passed Charles Lee by without a look. “In which universe a daughter calls her father to tell him she’s in jail for driving drunk and then hang up when the father is telling her off!!!” he complained going directly to the wall the phone was. Or was supposed to be.

Madison stopped right beside Lee. “No one has to know your personal life, please, lower your voice!” he begged.
“Welcome to my world…” said Aaron, feeling bad for the short and sick man.

Jefferson looked daggers at all of them. “Don’t tell me to lower my voice when…!” he went to take the phone, only to almost fall to the floor when he touched nothing and was inclined forwards. He looked at the wall, seeing the white space the phone was supposed to fill. He buried his face in his hands, muffling a shriek. “Whyyyyy…” he gasped a few times, not knowing what to do or where to go. “I can’t believe this… I refuse to believe this! Not this again!!” he screamed, running towards Hamilton’s office.

“Again…?” echoed Lee.

“God, not this…” muttered Madison at his side.

Charles went directly to where Jefferson was standing, wanting to calm things down a little, but before he could say anything, Thomas opened the door with a kick, making the door hit the wall and startling Hamilton, who had been sitting in his desk with the head between his hands.

“What the hell, Jefferson!” said Alexander, hitting the desk with both hands. “Don’t enter my office, especially that way!”

“How many times do we need to tell you not to rip the damned phone off the damned wall, you damned wet gremlin!”

“Jeez, jeez, jeez…” said Madison under his voice, taking one bottle of pills out his pocket. “Anxiety attack, anxiety attack”

Maria approached him. “Share that, please…”

“Agh, don’t start with me now, shitty Tinky Winky, I’m having a hell of a day” said Hamilton, waving his hand at his workmate, tired.

“Did your sixteen-year-old daughter call to tell you she is in a cell? No? Then, shut up and stop breaking phones! This is the fifth one in the month!”

“Was that what ‘outlay for communication’ meant?” asked Lee, with arms in akimbo.

The door at Hamilton’s one’s right opened to reveal a yawning Margaret passing a hand through her hair.

“Keep it down, people, I’m trying to sleep”

“Sleep…?” echoed Lee once again.

Before he could interrogate her any further, Lafayette appeared with supermarket bags in both hands, laughing.
“What a peaceful morning we’re having today, huh?” he said. For Lee’s horror, there was no sarcasm in his tone of voice. “It’s so clear Angelica threatened us this morning to behave!” he declared, passing a perplex Lee by.

“Peaceful? Behaving? This is behaving…?” he wondered, feeling his hands sweaty.

Maria and Madison walked him by, a pill in hand. “Run, run you that you can” she advised him.

Lee passed a hand through his face. “Heavens…”

“Now, I’m going to have to look for her all morning!” continued Jefferson.

“Can’t she call your wife and tell her?” asked Alexander, rubbing his temples.

“My wife is dead” said Thomas, offended. He put a hand on his forehead and moaned.

“Why does luck only smile to assholes?” wondered Hamilton.

Thomas looked at him for a moment, inhaling and exhaling dangerously. “Gosh, I still remember the times you didn’t work here and I wasn’t a smoker” he said, before getting out Hamilton’s office, heading directly to the door. “Maria, tell Washington I had to leave for family matters!”

“Maria is in the restroom” Aaron told him.

“Then you tell him! God, my head is killing me” complained Jefferson while putting his coat on. “Let’s see if I’m lucky and it’s a tumour and I finally die” he said, with an exhausting tone.

“Mother of God…” said Peggy. “Someone should really talk to him”

“Let life follow its course, Peggy” said Alexander, now standing in the door.

Aaron made his way to where Lee was, worried. “Alright, everybody, calm down. Why don’t we take a deep breath in and…?”

Aaron couldn’t end his sentence; an explosion was heard from the restroom. Maria’s scream was followed by Madison’s and Lafayette’s, who ran out the room, holding hands to push the other one and be faster.

“What happened?” asked Aaron, running to them.

Before anyone could answer him, John Adams got out the room, his clothes on fire. The whole hallway began to scream.

“Oh, my God. Oh, my God!” screamed Aaron, running to the entrance. “Where is extinguisher?!?” he screamed in the distance.
“There are no extinguishers, they were all used in the last foam party!” Lafayette reminded him.

“Was that what ‘festive things’ meant??” asked Lee, white as a ghost.

Laurens and Mulligan got out from the restroom, bottles of water in both hands, screaming.

“Roll, roll on the floor, on the floor!” said Hercules, opening one of the bottles and throwing him water.

“Someone call an ambulance!!!” begged John, almost crying, kicking the man to try and stop the fire.

“Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ!” repeated Maria, running to the entrance, she stopped, panicking. “There is no phone anymore!!!” she informed them.

“Again??” asked John.

“Yeah, right, like if you are in any position to judge me…” said Alexander, rolling his eyes.

Peggy’s voice could be heard, screaming at her phone, saying the address of the building. “And please, hurry up, my workmate set fire to another workmate!”

“DON’T SAY IT LIKE THAT!!” screamed John, red in the face.

Aaron got out from the washroom with a cube full of water in his hands. “Make way, make way!” he screamed.

Lee pressed himself against the wall, feeling numb. He saw Burr running to the burning Adams, tripping over his feet and throwing the whole cube over him, Mulligan and Laurens. Thankfully, that was enough to extinguish the fire on man’s clothes. Adams was on the floor, gasping and moaning. Madison decided to just bite and swallow the pill without any water, his whole body shaking; Maria was a ball on the floor, hyperventilating; Aaron got up moaning a bit while rubbing his ankle; Alexander pinched the bridge of his nose; the rest were gasping and looking at each other. Lafayette looked at Charles Lee, who was too pale to be healthy. The Frenchman got closer to him, about to ask him if he was feeling alright, but a beeping sound muted him.

The fire sprinkles turned on, soaking them to the bone.

“Oh, now you work!” complained John.

His voice was enough to wake Charles Lee up from his trance. He looked at everything and everybody in the hallway. He felt so numb and his vision was still a bit blurred. He couldn’t find the right words. He eventually looked at the entrance, where he saw Washington and his vice president, Schuyler, petrified and just as paled as him. Their arms falling on both sides, letting clear they felt defeated, shocked and speechless. Washington’s voice, broken and unusually pitched reflected he
was lost.

“We only left for five minutes!”

Charles Lee looked at his watch. He had been in that office only five minutes. Literally. The sirens of an ambulance in the distance prevented him to be frozen and thoughtless in the middle of that hallway again.

Three paramedics put Adams on the stretcher and checked on his injuries once he was inside the ambulance, while other two tended to Aaron’s ankle and helped Maria to put her anxiety under control. Someone wanted to check on Madison, but he declined the help politely, sitting on the sidewalk, next to Laurens, who had his face buried in his hands, sobbing and feeling guilty. Hamilton was at his other side, embracing him by the shoulders but with an absent-mind expression. In fact, his mind was kilometres from there, reconsidering a lot of things in his life, like his marriage. Lafayette’s voice was a distant sound. As Laurens was in distress for what happened, the Frenchman had decided to explain to Washington what happened.

George listened carefully and tried to contain his anger when he was told that all that happened because Laurens had forgotten to remove the fork again from inside the microwave before turned it on. As the poor machine was about to explode because of frustrating hits by the hands of his impatient employees and the other multiple times Laurens had let a metal utensil inside, it was a matter of time the microwave ended up blowing up. And so, it happened. The microwave began to sparkle and Adams was too unlucky as a sparkle landed on his jacket, burning it in the act.

The ambulance doors closed and the vehicle disappeared down the street along with its strident siren. Washington breathed slowly. He didn’t want to scream at Laurens, the poor boy couldn’t be blamed for his many, many, many slips… Or, at least, he thought he couldn’t, maybe he was being too nice. But, still, he couldn’t scream to someone who was sobbing, feeling terrible wrong for an accident. Let the memories of the millions of times he or Angelica had told him to not put metal objects inside the microwaves reprimand him in their place.

He turned around after a nod, Lafayette’s eyes still on him. George saw Angelica supporting herself by putting her forehead against the stone wall. A few metres away, by the door, was Maria, feeling a bit better for what it seemed. Arms crossed and a thoughtful expression. On the sidewalk, sat and with a blanket on his shoulders, there was Charles Lee, lost in his own thoughts. Just then, George felt how silent everything around him was. His employees didn’t dare to say a word when they saw him a couple of steps away from their personal manager. Though George was the president, if Lee thought something or someone wasn’t needed in there, he would have to do as he said. That was why he took this day of the month so seriously, he wouldn’t want to fire any of them, especially because that would mean to face the possibility of Lee pulling the strings to hire his
relatives. That was the last thing anyone, especially George, wanted.

“Listen, Lee…”

Charles raised his hand, and George sealed his lips. The man stood up, let the blanket fall to the sidewalk, and passed him by without a word or a last glare. Not even a farewell, a “we’ll talk” or anything like that. And that was what sent shivers up and down George’s spine. Once Lee’s form disappeared from their sights, George clenched his fists and turned around to look at all and each employee.

“I don’t want to hear a voice today. Neither to know anything about anyone. You are going to do your job and you will leave when it’s half past five. Not a single minute later” he said with a harsh tone. He shook his head, feeling his face burning up from a blush of anger. “One day a month. One day a month, people! That is all I ask you for! You just have to be normal one day a month, or, at least, pretend to be normal!” he ended up raising his voice. Still, Angelica didn’t show any signs of being alive, still with her forehead against the wall and her arms fallen. “Each of you, to your respective offices, and don’t dare to get out unless is because you needed to go to the washroom. I don’t even want to know you dared to put a foot in the rest room!”

Without waiting for a response or a simply nod, George entered the building, fuming mad. Maria stepped aside, not wanting to interfere in her boss’ path. She had a hand over her mouth, and finally she covered her eyes, crestfallen. Hercules and Lafayette were the only ones apart from her who were standing. They watched Angelica carefully. If it weren’t for the rising and falling of her chest, they would have thought she had turned into a statue. They shared a look and exhaled with exhaustion through their noses.

“Fichue affaire…” muttered Lafayette, rubbing his neck.

The next morning things weren’t going any better. Not even the fact that it was Saturday and they left earlier because it was their last day of work helped to cheer them up. The entire building was filled with negative and bad vibes, and they all felt it. George had locked the rest room with one of his keys the day before, and, for what they saw when they arrived at the office that morning, he hadn’t unlocked it, not even before leaving. Because all of them, even Hamilton, left the building at twenty-five past five, not wanting to risk it.

George Washington wasn’t in his office when they arrived, and, after seeing it had passed a whole hour and their boss hadn’t given any signs of life of any sort, they all went to the meeting room. Madison explained to Jefferson what happened while he was talking to his daughter and after
he left. The taller man listened to the story with his eyes fixed on the wooden table and then put a hand over his mouth, as Maria did the day before, thinking about everything in general and what would come from this.

Maria joined them in the meeting room as well, a thing that only happened once in a while, but she didn’t want to be left alone at the counter and be the first person Washington saw in the day. She sat between Aaron and Peggy, who were close to the door. Her introversion and shyness made her to hate being the one who stood out by something as simple as being the only one on her feet in a room full of seated people. And, also, it made her to always choose the same persons to spend time with, even if that filled her head with destructive thoughts about being too tiresome or dependant and the fear of them abandoning her someday. That was why she sat uncomfortably between Aaron, the man who helped her divorce her abusive husband, and Peggy, the nicest person in the office who always was up to talk about anything and anytime.

She looked at her right, seeing Angelica and Alexander on one of the extremes of the table. Angelica by Alexander’s left side, head between her hands, as she had spent almost ten minutes yesterday against the wall outside the building. Maria bent down, feeling very little all of a sudden. If Angelica was so defeated, how was she supposed to feel? She decided to look at the table, trying to not call the attention.

Alexander was also worried and that could be sensed by the way he didn’t talk a word in all that time. His mind was focus on his fight with Eliza, which also impeded him to work correctly. Due to lack of writing as if he were running out of time, he couldn’t ignore the growling of his stomach and even cursed Laurens and that damned fork for have made George lock the restroom. The fact that Eliza burnt his dinner and breakfast to take revenge only made matters worse. He looked at Angelica, still refusing to move or look at anyone, and sighed, rubbing her back in a way to comfort her.

Finally, and for the relief of some, Thomas broke silence.

“I swear to God that if I got fired and I have to stand the hippie of my daughter 24/7 I’m going to dedicate you some nice black candles…” he said in the same tone a normal person would say ‘good morning’ to their co-workers.

“We’re all in the same boat now, Jefferson” said Alexander, calmer than normal.

“Thank God I told you to behave… Thank. The Freaking. God” said Angelica under her breath, her tone letting them see she wanted to punch someone too badly. Alexander stopped rubbing her back, fearing she had talked to Eliza and he would be her punching bag.

Madison shook his head and rubbed his temples. “I told you, I told you: do not use the extinguisher for a damned foam party. Do not use them, or will be fucked one day… I knew it, dammit!” he complained, kicking the floor, enraged.

“I didn’t want any of that to happen, I swear” said Laurens, saddened. “I wish it would’ve been
me… Seriously”

“Don’t say that…” said Hercules.

“Why wouldn’t that damned sparkle land on me, man? Maybe that way I’d fucking remember to not put metal objects in the microwave” He punched the table. “How many times I’ve been told. Now, the poor Adams is in the hospital”

“Well, now he’d have a good excuse to miss work, he wouldn’t have to think of anything” said Alexander.

“Ale, I almost burn him alive!”

“Almost?” echoed Madison.

“Well, I mean deathly”

“He was a dick, John…” said Alexander.

“That doesn’t justify it!”

“Don’t talk in past tense, he’s still alive” commented Burr, quietly. “I think…”

“He is” said John, then he hesitated. “Isn’t he?”

Alex shrugged. “Annoying even for dying…”

“Jesus, Alex, you’re talking about a human being!”

“He died the same way he lived: by somebody else’s actions”

“Stop it!”

They heard the front door opening. Their breaths were caught in their throats. They watched George passing by the mid-opened door, looking forwards and too serious to be good. Then, they heard him close his door with a loudly thump.

“We’re dead” said Hercules.

“Mother of…” muttered Angelica, shaking her head.

“It was a pleasure to meet you all” said Lafayette.

“Not all…” said Alexander and Thomas, looking at each other at the same time.

They waited for a sound, a movement, something. No one dared to say another word, to raise the glare or even cough, which was the hardest thing Madison had found out he could do. Finally, George’s door opened, and his footsteps were heard getting closer to the meeting room. He took a glare to see if they were there, and when he found a positive answer, he opened the door completely.
Angelica, Alexander, at my office. Now” and he left, without a direct glare to anyone.

Alex and Angelica swallowed and got up from their seats with trembling legs. When they left the room, Thomas dared to speak.

“They are firing us all by alphabetical order…”

“In that case, wouldn’t Aaron be first?” asked Laurens.

“Then, in relevance order…” he corrected himself, gaining a dirty look from Burr.

“Do you think he would call me Margaret or Peggy?”

“What does it matter?” asked Lafayette.

She shrugged. “To know how many happy minutes I’ve got left”

They looked at her and nodded, thinking it was a good idea to use their left time in something useful, like thinking an excuse to not be fired or how to beg for a second chance or even to choose a sad memory so that way they could cry convincingly. Not that they had a lot of time to think, though; three minutes later, Angelica and Alexander came back. Their vice president opened the door with a thump, entering the room hitting the floor violently with her shoes with each step she took, and she let herself fall to the chair she had previously sat on. Arms crossed and jaw clenched. Aaron and Maria looked at each other, worried.

Then, the attention fell on Alexander, who made their worry grew when they saw he was simply standing by the door, watching Angelica. He had a few sheets in his hands. He looked at them rapidly, sighed, and closed the door quietly. Then, he proceeded to hand out the memos to his workmates calmly. As they read what was on the paper, their eyes grew wide, and looked at the person who was sat beside them, and then at Alexander, who went to his previous sit as well, with two sheets in his hands. He handed one of them out to Angelica, who looked daggers at him.

“I don’t want that shit” she told him in a raspy whisper.

Alexander looked at her up and down and let the sheet in front of her, re-reading his own to try to ignore the eight pairs of eyes which were staring at him.

“Is this serious?” asked Laurens. Alexander only nodded.

“For real?” said Peggy, quizzical. Alexander nodded once again.

“Do our parents have to sign this?” asked Jefferson sarcastically, shaking the sheet, upset.
“Thomas…” said Madison.

“What? They clearly think we’re six years old!”

“I feel like I’m in high school again…” said Maria with a bitter tone.

Aaron raised his hand after finishing his second reading. Maria looked at him with a frown and muttered that, yes, she was indeed in high school. Alexander raised his glare slowly and arched an eyebrow.

“Yes, Burr?”

“It’s written here that this will be on the weekend” he said, pointing at the sheet.

“Yes”

“This weekend?”

“Yes…”

Aaron looked at the piece of paper where it was written that all of them had to pack their bags for an excursion on the weekend. It also said that they had to remember to bring food, water, sun cream and a coat just in case. Aaron read it for the third time, not believing his eyes, and also feeling a déjà vu for his years as a student. A quiet ‘shit’ left his mouth.

“Well, at least I won’t have to spend the weekend in my house” commented Jefferson, with his eyes also glued on the paper.

“Jesus…” said Hercules surprised for that relief.

“I feel you” said Alexander. “Don’t get used to it, but this time I feel you…”

Alexander drummed his fingers on the table, clearly nervous. This weekend, Eliza and he were going to spend it only the two of them, as his parents-in-law were going to keep the children. Another broken plan… He shrugged, lowering his head as much as he could. She must be used to it. I am… With the corner of his eye, he saw Madison raising his hand.

“Yes, Madison?”

“If I bring a medical certificate, I’ll be able to skip this?” he asked.

“I was going to ask the same thing” said Hercules.

“Me too” admitted Peggy.
“Hey, I’m sick for real!” complained James, offended.

“Actually, you all are sick” said Angelica, without looking at anyone. “Sick of the damned head”

Before anyone could ask something or complain again, the door was opened, revealing a serious George Washington on the other side. His eyebrows frowned, his hands on his back.

“You can go home so you can have time to pack your bags with what it’s written there and other things you think you may need. Lee and I talked before I arrived, and he told me he would be here at nine” He narrowed his eyes. “If I see some of you missing, I’ll go to your house, grab you by the neck and drag you here” They all tensed at that image. George eyed them with fury. “I hope you’re happy, people. Thanks to your fucking trifles and stupid stunts I’m going to have to spend the whole weekend with you and Charles Lee and his damned comments” He put a hand on the knob and dedicated a last glare to all of them. “I want to see you all here at five to nine. I will even take a register to see who’s missing, and I know all your addresses and common places to hang out”

He slammed the door. They waited a few minutes until they heard him leave and then proceeded to go to their own houses, rubbing their necks with nervousness.

Thomas parked in front of his house, throwing curses to all his workmates, even to Adams for always be in the wrong place at the wrong time. He got out of his car and the first thing he saw was his older daughter looking out the window. He frowned and accelerated the pace towards his front door, which he opened with vehemence and shut with a bang.

“Martha, get out of the window, you’re bringing down the property value” he told the girl, who only rolled her eyes.

“Finally swallowing your pride and admitting you have to sell this “Ken dream-house”? she asked with a mocking smile.

“Hey, don’t dare to talk back to me today, young lady. Not after what you did yesterday and what I’ve been through today at work”

“What happened, Dad? Weren’t you buttered up at work today?” asked Martha, her teasing smile not leaving her face.

“What did I just say?” asked Jefferson. He went directly to the kitchen, where his younger daughter was drawing. He kissed her head. “How is my perfect and sweet princess today?”

“I’m fine, Daddy. I love you” said Mary, better known as ‘Polly’ by her friends and family. Her sister rolled her eyes once more and looked out the window again.
“I love you too, light of my life” he said, tossing her hair. Changing his smile for a stern look, he talked to his older daughter. “Patsy, help your sister pack her bags and you do the same. You’re going to spend the weekend with the Adams… Well, only with Abigail…” he informed, opening the drawers to see what they had left.

“What???” asked Patsy, jumping to her feet. “Why?!”

“The fucking Pikachu I worked with just set fire to John” he informed, putting a hand on his forehead. “And now I’m going to spend the whole weekend with the idiots of my workmates because our personal manager thinks he’s a psychiatrist or something…”

“I don’t want to go to that house” complained Patsy. “Why don’t we stay here? I’m old enough”

“Your call from yesterday prevents me to think so” Jefferson closed the drawers with a thump. “I don’t want you to touch my car, imagine how much I want you to be left alone with two of my most beloved possessions: my house and my only decent daughter”

Patsy was now red in the face. “I hate you, I hate this family and I hate my life” she screamed, running upstairs. “I swear to God I’m going to move as soon as I can!”

“Oh, no, please, keep living off of me, I love it!” said Jefferson sarcastically. He heard Patsy’s bedroom door being closed with a slam and he sighed, rubbing his temples.

The car drive wasn’t the best either. Thomas’ head was about to explode, Patsy refused to talk to her sister, and Polly decided to keep drawing in the car, feeling the tension too thick for her to break it. Jefferson looked at the clock on the dashboard and saw it was twenty to nine. He still had time, but decided to speed up just in case. Something told him George wasn’t joking when he told them he would know where to find them.

Once he parked in front of the Adams’ property, Patsy opened the door and got out, bag in hand and death glare in her eyes. Thomas sighed, and got out as well to help the younger one with her things. Abigail was already waiting for them at the door.

“Good morning, Thomas” she said, with a small smile.

“Abigail, thank you so much for this favour” he said, giving her one kiss in each cheek. “How is John doing?”

Abigail sighed and shrugged. “The doctors told me he is going to be fine, it could’ve been much worse”

“His blubber must’ve protected him” muttered Patsy, gaining an elbow from his father in the side. “Ouch!”

“We’re glad to hear that, Abigail, we wish you the better” said Thomas, giving her a reassuring smile. Turning to his daughters, he added: “Behave while you’re here. Martha…”
“Yes, be good and feminine, I know it” she said, waving her hand in the air.

“I am serious, Martha, I don’t want Abigail to call me because you messed up. Remember you’re grounded. So, I hope you study until you feel so exhausted you cannot comprehend which letters you’re reading anymore”

“Yes, yes…”

Thomas rolled his eyes and then looked at his nine-year-old child. “Be good, Polly, Daddy will come pick you up Sunday afternoon” he said, kissing her in the forehead.

Polly hugged him: “Bye, Daddy” she said with a smile, then entered the house after Abigail petted her head.

Thomas looked at the older, this time a bit sadder. “Well, Patsy… Goodbye”

Martha looked at him with the corner of her eye. Grabbed her bag and entered the house. “Bye” she muttered.

Thomas watched her leave without pushing her to show affection. He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose once again. He bid Abigail goodbye and then returned to the car, throwing one last to the house. He saw Martha looking through the window, his sister at her side, holding her hand. The little one waved him goodbye while Patsy looked at the floor. Thomas sighed once again, after returning the gesture to the youngest.

“Good boarding school, I miss you so much” he said, starting the car.

Alexander was glad he had said his goodbyes to his children that morning before leaving to work, because when he entered the house there was no sign of them. He looked at the living room, seeing nobody. He checked the kitchen; nobody. Never the hallway that led him to his shared bedroom scared him that much. He gathered his courage, sheet in hand, and walked directly to the first door at his right. There he finally saw her: Eliza, on the bed, with that book she borrowed from Angelica eight months ago.

She raised her eyes a bit, and then continued reading. Alexander stood by the door for a moment, and then he got closer to the bed and let the memo on the mattress and proceeded to pack his bag with all he thought it would be necessary. Eliza glared at the piece of paper and took in, reading it in silence. When she was finished, she let it on the night table, resuming her reading.

Alexander prepared everything in silence, throwing glares from time to time to his wife, who refused to pay him any attention. He hoped to hear her voice telling him something, even if it was only to tell him he could go to Hell and never come back. Anything would be enough if it was said
with her voice. But Eliza didn’t talk, and, at least for the times he looked at her, he didn’t see her looking at his direction, either.

When he was about to finish, Eliza got up from bed, put the book on the nightstand and exited the room. Alexander looked at her and sighed, rubbing his forehead. He closed his bag with a thump, feeling enraged. He spent a few good minutes just looking through the window. He was surprised to be able to come back to reality thanks to Eliza, who touched his shoulder gently. He looked at his side, seeing her standing there, with the sun cream and a coat and a scarf hanging from her forearm. She was looking at the side, not meeting his eyes.

“Thank you” he said, taking the three things and putting them in the bag.

“You have a sandwich on the kitchen table. And, I also prepared you a thermos with some water” she told him, playing with the ends of her hair.

“Thank you” he repeated, zipping the bag shut.

He existed the room, not being followed at first. When he entered the kitchen, he found the food inside a plastic bag and the thermos waiting for him. He put his coat and scarf on and placed the plastic bag and the drink in each pocket. He looked back, seeing Eliza with her arms crossed, looking at him.

“Have a nice trip” she told him, looking him in the eyes.

“Have a nice weekend” he said, with a nod. “Goodbye” he added, before getting out the door.

“Bye-bye…” she said, watching him leave.

It took Alexander a moment and a last glare to his wife before he closed the door. After throwing the bag to the backseat, he sat behind the steering wheel and started the car, turning on the radio as well, to have his mind entertained. He frowned when, no matter how many times he changed the radio station, he only heard songs as ‘All by myself’, ‘Seven things I hate about you’, ‘Loser’ and, the last straw, ‘Two-legged rat’. He stripped the radio off and threw it out the window.

“Even the fucking radio hates me…” he muttered, seeing the object destroyed in the middle of the street. He looked at his house with the corner of his eye and sighed, covering his eyes. “To the hell” he said under his breath.

If Washington wanted to come to his house and drag him by the neck for being late or not going at all, then, be it. He may seem heartless but reality was another story, and though the popular opinion may think the contrary, he hated to be in tension with other people, especially closest ones.
Alexander got out of the car, trotted to his porch and opened the front door: “Eliza, honey, I don’t want to leave angry” he said before closing the door quietly. “Eliza?” he called. He entered the living room, finding his wife crying on the couch. “Eliza…” he said, going to her and embracing her by the shoulders.

Eliza jumped, startled. “Alexander, what are you doing here?” she asked, surprised.

“I didn’t want to leave like this” he admitted, shrugging. “Listen, I don’t know if George may come for me, but I’ll stay” he said.

“You…” she tried to say.

“No, no, Eliza, I’ve done this to you countless of times” interrupted Alexander. “This was going to be our weekend, and not even the Apocalypse is going to take that away from us” he kissed her on the cheek.

“No, Alex, you have to go, you’re gambling your work”

“I’d rather risk that than our marriage” And he gave her a hug.

Eliza laughed, moved, and tapped his back. “No, honey, really, you have to go. Angelica told me all that happened, and this is not the time to risk anything” she told him. “Go, I’ll be fine”

They got separated. “Are you sure?” he asked.

She nodded, with a smile. “Yes, leave, maybe it will do you good to breathe a bit out of that office” she joked, making him laugh.

This time, she accompanied him to the door, and said goodbye with a kiss. Eliza waited by the door until Alex’s car disappeared in the distance. Then, she closed the door quietly. There was no way in hell she was going to throw away her shot. Because, after twenty-five years of standing sisters, parents, husband and children…

“Finally, the house is all mine” she said aloud, her smile growing. She felt tears of happiness streaming down her face once again. “Finally, the whole house is all mine and for two whole days” And she sobbed a bit, not believing how lucky she was. “My God… Thank you…” she whispered. She inhaled and looked around, seeing the spaciousness of her house. “And what do I do now…?”

Martha Washington knew it wouldn’t be a good move to ask why her husband was home earlier than usual after the deathly silence she lived last night. She decided to simply go to the kitchen and served him a glass of whiskey to calm his nerves. Maybe today he was more willing to talk.

“Bad day at work?” she asked when he heard him passing by the door. She turned around, seeing
him with a bag in his hands. “Bad day at work” she nodded.

George entered the room and took the glass, taking a sip. “More like horrible” he clarified.

“Are you going to live as a hermit until you find out what to do?” she joked.

George laughed. “No, Lee decided to take us all to a trip” he answered.

“What, why?” she asked, taking a seat on the table. Her husband did the same.

“I’ll be damned if I know” he said, taking another sip.

And then, he proceeded to tell her all what happened yesterday, seeing how her eyes grew wider and wider as the story went by. When he had finished, Martha tilted her head to the side.

“Well, I bet he only wants to prove he can bring them into line” she commented. “You know how bitter he is”

“Yes… Well, he is going through a hell of a challenge if that is the case” he finished his whiskey and let the glass on the table. “Standing those people is not an easy task… But I won’t say a thing, no. George is always the know-it-all who has to bother Charles Lee and his awesome ideas. Well, not this time. If he wants to drive us all from the whole country, then I’ll let him. And, maybe, when he sees the incarnated demons I have to look after from Monday to Saturday ten hours a day, maybe then he will see that I don’t have a spot in Heaven from standing those vermin, I deserve to rule Heaven” He saw his wife looking at him with perplexed eyes. “I love them and so I can insult them if I want…”

By nine o’clock, everybody was standing by the entrance of the building, talking to one another. When George arrived, and saw the scene from a prudent distance, he had to convince himself that he was not a teacher. Difficult task when you see your employees throwing straws to one another by blowing their wrapping and posing to take selfies.

“This was supposed to be a punishment…” he muttered while parking his car in its corresponding parking lot. “To who, I don’t know” he added, getting out, bag in hand.

Just as he was approaching the group, a horn sounded at his back. Everybody gasped in surprise when they saw Charles Lee driving a huge motorhome. Their personal manager stopped in front of the building and opened the door for them to come in. George went first, not seeing his employees looking at each other and nodding.

“Lee, where did you get this from?” he asked, taking a seat as the co-pilot. The rest of the group getting in while talking.
“Do you like it? It's my father-in-law’s” he explained. “You have food, drinks and even a toilet right there!” he told the workers once they were all in, pointing at the fridge, and a closed door.

“Look, there is a water bed!” said Hercules, jumping on it.

Peggy followed him. “Oh, like the one we had when we were little, Angie!” She grabbed her sister by the wrist and pushed her forwards. They laughed as they let the water bed moved them as its will.

“Boys, don’t touch anything without permission!” said George, looking over his shoulder.

Lee waved a hand nonchalantly. “Don’t sweat it, Washington. Everything is everybody’s!”

“You don’t say…” commented George with a sceptical look.

“Oh, there is Simon’s life orange juice here!” said Laurens, looking inside the fridge.

“Serve a glass, please” said Madison, getting closer to him.

Laurens took the plastic bottle and raised it over his head. “I’ve got the poweeer” he joked.

“Hey, Laurens, stay away from the microwave!” said Jefferson, taking a seat beside the window. Everybody, except George, laughed.

“I’m having a divorce with the microwaves across the world” said Laurens, laughing.

“Call me if you need a lawyer” said Hamilton.

“I want to end the relationship in good terms” And everybody, even Hamilton, laughed hysterically.

“Bazinga!” said Angelica and Peggy.

Charles Lee wiped away one tear of laughter. “Oh, this is gonna be a good trip. This is all you needed” he told Washington, starting the car.

“Mmmh…”

“Hey, Lee, turn on the radio!” Lafayette screamed from one of the set-in couches.

“Got it!”

George saw Lee turning on the radio and heard everybody laughing and talking animatedly. He sat comfortably in his seat, trying to not smile too much. This is just the novelty of the situation delaying the inevitable, he told himself, deciding to close his eyes and take a nap before the Hell was let unleashed.

Two hours and a half later, George was starting to be impatient. The pop music on the radio, the silence at his backs, the friendly whispering from time to time, the stupid and permanent smile on Lee’s face… He looked over his shoulder, seeing Lafayette, Mulligan and Laurens playing a board game on the floor; the Schuyler sisters braiding one another’s hairs; Jefferson taking a nap; Burr
reading a book next to Hamilton, who was writing on his laptop and Madison lying on the set-in couch, where Maria was as well, looking out the window, hypnotized by the sights. George pressed his lips. It was harmony. Damned and odious harmony. Madison’s sneezes broke it.

“Hum, Lee, could you please increase the temperature?” he asked.

“I like it like this” commented Lafayette.

“Yes, it’s perfect” agreed Peggy.

George smiled. It has started.

“Wait” said Laurens, getting up and going directly to one of the cupboards. He took a blanket out of it and wrapped Madison up with it. “There you go. Feeling better?”

“Yes, thank you” said Madison with a smile.

“Do you want me to prepare some tea?”

“That would be lovely”

As Laurens went to the burners, George eyed the two men with a frown. It doesn’t matter… The silence has been broken, now, it’s a matter of time. He told himself.

“Lee, could you please change the music?” asked Jefferson, with a hand on his forehead.

“Is your head bothering you again, mon ami?” asked Lafayette with a worried tone.

“Poor one…” commented Angelica, clearly concerned.

“I’ve brought my pendrive, it has classical music in it” commented Burr, finally raising up his glare. “Do you think that would be better or you prefer silence?” he asked, looking at Jefferson.

“Let’s try it” he said, shrugging. “Thank you, Burr”

“Don’t need to thank me” said Aaron, taking out his pen from one of his pocket. He got closer to the radio. “Can I put it, Lee?” he asked.

“Of course, I told you: this weekend Joanne is everybody’s” he told them. He felt George looking at him. “Yes, I named her!” he said, proud of himself.

“It’s such a lovely name!” commented Maria.

“I know, right?”
The classical music began to play on the speakers. George looked daggers at Aaron as he sat down again next to Hamilton. *Do not lose hope*, he told himself. *Patience, patience…*

“Hey, Aaron” Hamilton spoke. “I know you just sat down, but could you bring me my charger, please?”

George nodded, smiling. *There we go, there we go.*

“Of course” said Aaron, prepared to stand.

“Don’t worry, Aaron, I got it!” said Hercules, going directly to Alexander’s bag and handing him the charger. “Here you go” he said.

“Thank you. Sorry, Aaron”

“No problem, my friend”

Friend…? Wondered George. He looked desperately over his shoulder. Everybody was focus on something, smiling peacefully. It was a nightmare. George drummed his fingers on his lap, growing impatient. Finally, he made up his mind. *Sometimes, kids need a little push.* He looked at them all again, this time realising something.

“Oh, Peggy, isn’t that Angelica’s sweater?” he asked, with a faked curiosity.

“Yes” said the youngest Schuyler sister. “I was feeling a bit cold and I took it from her bag”

“Oh, really?” said Angelica, stopping braiding her hair.

*There we go, there we go.* George nodded. “Oh, girls, I’m sorry, I didn’t want to start anything…” he lied, shaking his head.

“I’m so sick, Peggy, but so, so sick…” *Come on, Schuylers, unleashed your fury.* “…of you looking better in my clothes!” she said, in a happy tone.

“What…?” said George, blinking incredulously.

“Aaw, thank you, sister, I love you!” said Peggy, hugging her.

“Aaaaaw” they all said, moved. George simply passed a hand through his face.

“Hey, Lee, do you think we could stop at some place to eat?” asked Hercules all of a sudden.

George smiled again. *Now. Now there we go.* “That’s a good idea, Mulligan. Where do you want to go eat?” he asked, casually.

“I was thinking about fast-food?”
“Again?” asked Angelica, wrinkling her nose. “We’re always eating that at work”

“Oh, I know a restaurant a few kilometres away from here” said Laurens, passing one of the tea cups to Madison and keeping the other one to himself.

“But is it too expensive?” asked Maria.

“I don’t want to go eat in a restaurant, I get too nervous” admitted Peggy.

“What about mac and cheese?” proposed Jefferson.

“No” they all said.

“I’m still digesting that from the last meeting…” commented Hercules.

“To be honest I’m not that hungry yet” said Aaron.

“Me neither” said Alexander, stopping working.

“You’re not?” asked Laurens. “I’m starving”

“We could vote” proposed George, trying to contain his smile.

“Oh!” Lafayette clapped his hands. “Why don’t I cook my quiche lorraine?”

They all agreed in unison, nodding and smiling. George inhaled, moving his tongue in a way to contain his frustration. Lafayette got on his feet and went to the burns, seeing the little counter stained.

“Oh, Laurens, you forgot to clean this” Lafayette told him.

George smiled again. Now finally, there we go… “Oh, I’m sorry, I’m so forgetful!” admitted Laurens. “Give a minute, I’ll clean it”

“Non, non, non, I’ll clean it, you drink your tea and relax” said the Frenchman, taking a cloth from one of the drawers. George eyed him, irritated.

“You don’t have to…”

“It’s nothing”

“Let me help you” said Hercules, getting closer to his friend.

“Take the ingredients from my bag”

“Did you bring them?” asked Madison, surprised.

“Yes, I remembered how much you liked it the first time I brought it to the office, and I thought it would be a good idea to cook it if the occasion arrived” said Lafayette shrugging.

“Aaaaaw!” they all, except George, said, now with a hand on their chests.
George refused to abandon the ship yet. He took one last glare to the back of the vehicle, his eyes ended up falling on Burr and Hamilton, sitting together. He looked at the laptop and tried to hide his smile.

“Oh, Alexander, I see your laptop is working well” he commented, trying to sound more casual than before. “I see what Burr spent in fixing it was useful”

“Oh, this? Peggy knew the guy who sold me the first one and made him give me another one for free” he explained, shrugging as if it was nothing important.

“Ooooh, I didn’t know” said George. He knew. His employees gossiped more than they worked. He looked at Aaron, who was watching Alexander carefully. “Sorry, Burr, I didn’t intend to throw salt into an open wound or anything…”

“Nah, it’s alright, Eliza has the new one, so…” said Burr, pressing his lips at the end.

*There we go, there we go* thought Washington, nodding again with a half-smile.

“In fact, I’m happy you reminded me, sir” said Alexander.

“Oh? How is that?” asked George.

Alexander rummaged in one of his pocket and, then, handed some bills to Aaron. “Here you go. I went to the store and I asked how much it cost you to fix my computer” he explained.

Aaron looked at the money, gasping. “No, Alex, I can’t!”

“Ah, ah, you didn’t have to, but you did it”

“I broke it in the first place”

“It was an accident” He took Aaron’s hand and placed the bills there. “Here you go. And I added twenty bucks more: ten for the trouble and other ten for being such a good friend” Then, Alexander looked at Madison from across the vehicle. “Madison, I want to apologise for screaming at you. I totally lost it that day”

“Don’t worry, I also said stupid things” said James, waving his hand.

“Thank you for taking the blame” said Aaron.

“That’s what friends are for!”

“And you two are ones of the best friends I’ve got!” said Burr, looking at Hamilton and Madison.

“Aaaawww” they all said once again, now even louder and more moved than before. George looked at the scene, frozen. *What the heck was that?* He wondered. He heard a sniff by his side, and saw Lee wiping one tear from his eye.

“I’m getting emotional” he admitted, throwing a rapid glare over his shoulder. “Hey, people, I was thinking about drive you all to the cabin my politic family uses to spend the holidays so you could
talk about your problems” he confessed. “But I see the only thing you all needed was a break! So, what do you say about we drive Joanne ocean-to-ocean?”

They all agreed, laughing and commenting animatedly. George had his face buried in his hands, feeling his shoulders heavy all of a sudden. He watched behind his backs once again, everyone was smiling and talking and laughing. What a nightmare. Suddenly, Jefferson got up from the water bed and went to help Lafayette with the food. His eyes fell on the bags, piled in that corner on the back.

“I need to go to the toilet” he told Lee, getting up. He only received a nod as an answer. They are drugged, that’s what happening, he thought, narrowing his nose. There is no more logical explanation. He went directly to where the bags were and started to unzip them and look inside, searching for small plastic bags. They all snorted some happiness powder, that is what they did. I’m sure Jefferson just brought some from his trip to France. He looked for something strange inside the bags, more nervous as he found nothing at all. “They could at least share it with the man who stands them all week” he muttered, feeling enraged when he saw nothing at all.

“Sir?” a female voice said from behind.

George threw Laurens’ bag to where it had been all that time and got up. “Maria, what are you doing here?” he asked, casually.

Maria arched an eyebrow. “I saw you acting a bit strange” she admitted. “Why were you looking inside our bags?”

“I… I was looking for some pills, my head is killing me” he lied, pretending to be in pain.

“You can lie here” she pointed at the water bed. “Jefferson seems to be a lot better”

“Yes… You all, indeed” he whispered.

“What?”

“Thank you, Maria, if my headache gets worse, I’ll listen to you” he smiled politely.

“You’re welcome!” she said, returning the smile, and went back to sit with Madison and look out the window.

“Fucking nosy…” he complained under his breath.

He passed a hand through his face and bald. He was feeling in a full shame spiral. He stood there for a moment. He saw Jefferson taking a bottle of water out the small fridge. He opened it and was prepared to drink it. He passed beside the table Hamilton and Burr were. George’s mind was working too fast, thinking and rethinking. He had tried to avoid this. He looked around him, everything was peaceful. Was he going to destroy something he had dreamt of only because he wanted to prove something? Then, he looked at Lee, smiling while driving. And he felt a sting feeling in his heart. Desperate times call for desperate measures, he told himself. God, please, have mercy.
George walked forwards, pretending to be heading again to his seat. Jefferson made way while drinking water, and then he saw it was a signal. He pushed him, pretending to trip over something. Jefferson leaned forwards, spilling half of the bottle on Hamilton’s laptop. The commotion caught everybody’s attention.

“Oh, oh, Jefferson, look what you’ve done!” said George, a hand over his mouth. “You just spilled water all over Hamilton’s brand new and expensive laptop!”

Alexander got up from his seat immediately, Aaron got a bit separated from him, book against his chest, Jefferson capped the bottle, George bit his low lip to not smile. Now, now, there we go.

“Jesus, Jefferson, are you okay?” said Alexander, stretching one arm to Thomas.

“What?” asked George, feeling his blood running cold.

“I’m sorry, Hamilton, I don’t know what happened!” said Thomas, taking some paper towels Laurens handed him. “Let me clean it, I’ll pay it”

“What…?” repeated George.

“No, no, don’t think about it” Hamilton waved one hand. “Eliza wrapped it up with plastic, see?”

“She’s such a clever woman! And very lucky as well for being married to such an understanding man!” said Thomas, with a smile. “But, I insist, let me clean it”

“Alright, but take a seat and take your time, a break won’t harm me”

“Since when…?” asked George in a whisper.

“I really hope your essay is alright” said Jefferson, while cleaning the keyboard.

“Oh, it’s not really an essay. Aaron and I thought it would be nice to write Adams a letter, wishing him to get better”

“What…?” George pressed his side to the toilet door.

“That’s so nice. We are so lucky to work together” commented Thomas, nodding.

“Yes, I wouldn’t have dreamt of better workmates” Aaron nodded in agreement.

“Hey, idea!” said Laurens all of a sudden. “Groupy selfieee!” he called, taking out his phone.

Everybody started to comment, nodding, getting up their seats and approaching John. George was left behind, seeing the scene. What the hell was that and why did it feel like it was the beginning of the end of the world? He thought.
He decided to lie down on the water bed, now with a real headache.

George wondered if this is the way the generals felt when they lost their wars. He lay on the water bed, being moved gently for the movement of the vehicle; voices joking and talking joyfully right beside him and yet he heard them too distant. His eyes were glued to the ceiling, his hands with tangled fingers on his chest, raising and falling rhythmically with the clattering. He didn’t think he could feel more defeated, until a thought appeared in his mind like a flash.

What if it wasn’t the cold confines of a moving vehicle or of a heated meeting room that brought out the worst in his employees? What if it was him the one who brought the worst in them? He had been working for George King the majority of his life and, even if the environment and the treatment weren’t the best, he never experienced something as the things he had lived in his own office. Even before Aaron and Angelica came to him talking about Hamilton, there had been problems and fights back at the office; there had always been screaming and threats and bad vibes and feuds among his employees, in a higher level than in any other workplace he had been.

George looked at his right, seeing the good mood, how everything was flowing almost spontaneously. It was true he was the one who founded their new department, the one who got separated from George King’s upper hand, but that didn’t have to make him a good boss. What was what Lee told him once? “You can’t be left alone to your devices; indecisive, from crisis to crisis”.

George sighed and sat up straight. Admitting being wrong was very honourable, as well.

Washington walked back to the co-pilot seat, letting himself fall on it. Lee had the eyes on the highway. He hadn’t realised they were now in the freeway, mountains at their rights and the vision of the ocean at their lefts.

George cleared his throat. “Lee, I need to apologise to you”

“What?” said the personal manager. Though he couldn’t look at him, Washington knew he had his complete attention.

“I’ve been trying to boycott this” he admitted. None of the two realised Maria had opened the window. “I didn’t want to believe your idea could work, I thought it will be a disaster. In fact, I was hoping it to be a disaster”

“What are you talking about?”

“Look, I know we haven’t been in good terms since… never. But I want you to know I won’t hold any grudges” None of them saw Lafayette getting a seat in the water bed along with Jefferson, getting entertained in their own conversation and leaving the oven unsupervised.
“Washington, I didn’t do this for our rivalry” said Lee, frowning and looking at him with the corner of his eyes from time to time.

“You didn’t?”

“No. Listen, I’ll be honest with you, as I was heading to your office yesterday, I was going to be merciless. Honestly, I read things in the documents I was given this month that I didn’t understand and I thought it was a blessing, or something. But then I entered that building… Gosh… Hamilton breaking the phone; Maria panicking continually; Madison as a junkie; Jefferson kicking doors; Adams on fire…”

“Except from the burning man, nothing was new…” commented George under his breath.

“See? That’s what I’m talking about. That’s not normal, and I wouldn’t wish that to anyone, not even my worst enemy, and that’s you” George gave a nod. “I really thought doing this will help that people. They have problems and they needed to talk about them, and so they have. And you needed a break, you needed to breathe” He paused for a moment. None of them realised Chopin’s Nocturne was about to end sounding on the speakers. “What I’m trying to say is that I’m not going to sell you down the river in this month’s audit. So, be calm and try to enjoy the trip”

George passed a hand through his face, embarrassed. “God, and I dared to say I deserved to go to Heaven” he muttered. He looked directly at Charles. “I just deserve Hell after today”

“Don’t say that”

“It’s true. Listen, I see it clearly now” None of them realised now Jacques Offenbach’s Galop Infernal began to sound on the speakers “: maybe you deserved this post as president more than me”

“Washington, I didn’t do it because of that” promised Lee.

“I know, and that’s how I know you’re going to be better than me. You know how to…”

And, then, finally, it happened, what George would tell his wife later, when he returned home, as ‘The biggest miracle ever seen since the Raising of Lazurus’.

“Aaaah, a wasp!!” screamed Madison all of a sudden, interrupting their conversation.

“Oh, my God, it’s huge!!” shouted Maria, horrified, running to hide under the table Aaron and Hamilton were.

“Get it out, get it out!” said Peggy, terrified.

The women started to scream. George looked over his shoulder, seeing Peggy throwing herself to the water bed, where Lafayette and Jefferson were sat. As expected, she fell on the top of them, making them all fall backwards and the water bed to move uncontrollably. Peggy screamed the whole time, trying to get off them and hide in the corner where the bags were piled. Lafayette tried to calm her down, while Jefferson was screaming at her, telling her to get off him. Madison covered himself with the blanket. Angelica, near him, saw this, and tried to do the same, but James refused to give her the blanket and they started to struggle.
“Let me borrow it!” screamed Angelica.

“No way!”

“Come on!”

“I said no!”

“That blanket is mine!” said Hercules, grabbing the sheet. “Give it back!”

“You snooze, you lose!” said Angelica and Madison at the same time.

At first, George simply looked at the scene. Then, a small smile began to form in his lips. And it started to grow as the scene went by, especially when he heard the famous ‘Can, can’ song was sounding on the speakers. Thank you, God.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got it!” said Aaron, getting up from his seat and shaking the book in the air, trying to hit the wasp. He ended up hitting Hamilton instead.

“Ow, you idiot!” he screamed, getting up as well. “Do I look like a wasp??”

“You sting like one!” Jefferson screamed, finally getting Peggy off and running to the sink, filling one glass with water.

Hamilton looked daggers at him. Aaron put his book against his chest: “I’m sorry, it was an accident!” he said.

“Well, so is this!” said Alexander, taking Aaron’s book away from him and throwing it out the window.

“My book!” said Burr, hands in his head. He looked enraged at Alexander. “I won’t give you your money back!”

“The hell you’re not! Give it back!”

“No!” Aaron took the laptop and began to run throughout the whole vehicle. “This is mine!”

“Give me that. Pay me! PAY-AY-ME!”

Jefferson turned around and threw the water blindly, wetting Angelica and Hercules in their backs.

“Ah, you imbecile, it was cold!” complained Hercules.

“Sorry, I was aiming for the wasp!” explained Jefferson.

“My new dress!” said Angelica, letting go of the blanket to separate the wet clothe from her back.
Madison kept pushing, Hercules was distracted and he was pushed forwards and was now with half of his body out the window. The blanket still in his hands.

“Oh, my God!” said Madison, alarmed.

“Get me in, get me in!” pleaded Hercules.

“Promise you’ll let me the blanket!”

“NEVER!”

“Don’t be such a psychopath!” said Jefferson, helping Mulligan be in the vehicle again.

“Alright, people, cover yourselves!” said Laurens suddenly, getting out the shower cabin, with the sprinkler in one hand.

“No, no, wait!” said Angelica. “The dress is new!” she explained, walking backwards.

Laurens didn’t hear her and began to throw water at different directions. Jefferson, Mulligan and Madison covered themselves; Hamilton and Burr got up the table were Maria was hiding under, making her scream when she heard the wood creaking. Angelica jumped on the water bed, desperate. Her heels teared the plastic cover of the water bed, flooding the floor.

“The bed!” screamed Hercules. “Not the bed, not the bed!”

“My God, someone kill that bug already!” screamed Maria at the top of her lungs, covering her head.

“Guys, calm down!” said Lee, trying to pay attention to them and the driveway at the same time. “I’ll open the double-tilt swiss skylight and the airflow will pull the wasp out…” he tried to explain, but another scream, this time from courtesy of Angelica, interrupted him.

“Aaaaah, there is another one!” she screamed, crawling on the now plain surface were a water bed was five seconds ago. Lafayette and Peggy hugged each other while Angelica got on the top of them, terrified.


“Someone get the shower head away from him!” screamed Madison.

Jefferson tried to do the job, but slipped with the water on the floor, and landed on the top of Laurens. He crawled until he could turn the water off. Meanwhile, Aaron and Alexander were trying to maintain the computer and the charger away from touching the water.

“Somebody unplug the charger!” screamed Aaron.
Maria’s scream muted his. “Aaaaaaah, there’s smoke coming from the oven!!!”

Lafayette gasped. “MA QUICHE!” he shouted, jumping out the once-bed.

He unintentionally made Peggy fall backwards, ripping off the left sleeve of her sweater with the corner of the bed.

“No, my sweater!” she cried.

“My sweater, which you shouldn’t be wearing!” said Angelica, angry, trying to get the sweater off her sister.

“Jealous bitch!” Peggy insulted her, trying to get away.

Charles Lee was pale and almost gasping for air at this point. Meanwhile, George was humming the ‘Can can’ song from the background with a big smile on his face. Meanwhile, Lafayette run to the oven, hands bared. Jefferson, supporting himself by grabbing the jamb of the shower cabin, noticed it.

“Put gloves on, you useless!”

“Quoi?”

Lafayette opened the oven and took the tray out, burning his hands in the act. Laurens was trying to find a way to support himself or somewhere to fall on. Lafayette turned around, screaming from pain, throwing the tray and the burning quiche lorraine in the air. It hit John right in the face, making him cry from pain as well.

“Oh, merde!” said Lafayette, hesitating in moving. “Désolé, mon ami, c’était un accident, je le jure!” he rambled, this time trying to get closer to him.

“Gosh, John!” said Alexander, jumping off the table and trying to reach him.

“Laisse-moi y jeter un coup d’oeil!”

“Lafayette, press the restart button” commented Hercules.

“Nooo!!! Nobody help me!” he screamed covering his face and wobbling backwards. Hamilton and Lafayette didn’t get any closer in case they could get hit. “It’s the karma, the karma came from me!”

“Look out!” said Aaron, seeing how Laurens landed on the couched sits behind the table. He hit the window, opening it in the act by accident.

Charles Lee looked over his shoulder. “Mother of Christ!” he said with trembling voice.
“Washington, do…!” he stopped mid-sentence when he saw George smiling and biting his bottom lip to prevent a laugh. “Why the fuck are you smiling?” he asked in a scream.

George, in his own world, just said. “Yeeeeeeees!!!! I knew it couldn’t be me!” he declared looking up. Then he looked at his employees, smiling and pointing at them with satisfaction. “I knew you were just demons!!! I am going to rule in Heaven when I die!!!”

Everybody looked at him, bewildered. Something inside Lee’s head made ‘click’ and, in the three last notes of the famous song, he clenched his teeth and spun the steering wheel around to park the vehicle in a corner. Everybody at the left side of the motorhome fell to the right, screaming in the act. The vehicle hit the rock wall at the other side. Lee pulled the hand brake with vehemence. The song stopped just in that moment. Nobody saw the two wasps flying out the window Laurens had previously opened by accident just then as well.

There was a saying that went ‘the calm before the storm’. For George Washington and his team, it happened backwards. Now the whole motorhome was in complete silence, except for Lee’s gasps. He still had a strong hold on the steering wheel, his knuckles completely white by the strength used. Finally, he screamed, in frustration.

“I'M A NAÏVE BOOB FOR THINKING WE COULD GET ALONG!” he shouted, taking the seatbelt off and jumping off his seat to face everyone. “I see it was too much to ask, to even think!, we could have a peaceful and wonderful trip in a magnificent tricked-out, state-of-the-art R.V.!” He was red in the face. “I GUESS I ASKED TOO MUCH TO A BUNCH OF SELFISH TODDLERS!”

And with that, he passed George by, opened the door, and got out the motorhome. He got in again, just to look Washington in the eyes.

“I hope you’re happy” he grunted, resentfully, and then closed the door with a thump.

They all heard Lee screaming from outside, frustrated. They didn’t see, however, how George was biting his bottom lip to prevent his smile to grow.

Lee watched the line where the sea met the sky, trying to forget what he had experienced back there; the breeze hitting his face, the sound of the sea flooding his ears. Even though it was relaxing, he still felt his heartbeat racing. Damned the hour he thought it could be good to help George with
his personal nursery. His jaw clenched; his right foot resting on one of the rocks lined up a couple of meters away from the cliff from where he wanted to jump right then. He was so focus trying not to jump that he didn’t even realise two buses had parked a few kilometres away from his motorhome.

The smaller one opened its door first, revealing a thin and tall brunette man with green eyes getting out the vehicle, clearly overwhelmed, his raven hair tied in a ponytail beyond messy. From inside the vehicle it could be heard the screaming of, what seemed, thousands of children, though there were only about thirty.

“José Manuel, stop kicking!!!” shouted the man. “I’m going to take a breath, if, when I come back, you are still screaming and misbehaving, we’ll turn around and go back to school!” he promised solemnly.

The man jumped off the stairs and headed directly to where Charles Lee was standing, still not noticing anything around him. He passed a hand through his hair, trying to tidy it up. From the other bus came out a woman, clearly at the verge of an outburst of pure rage. She also threatened the kids who were inside the vehicle, raising her index finger. Her voice was still low, so it didn’t echo like the man’s, but it felt as firmer and exhausted as his. She threw a last glare to her students and then followed the same path. When she saw there were two men just seeing the ocean, and noticed the two huge vehicles parked behind hers, she began to trot.

“Please, tell me some of you have a cigarette”

“Sorry, ma’am” said the man.

“I left mine inside” answered Lee, still with his glare glued to the vast ocean. “And I’m not going back inside for nothing in the world” he added, darkly.

“Excursion?” asked the man, looking him up and down. Lee nodded. The thin man scoffed and shook his head. “A teacher’s worst nightmare”

“How old are your trolls?” asked the woman.

“Mine are eleven” answered the green-eyed man, turning his head towards her. “But their brains stopped growing up at the age of three, I’m afraid”

The woman let a sarcastic laugh out her thin and pale lips. “Mine are six” she answered, looking at the horizon.

“Brave woman”

“More like stupid. I’m only a substitute. My first and, I fear, last time”

“I’m new at this as well. Only two years, so unlucky I am stuck as the tutor of the same class in that time” he shook his head, saddened.

“That’s tough, they already know your weaknesses”
He nodded. “I thought I would get used to it with time, but it’s only getting worse. I’ve been through almost everywhere with them: the beach, the mountain, the theatre… I even considered faking my own death at the theme park once”

“I went to the theatre with my class last month” the woman said. “They are playing a G version of the Phantom of the Opera right now. Do not miss it”

“I will” Lee talked again, still not looking at any of them. “I am going to miss everything. I refuse to spend another millisecond in that rolling asylum”

“Poor man… How old are yours?” asked the woman, crossing her arms and frowning with worry. “Six or seven like hers?” asked the man, pointing at the woman. Lee shook his head. “Eleven like mine or so?” Lee shook his head again, still looking at the horizon.

“Oh, my God, you’ve got teenagers!” said the woman, horrified. Their fear grew when they saw Lee shaking his head for the third time. “Don’t tell me… Please, don’t tell me you’ve got pre-university students in there!”

“Oh, I’ve heard stories about those guys… Tough stuff” said the man.

“Are they…?” the woman tried to ask again.

Lee finally moved his head to the side, watching them both. His eyes began to water and he felt a lump in his throat. He pressed his lips, unable to say it aloud. He just shook his head once again. The two persons looked confused; they shared a worried look and then looked at him again, feeling compassionate and, also with watery eyes.

Hercules had sat at the pilot seat, wanting to see what would Lee do. All of them began to be afraid that he would throw himself into the water. Washington was at his side, looking at the flooded floor; Mulligan couldn’t tell what was happening in his brain, but he’d swear he saw his boss smiling. He shrugged and paid attention to what was happening outside the vehicle again. He frowned and rubbed his eyes, thinking he was seeing things. Wrinkling his features, he informed:

“Lee is having something like… a super-sad hug thing with a woman and a man… They’re crying”

“For a man who has to name a motorhome Joanne to feel less alone, it could be considered a success” commented Jefferson, hand on forehead.

“Hope you’re right” said Angelica. “Maybe that way he will be in a better mood by the time he comes back”

“If he comes back” said Madison, arms crossed.

“I wouldn’t if I were him” admitted Lafayette, passing a wet cloth to Laurens, whose face was all red. “Are you feeling any better?”

Laurens wet his face slowly. “I just feel numb”

“Me too” agreed the Frenchman.
“We messed up” said Peggy. “We absolutely messed up”

“Don’t be too harsh on yourselves” George’s voice startled them all, as he had been absent since the whole incident happened, not doing nor saying anything about it until now. “It’s partly my fault, I tried to goad you into a fight to prove a point”

“Yes, we noticed it” said Jefferson, bitterly. He shook his head. “I saw my life passing in front of my eyes when I spilled that water over Hamilton’s laptop. I was beyond sure I was going to die then”

Alexander clicked his tongue. “God bless Eliza and her brilliant ideas”

“God bless Eliza” the rest of the team repeated, nodding in total agreement.

“I swear I don’t know what I could’ve done if she hadn’t wrapped that thing up the other day”

“Me? I was about to run into the toilet and locked myself there until the massacre ended” confessed Aaron. “I doubt that if Hell opened beneath my feet right now, I would feel more scared than when I saw you getting up”

“God bless Eliza” they all said again.

“We almost did it…” commented Madison suddenly, saddened. “We almost did it”

“We were doing so good” Angelica agreed, shaking her head in disbelief. “We even get through George’s provocations…” Washington looked at her with a cocked eyebrow. “Damned wasps…” she muttered.

“Did you notice it?” asked George, eyeing them all.

“God, Mr. Washington we are not that clueless” said Hercules.

“Nice sweater, Peggy” said the youngest Schuyler sister.

“Didn’t know your laptop was working fine again” said Aaron.

“Let’s vote where we eat” said Laurens.

“Ma quiche…”

George sat up straight, feeling suspicious. “What the hell is going on here?”

“We planned this” admitted Jefferson.

“Angelica and Peggy’s idea” explained Hamilton.

“We all agreed that if Lee saw us getting along he would let us be… Most importantly, he’d even let us go home sooner” kept telling Hercules.

“We were almost there” said Maria, still under the table, unable to move or do anything but re-think everything that happened in just two minutes. She was at the verge of tears. “Why did I have to open that stupid window?” she wondered, sobbing.

“Damned wasps” repeated Angelica.

George was feeling numb as well by now. “You all planned this? You were pretending??”
Alexander sighed, exhausted. “Of course we were pretending, sir. Why on Earth would any sane person say ‘aaaw’ all the time and like that?” he asked, irritated. “This is real life, no ‘My Little Pony’” he added under his breath.

George began to shake. They were pretending to be nice all the time. They had been pretending. He clenched his fists and teeth and got up from his seat with a jump, hitting the seat, furious.

“Amelie, Loki, thank you so much your help and support” said Lee, shaking hands with the both of them. “You have given me the courage and strength I needed to go back there, face my arch enemy and admit that he was absolutely right”

“Go there, good man” said Amelie with supportive smile.

“You can do this” said Loki.

Lee bid his farewell and went directly back to the motorhome. Amelie glared at her bus and sighed, resigned.

“Aren’t you coming back as well to your toddlers?” she asked Loki.

The man only shrugged and look at the horizon. “I think I might stay here a bit longer” he said with melancholy.

Amelie nodded in understanding and walked back to her sentence.

Lee was about to open the door when a scream stopped him. George Washington was screaming at the other side. It was unusual and terrifying at the same time.

“WHY THE HELL DIDN’T YOU TELL ME ABOUT IT?”

“BECAUSE WE WANTED TO SURPRISE YOU AS WELL!” Angelica was screaming as well. Not as surprising, but worrisome enough.

“WHAT FOR? FOR BEING MONSTERS AGAIN ON MONDAY?” George’s voice broke a little. “YOU CAN NOT PLAY WITH PEOPLE’S HEARTS LIKE THAT!”

“We thought…” Angelica tried to explain.

“Unbelievable, unbelievable!!!” exclaimed George. “All the fucking weeks I receive messages and
GIFS from all of you… You and your baking! Peggy and her random photos! Laurens and his pet turtles! Hamilton and his essays! And none of you thought I might have wanted to know you were going to pretend to be normal?!"

Lee inhaled dangerously through his nose when he heard that. He felt the blood boiling in his veins.

“Most importantly: why the hell did you do such a thing for Lee, of all people, and not for me? The man who pays and stands you six days a week!”

Angelica grunted under her breath: “OH, FOR CHRIST’S SAKE, WASHINGTON, YOU CAN’T COMPARE LEE TO YOU: HE’S MADE OF DAMNED GLASS, HE BREAKS ONLY BY LOOKING HARSHLY AT HIM!”

The last straw. Lee opened the door of the motorhome, and all pairs of eyes fell on him. He closed the door with a thump and walked to the pilot seat after Hercules had run off it. Charles sat, started the car and began to drive again.

“Lee?” said George, sharing a glance of concern with his team. “Lee, hear me out…”

“Everybody sit down” he simply said, not looking at anyone.

“Where are you taking us?” asked Hamilton.

“Sit down” repeated Lee.

They all did as they were told. No one dared to talk. Angelica went to sit beside her sister, who didn’t want to move from where the water bed had been. She heard her mutter, again and with more sadness than before: “We were almost there”.

Lee drove for hours. The sun was setting by the time the RV entered the woods. Everybody shivered when they faced the uneasiness of being in an almost dark and unknown place. Peggy got closer to her sister, who embraced her by the shoulders; Maria was still under the table, her legs pressed against her chest and her chin resting on the knees. She was, as Lafayette, Laurens, Hamilton and Burr, sat on the couch across the aforementioned table, looking at the floor, covered in water. Aaron, having a better sight of the environment, saw everyone was looking down.

Lafayette turned his head to look at the driver and his co-pilot. George was staring straight at Lee, who only had eyes for the road ahead. He spun the steering wheel a couple of times, gently. Madison bit his bottom lip, trying to not get up to go to the toilet; the last thing he wanted was to be
the one who broke the quietness that fell on the caravan.

When Washington felt the personal manager slowing down, he decided it was the right moment to try to start a conversation.

“Listen, Lee, I know we exceeded our boundaries” he began to say, throwing a glare to his employees. They were all looking now directly at him. “We acted unfairly towards you, especially me. This was a nice detail, and I can tell you did it from the bottom of your heart” Lee had stopped the vehicle. The workers looked out the window, finding a cabin. They returned their attention to their boss, hopeful. “I think I am talking on behalf of everybody in this RV when I say…”

“Get out” interrupted Lee, still looking forwards.

“Beg your pardon?”

“Get. Out”

Washington looked out the window, seeing the cottage. He stared at his employees, looking back at him with pleading eyes. They all shook their heads at once, helplessly. Meanwhile he was watching his surroundings, Washington missed seeing Lee bending down and taking a bag out from under the seat. He unzipped it at the same time George cleared his throat.

“Lee, let’s talk about this as adults and…”

He stopped when he saw Charles taking a gun out from the bag and aiming it at him with narrowed eyes. Peggy screamed, hugging her sister closer.

“Get out of fucking Joanne!” screamed Lee.

“My God, he’s nuts!” screamed Madison from the back.

“Out!”

“Lee, lower the gun” said George calmly.

“Out of the fucking caravan or I’ll shoot until I’m left alone!”

“Come on, stop being an idiot” said Hamilton, trying to get up. Aaron held him by the arm. “We all know it’s unloaded”

Lee fired up a couple of times, making them all scream shrilly and cover themselves.
“Now, those were your only bullets” said Alexander.

Lee repeated the action, making Peggy scream even louder than before.

“No, now you’re out of bullets”

Lee raised his gun once again, the only thing stopping him from firing it being Angelica’s scream: “Jeez, Alexander, shut the fuck up before Peggy deafens me!”

“Open the door and all of you get the fuck outta here!” said Lee once again, aiming at George.

This time, Washington simply jumped off his seat, tangling himself with the seatbelt. When he was free, he opened the door, half of his employees already making line while screaming.

“Get out, kids, come on, come on!” said George, hurrying them with his hands.

“Wait, what about the bags?” asked Hercules all of a sudden.

Lee fired the gun again, making everyone, especially Peggy, scream. “You don’t deserve them, get the fuck out of Joanne!”

“I don’t think he realises how dirty that sounds” commented Jefferson under his breath.

Once George saw all his employees were out the vehicle, he imitated them. They all started to talk at once, and he did his best to try and calm them down.

“He can’t leave us here all alone! It’s almost a set-up homicide!” shouted Lafayette.

“You are going to be here until Sunday afternoon, you monsters!” informed Lee, aiming the gun at each of them. “Until fucking Sunday afternoon!” he repeated, closing the door automatically.

They all saw him turning the huge vehicle around and leaving them there. The smoke from the exhaust pipe making them all cough. They waited a few minutes, sharing glares. Finally, Madison said what they all were thinking.

“We are going to die here”
And, for once, everyone agreed on the same thing.

Saying Eliza was happy with her alone time wasn’t even close to what she had felt since that morning. She had received a few messages from her parents telling her about the children. She decided to call them in the afternoon, so that way she could have the whole night for herself.

And so, she was now sat on the couch, her robe on and with chocolate and strawberry ice cream in a bowl, watching some TV alone at the living room. It was fantastic. She put a spoon full of ice cream into her mouth and savoured it. Some of chocolate fell on the couch. She looked at the stain for a couple of seconds and then smiled.

“Guess who’s gonna get up and clean that before certain husband sees it and starts screaming the couch is too expensive to be stained in the first ten years?” she asked to the air. She laughed. “Exactly: not me! And who’s gonna share this delicious ice cream? Not me either!” she crooned and laughed. “Oh, commercials. Not today, TV” she said, picking up the remote and zapping until something caught her attention. She frowned and raised the volume to hear better. “A storm? Oh, God, I hope Alexander is okay…” she said to herself. She looked out the window, seeing the sky clear. “I hope he’s somewhere very far, far away, safe and sound… So far, far away that maybe he only can come back on Tuesday, or Wednesday, even!” she said, smiling. “Oh, that reminds me of something!”

She put the remote down and rummaged in her pocket, taking out her phone eventually. She clicked a couple of times on the screen and then waited with the mobile by her ear. She smiled.

“Theo, how’s everything?” she asked, taking another spoon full of ice cream. “Yes, me too” she swallowed. “Hey, bitch, just guess who is going to run a party so big and awesome that it may cause her husband a heart attack once he sees our account?” She nodded. “Yeah, honey, don’t make plans for tomorrow, this is our time!” She nodded a couple of times. “Yes, I just watched the weather as well… Nah, they’ll be fine, Theo, don’t worry. They said it will only rain tomorrow” She laughed. “Yes, yes, let’s hope our husbands don’t shoot each other for having to stand each other for too much time!” She and Theo laughed loudly, and said at the same time: “Can you imagine?”

Chapter End Notes

I write a parody of "Modern Family" with "The Avengers" characters; in that series, Loki is working as an English teacher (well, as that series is written in Spanish - my mother tongue - it’s a Spanish teacher, but well...). That's why he appears here as a teacher in some part of the chapter. Amelie is an original character.
I'm a bit rusty in French, so if I wrote something wrong, just tell me. Here is the translation:

Fichue affair: What a mess.
Quoi: What
Oh, merde. Désolé, mon ami, c’était un accident, je le jure!: Oh, shit. I'm sorry, my friend, it was an accident, I swear!
Laisse-moi y jeter un coup d’oeil: Let me take a look at it.
Mon Dieu: My God.
Group therapy (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

In which they are abandoned in the middle of nowhere and George starts to lose his mind.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, extremely black humour, drugs.
TRIGGER-WARNING: Anxiety
DISCLAIMER: This musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cottage was on a cliff. Laurens was the first one to find out when he was examining the terrain. They all felt nervous when they saw George fixing his glare on it. The cabin, on the inside, would’ve been comfortable if the situation had been different. It had enough room from them all, and they saw the kitchen had food for that night and tomorrow. If Lee was serious about coming back, none of them knew for sure. Angelica hoped he would go over a bump, lose the control of his fucking Joanne and have a mortal accident… Now, she understood when her sisters told her she was too dark sometimes…

They were sitting in the living room. They had no power, and knew they’d have to go pick up some wood when they saw an inglenook they could use for the night, because nobody was feeling sleepy at all. Washington told Angelica, Alexander and Thomas to do the job while he would try to make some dinner. Aaron and James proposed themselves to help him. Peggy, Lafayette and Hercules agreed on their own to explore the cottage to see what they had and could use until tomorrow arrived. Laurens and Maria were left alone at the living room, exchanging an uncomfortable look.

Laurens broke the ice. “Hey, do you want to try some?” he said, showing her a little plastic bag.

Maria’s eyes grew wide at the sight of what it contained. “Laurens, how…?”

“I found this on Jefferson’s bag” he admitted.

“Why were you…?”

“Come on, you all know I have a problem”

Maria eyed him for a minute. She got closer and whispered in his ear: “Let’s go downstairs, everybody hates basements, they would never find us until we want them to”
Laurens smiled. “You rock”

“I know” she half-smiled. “Come on, I’ll roll them for ya”

“Can you do that?” Now, it was John’s eyes turn to grow wide. “I didn’t know that!”

Maria’s smile only grew: “There are plenty of things you all do not know about me, Laurens”

Angelica had found a good number of logs at the backyard. Alexander and Thomas told her they’d pick them up so she didn’t have to worry. She felt so exhausted she just let them do. She walked to the cliff Laurens had seen a few minutes before and looked down. Nothing more than rocks and more trees.

“If I jump” she wondered out loud. “would it be high enough to kill me or would it leave me dumb for the rest of my days?”

“Hey, Angelica!” Alexander’s voice sounded distant. She turned around, seeing him picking up some more logs while watching her with a frown. “Get away from there! You may fall!”

Angelica rolled her eyes. “Don’t worry, Dad, I’ll be fine!” she mocked.

“Ha ha, very funny!” said Hamilton sarcastically. “I’m serious, Schuyler, if you die, your sister kills me. And once I’m dead, I’ll torment you for the rest of my days”

“What’s the difference from what you do now?” She heard Jefferson’s laugh even from there.

“Angelica…!”

“Alright, alright, man, chill!” she said, laughing.

Alexander muttered a few swears under his breath, picking a few more logs. He turned around, and bumped into Jefferson, throwing both his and Thomas’ logs on the ground. They started to pick them up.

“Look where you’re going” complained his workmate.

“You look… Don’t touch those, those are mine”

“Do you want to have the monopoly of the wood as well?”

“Don’t tempt your luck, Jefferson; it has already run out since you spilled that water on my computer”

“At least, I did it by accident; where’s Burr’s book, by the way?”
“I don’t know, maybe on the bottom of the ocean, where your coherence has been living since you throw it down the toilet” he turned around, finished picking up logs. “Angelica, com…” he stopped mid-sentence, seeing no one at all. “Angelica?”

They both heard a thump of something heavy hitting the ground that was several meters down the cliff. Alexander and Thomas paled.

“ANGELICA!!” they cried.

They threw the logs and ran to the cliff, their hearts hitting their chests until it hurt. Once they have reached it, they knelt on the ground and peered over the edge. They felt their hearts skipping a beat when they saw the older Schuyler sister holding herself in the air thanks to her belt, which she previously tied to the first big rock she found, very near the edge of the cliff, and was holding it in her hands. She began to laugh hysterically.

“You should’ve seen your faces! Hahahahaha! You even stopped fighting to see if I was alright, I feel flattered!” she said, and began to laugh even louder. “Oh, my gosh, this was too good! I almost didn’t do it, but I’m glad I changed my mind at last second, it was worth it! Hahahahaha!” Then, mockingly, she half-sang: “You loove mee, hahahaha!”

Alexander and Thomas were frozen at first, then felt their cheeks burning from blushing and shared a look full of shame. Angelica kept laughing, remembering their faces.

“Hey, if you love that much, marry me, buahahahahahaha!”

Alexander and Thomas simply got up then, and began to walk back to the house. They didn’t bother to pick up the logs this time.

“Hey, wait, you’ve gotta help me up” said Angelica when she stopped laughing and saw no one. “Hello? Alex? Thomas? Somebody with sense of humour? … … … It was still worth it”
the good days... If there had been any good days lately. They sometimes felt jealous of Hamilton or Jefferson’s ways with words and how easily they could express their ideas aloud; but when that stinging feeling disappeared, neither of them wanted to be in their shoes. When they found themselves enjoying the quietness of their rooms and own offices, they remembered how happy they were just being the way they were. Not everybody was born to lead, and not everybody had to like to be in charge.

Washington was a man of few words, but still had something they both lacked: the authority and a voice everyone paid total attention. Aaron and James did their job, did as they were told, and they did it fine, they did it in their personal bubbles, isolated from the actual world which was in constant movement. Some days they wanted to be part of that movement; some other days, they didn’t. Some days they just wanted to light a flame; some other days they just wanted to watch the world burn in their personal space, to observe in which direction the wind blew and then decide which side they thought it was better to be on.

Today they were living one of those days when they felt panicked at the idea of being part of what happened in the real world, but they acknowledged that it wouldn’t be a good move to choose any sides. They were all crazy in that stupid cottage. Today was one of those days when they felt lucky to be just the way they were... Because today was the day they saw, as observant as only introverted people learned to be, in order to survive, that their boss was finally losing his mind. It wasn’t surprising. Aaron and James were waiting for it to happen at some point. But it was more terrifying than what they’d imagined it would be. And they were so stupid that they had freely propose themselves to help Washington in the kitchen, and they were seeing his downfall in the front row. They blamed their slip-up to their outgoing and brainless workmates. They had exhausted their minds by standing them for too much time without breaks.

George Washington kept muttering under his breath, the thick silence that filled the kitchen – and the whole cottage, to be honest – made easier for them to understand his low words. Some were dedicated to Hamilton; others, to Laurens; others, to Jefferson... Even Angelica had her moment in the spotlight. Then, last but not least, there came Charles Lee, who seemed to have won the prize for the most insulted man on Earth that year.

Madison was the first one to look at Aaron, who didn’t want to turn away his gaze from Washington in case the knife he was holding ended up flying to one of their heads. Eventually, he decided the thumps it was making against the counter would be enough to know when his neck would be in danger. James pointed with his chin at their boss, and Aaron nodded. They never knew if all introverted talked with the glare or it was something they both learned to do in their way to survive in that asylum they called workplace.

Aaron watched carefully how George let the knife on the counter, picked up the vegetables he had cut and was now washing them under the sink, still muttering. Madison and he shared another silent glare. The shorter one just shrugged. Aaron nodded, and decided it may be a good time to make a move. He stretched one arm towards one of the burners, wanting to turn it on. He and Madison jumped afraid when George let the knife fall with a loudly thump a few centimetres away
from his now trembling hand.

“If I see any of you near something inflammable ever again, I’ll cut your hands off” their boss promised solemnly.

Aaron walked back to Madison’s side and pressed his back against the wall, where now James was, shaking like a leaf. They were pale as ghosts, especially when they saw George refused to put the knife down this time, not even for taking one saucepan out and put the vegetables in with one hand.

“Fucking Charles Lee” they heard him say, meanwhile. “How can that Lunni own a gun? That man poked himself in the eye every time he used a straw back in college… Let’s see if he keeps going on with the tradition and the next time I see his face is in the news, with a sign that read: man shoots himself for idiot. What a wonderful day that would be…”

The door was heard being opened and closed with a slam, and Aaron and James lost no time in running out the kitchen, alleging they would help their three workmates with the wood. If Washington didn’t hear them, too focus on his rambling, or had decided to ignore them, they didn’t want to know.

“Where are the wood and Angelica?” asked Aaron once they were in the living room.

“The logs are outside, so is Angelica…” replied Alexander. “And why do you ask for a log before Angelica?”

“Did you leave her alone with the logs?” asked Madison.

“We left her alone with her thoughts” answered Jefferson, shrugging and sitting on the nearest armchair. “She needed a time alone with her humour, as well”

“Her humour?”

“Don’t ask” said Jefferson and Hamilton at the same time.

“How is Washington doing?” asked Alexander.

Aaron and Madison shared a nervous glare. “Fine…” they lied.

“I’ll go see if he needs any help”

“No!” they screamed.

“Why not?”

“Where is the wood?” George interrupted the attempt of an excuse that was about to come, standing at the door, knife in hand.
“Em… Angelica will bring it in” answered Alexander, taking one step backwards.

“I told you it had to be the three of you”

“Yes, but she…” tried to explain Jefferson.

“I’m so tired of you not listening to me” he whispered, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“No, sir, that is not…” tried to say Hamilton.

“Going through the military service, that is what you all need. Back there, if you didn’t obey direct orders you spent some not-so-good time in a cell, and the time you were there it was added up to the time you were supposed to end your service there”

The four of them shared a glare of bewilderment. George began to talk again, this time, moving the knife. That made them all pale and almost lose focus on his words.

“Back there you had your orders, your schedule and there was no time for idiocies. If you dared to raise your voice to your superior, you went to the cell. If you dared to disobey him, to the cell. If you talked back, to the cell. If you were late, to the cell. That was respect and harmony and stability. Bunch of animals… No, you’re worse. Animals at least take care of their homes and the places they spend time in… You don’t even do that. You’re below animals; you’re sub-animals. And that is what I’m gonna call you from now on… I lost count at how many times I have to clean that damned restroom a day. Not a week, a day. You spent more time there than working. You come to work only to go there. And the washroom as well. I don’t know what kind of obsession is that, people, you should really check that out, it is not very normal that adults are obsessed with rest and washrooms… It is not normal to leave them after turning them into a pigsty. If you like them so much, then, have a bit of human decency and clean them. It’s easy: you take a cloth and clean, clean, clean… You can whistle while you work, even, I heard it doesn’t take that long if there’s a song to help you set the pace. Well… That’s if you know what a cloth is. Do you even know what does it look like, people? Have you ever heard the word, even? The trigging C words: cloth and clean. I’ll tell you something: if we survive this, I promise you, hand on heart, I won’t clean any of those rooms anymore. We all agreed that we didn’t need to hire a professional cleaner, you even proposed doing a colour calendar… Where is it?”

The four men looked at each other, feeling completely speechless. They hadn’t realised, until now, that Angelica was at the door holding a few logs, and Peggy, Lafayette and Hercules were at the top of the stairs, hearing the passive-aggressive scolding. They all shared glares. George gave them a moment, waiting for someone to say something.

“Nice. Does it even exist? Did you at least look at the pile of papers and decide which one was going to be the chosen one for such a noble duty? I’d bet all my possessions, even my house which is almost completely paid, that you forgot about that calendar the second after you exited the meeting room. Have a bit of grounds. A bit. Be smart cookies from time to time. Do you even realise how lucky you are for working for me? What I’ve stood all this time… Not even half of it would have been stood by any other rational person with a bit of self-love. There are nights when I’m just lying
on bed, facing the ceiling, and I rethink my life, I rethink a lot. I tried to understand. I tried to understand you all, I promise, I swear. I tried to understand why Hamilton breaks things; I tried to understand how Jefferson doesn’t realise he is capable of contradict himself just to try and be always right; I tried to understand why Aaron doesn’t talk; I tried to understand what is Peggy doing there; I tried to understand how Madison always gives me his essays on time even though he’s always sick and misses work some days meanwhile the other ones, who are in that office day and night, only know to come to me with excuses about why they haven’t done their work yet. Well, except from Hamilton, who must have ink in his veins or something. That man is non-stop, he’s a mutant, an X-man or something like that… Thanks to those two I still have energy and enough strengths to get out bed and go to work every day. I tried to understand how the fuck Laurens still doesn’t understand you are not supposed to put metal objects inside of a fucking microwave… But I am partly responsible for the almost murder of Adams: I should’ve bought plastic cutlery. It was very irresponsible on my part not to, as I work with children… I tried to understand how I’m still alive, how I haven’t died of a heart attack or something… I haven’t seen what I’ve seen here anywhere else. If one day I write my memoirs, they will publish them in the category of Sci-Fi, because no one would ever believe what I’ve been through was real. I have never seen so much selfishness, indifference and incompetence in one place at once… If you had fought in the War of Independence, we would have stayed British, I know: you know nothing about unity and teamwork. You only move when you want to bring the other down, you don’t move a finger unless is to point at what you want to be handed to you. And sometimes, not even that…”

He got silent for a moment, finally stopping moving the hand where he had the knife. George looked at the floor, thoughtful. His employees shared another glare of worry. Angelica’s arms hurt for the logs’ weight, but she didn’t think she could move or make any sound in that moment. Aaron wanted to go to help her, but thought the same about being the only one moving in a situation like that. George’s sigh made them turn rigid again.

“As I said: I won’t clean the rest room or the washroom or the fuck room or whatever the hell you decide to hang out instead of being working as you’re supposed to do. If Health Service has to come and close the shady company, then be it. Maybe they would forbid me to ever work again. Maybe that way I’d have my happiness back”

He walked up the stairs, without looking at anyone. Peggy, Lafayette and Hercules made way for him, eyeing him quizzically. There was a moment of silence, in which everyone looked at the floor. Madison was the first one to talk.

“He just took the knife with him”

“Where did that come from, anyway?” said Hercules.

“I don’t know, we just told him we left Angelica collecting the logs all by herself for thinking she’s funny and he just… that” explained Alexander.

Angelica wrinkled her features. “Yes, thank you for that, by the way”

“Don’t play the victim card” said Jefferson, turning to face her.
“Bah, go to Hell” she shrugged, entering the house with trembling arms.

“We’re already there” whispered Lafayette.

“Let me help you” said Aaron, taking half of the logs in his arms.

“Thank you, Burr, it is nice to know there are still gentlemen around here” she said, looking at Jefferson and Alexander with a resentful glare. They both flipped the bird at her.

“Did Washington cook dinner?” asked Peggy, going down the stairs with her two workmates. “I’m starving”

“He was preparing some vegetables earlier” said Madison, looking at the kitchen. “I don’t know if he finished it, though”

“I’ll take care of it” said Angelica, throwing the logs to the floor.

“Sssh! He could hear you!” said Lafayette.

“And he has a knife now” added Madison.

“Bah, don’t worry, Washington is just like this” she said, waving her hand nonchalantly. “I know him: he just needs a bit of time to cool his head”

“If you say so…” muttered Hercules, looking upstairs with a worried look.

There were a few occasions when Alexander Hamilton lost composure: when he was defending something he believed in; when he wanted to convince someone to do something; when he felt attacked; when he saw something unfair according to his standards… Honestly, it would be more correct to say there were only a few times when Alexander Hamilton didn’t lose his composure. But even in those moments of outburst, he still had control over himself. He was aware of what he was talking or writing about, and though he could admit the ways could have been different, the essence and the message would stay the same, however the people around him liked it or not.

Now, there was only a moment when he stopped being in control of his movements, thoughts or what left his mouth. And that was when a bad weather hit wherever he was living at. He had learned to ignore the flashbacks when it was a normal amount of rain; but by the looks of those clouds that were now gathering outside the cottage and the force of the wind that made the windows and doors tremble, he doubted that was going to be a little night rain. And, of course, it had to be when he was trapped in a cabin, miles away from home, lost in the middle of a forest, with ten persons who didn’t have his total trust with the exception of only two. And he didn’t even want those two to see him in an emotional breakdown by the time the storm hit the wooden house they were going to spend the night in.
He turned away from the window, feeling his legs turning numb already, and took a seat at the table, where the rest of the team were waiting for Angelica to serve them the food she had ended up cooking. In a matter of seconds, Alexander and the rest had their respective plates full of vegetable soup in front of them. Angelica was the last one she served to, and to sit down as well; her hospitable education running deep.

They ate in silence for a few minutes. The wind outside became faster and stronger, and the darkness hovered over the house as a bad omen they all deliberately decided to ignore. Peggy, sat at one of the extremes of the table, her back facing the wall, got tired of the silence first. She thought maybe it was the result of had been raised with two older sisters and working with those people, but the silence felt heavy and more deafening in her ears than noise.

“I didn’t know the weatherman announced downpour” she said casually, pushing one of the carrots to the side of the plate. Alexander moved uncomfortably in his seat.

“Do they ever get it right?” asked Lafayette, shrugging.

“I just hope it destroys something of this house” said Angelica, her eyes fixed on the food. “Lee deserves it, anyway”

“Do you think he would come back?” asked Aaron, looking at each of them. Madison shrugging at the other extreme of the table caught his attention.

“Who knows” he said. “He just stood us for a few hours and he took out a gun when he saw our true colours… I don’t know if I want him to pick us up”

“He has our things” said Hercules all of a sudden. “I want him to come back to get my things back”

“That is the only reason I want him here by Sunday afternoon, to be honest” agreed Jefferson.

“Hey, where are Laurens and Maria?” asked Lafayette after eyeing them all.

“Maybe they dug in some of the rooms” guessed Peggy.

“And we thought they were idiots…” commented Angelica.

“They are two-faced, that’s what they are” said Jefferson.

A loudly thump was heard outside, making them all jump in their seats. Alexander kept eating though he was less hungry as the storm was getting closer.

“This time is giving me the chills” commented Madison.

“Hehe, do you imagine if the cottage just flies off the ground, like in ‘The Wizard of Oz’?” asked Lafayette, with half a smile. Alexander threw daggers at him with the glare.

“I was thinking about how this is like the book I was reading, in which a group of ten people are invited to a house at the top of a cliff and they start to die one by one” commented Aaron while
“Well, one of us is already armed, and two are missing” said James, tilting his head to the side.

“Stop it, you jinx” Angelica blurted out.

“Well, come to think of it, this is how scary movies start” Peggy agreed, shrugging.

“How did the story end?” asked James, looking directly at Aaron.

He only shrugged. “Don’t know, Hamilton threw my book out of the window before I reach the end”

“Way to go…”

“Why would you want spoilers, anyway?” asked Lafayette.

“Because I want to know how this would end”

“Bah, don’t be overdramatic” said Jefferson with an eyeroll.

“Overdramatic? Washington just threatened us earlier, saying he would cut their hands off to whoever touched something inflammable” explained James, Aaron nodded.

“Better say goodbye to your hands, sis” said Peggy, with a giggle.

“Ha, ha, yes… You’re welcome for the dinner, by the way” said Angelica, finishing her ration.

“If this were a scary movie, who do you think would die first?” asked Hercules.

“Well, the majority of us are black so it will be hard to know…” said Lafayette, thoughtful.

“What does that have to do with anything?” said Jefferson.

“Black people are the first ones to die in movies; they appear so the people behind it can’t be called ‘racist’ and then: bye-bye”

“Jesus, Laf…” said Hercules.

“What? It’s the true. The sooner we learn to cope with it, the sooner we’ll be happy… The world is not gonna change, it’s only going to pretend to be changing”

“Well, in fact, I was thinking Peggy would be the first one to die” commented Hercules.

“What? Why me?” said the youngest Schuyler, offended.

“Bah, because you’re sweet, kind-hearted and good”

“(… I’m confused. Aren’t those good traits?)”

“Good and useless. Are you going to defend yourself from a manic with a smile?”

“Excuse me, my smile has helped me avoid a lot of citations”

“Well, to be fair, Peggy is smart as well” said Jefferson, all of a sudden. “She could get away if the occasion arises”
“Thank you!”

“For me, the first one would be Maria”

“Nah, she would be the pretty face that is always tripping over her own feet” disagreed Madison.

“And the reason why Aaron would die” said Angelica, pointing at the mentioned one with the spoon. “He would be the one who is always going back to help her”

“The worst part of that is that I can’t be offended: I would be” said Aaron.

“Hey, and what about if instead of a man, it’s a ghost?” asked Peggy.

“Why would a ghost be here?” asked Madison, taking one sip from his glass of water.

“I didn’t want to say anything, in case I sounded like a weirdo,” said Lafayette, leaning in his seat “but this is the perfect weather and place to play with a Ouija board”

“C’mom, the other one as well…” muttered Angelica in a sarcastic laugh.

“Oh, yes, cool” said Peggy, her eyes shining with enthusiasm. “It’s true, it’s the perfect timing”

“How are you thinking those things?” asked Hercules, with a cocked eyebrow. “A break-in is one thing, but asking a crazy spirit to come is suffering for the sole reason of suffering”

“Those things do not exist” said Jefferson. “People simply influence themselves”

“Exactly” Angelica nodded.

“If you’re not scared, then, why don’t we give it a try?” said Peggy.

“No, I have respect for those things” said Hercules, with a frown.

“Besides, what are you going to do if a bad spirit, maybe a demon, answer you?” asked James.

“No problem: with all the bad vibes we bring by standard, it’d be the demon the one who’d beg us to close the session and let him go” said Jefferson, shrugging.

“Not even the bad spirits want us around, what a sad life…” said Angelica, shaking her head.

“Come on, don’t be reckless” said Hercules, looking at them serious. “Everything is fun and laughs, until you wake up dead”

Lafayette rolled his eyes. “How many times do I have to tell you? You can not wake up dead, it’s illogical”

Hercules rolled his eyes as well. “And how many times do I have to tell you that it’s not? You spirit wakes up and sees your dead body. I’m saying it fine”

“By the way, if you turn into Christianism at last minute, saying you love God and you regret all your bad actions in life, you go to Heaven, right?” asked Peggy.

“Yes” they all said.

“That’s the good thing about being a Christian” added James.

“Nice, then we can go ahead and piss a demon off, I’m ready” she smiled.
A lighting struck right after, illuminating the kitchen for a brief moment. Then, the thunder sounded, reverberating the walls around them.

“Alright, alright, we won’t do it…” said Peggy, defensively.

“Hey, Alex, are you feeling alright?” asked Aaron, stretching a hesitant arm to his workmate.

Alexander felt everybody looking straight at him, which didn’t help to let some air fill his lungs in that moment. He managed to take a shaky breath in and nod, his eyes fixed on his barely eaten portion of food. His head was throbbing now, and had to shake his hands a bit to feel them again. He tried to get up, mumbling an excuse of going upstairs to get some sleep nobody bought. Maybe they’d have let him go nonetheless, if he hadn’t stumbled with his own trembling legs.

He could manage to hear a collective gasp through the sound of his heartbeat and the buzzing sound that had occupied his two ears; and then felt two pairs of arms, at each side, holding him steady. His rapid breathing and pulsations prevented him to hear the conversation that followed the small and shared fright.

“It’s a panic attack” pointed out Aaron, too familiar with the experience.

“He’s not fan of storms” Angelica remembered suddenly, feeling bad for not have realizing that before. “Let’s sit him in the living room, so he can get some air”

After a nod of Aaron, they both helped and guided Alexander to the living room, under the vigilance of the rest of the team. Thomas got up from his seat and went directly to the counter, opening the drawers.

“I’m going to make some tea” he explained. “That helps my daughter”

Peggy stood up as well. “I’m going to see in which bedroom Laurens is in, maybe he can help”

“Let me go with you” said Lafayette.

“Wait” said Hercules suddenly, going to serve another plate of soup. “Give this to Washington, he would have to eat eventually”

After putting the plate on a tray, Peggy and Lafayette headed towards the stairs, throwing a worried glare to Alexander, who was sat on the nearest armchair to the kitchen door, still struggling to breath. Aaron had a hand on his shoulder and Angelica was knelt in front of him, whispering what he had to do and repeating she was there. Peggy and Lafayette looked at each other, frowning. The
youngest Schuyler sister got closer to Aaron and called his attention by touching his shoulder.

“There are a few magazines in there” she whispered, pointing at one small table near the door. “Take the thinnest and fan him; that used to help me” she added, looking empathetically at his brother-in-law.

“How didn’t I think of that?” said Aaron, walking towards the table.

“Lie back on, Alex” instructed Angelica, helping him in the process. “Lie back on… There. If you need to walk or lie down, tell us” she felt a bit relieved when Alexander nodded.

Peggy clapped him on the shoulder right before Aaron came back with a thin magazine and began to fan his workmate. Lafayette indicated the youngest one to follow him. Though they didn’t want to, they knew it would be more helpful to leave so Alexander wouldn’t get more overwhelmed. Peggy looked over her shoulder while walking upstairs, seeing Madison taking off his coat and putting it on Hamilton’s shoulders; she heard him telling the other two Jefferson was making the tea.

“It’s nice to know that, though we scream and insult each other, we’re still there for one another” she commented in a quiet whisper.

Lafayette nodded. “Why couldn’t the storm come sooner so Lee or Washington would’ve seen us like that?” he asked, looking at the tray he had in his hands.

Peggy’s eyes grew wide. “Jeez, Lafayette, one of our friends is suffering!” she said, raising a hand to her mouth.

“If the storm had struck when we stopped at the gas station, we would be at home right now. What a pity” he shook his head.

“Laf!” she reprehended him.

They reached the top of the stairs, feeling chills running up and down their spines when they saw the darkness the hallway was immersed in. Peggy looked at her left when she heard the plate shaking uncontrollably on the tray thanks to Lafayette. She locked one arm with his own, and they walked slowly through the dark hallway. Peggy took care of knocking on the doors, saying Laurens’ name in a soft voice. From time to time, she even called Maria, just in case. They began to feel concerned when they were reaching the end of the hallway and no one had answered them. Lafayette had pressed one ear against each door, shaking his head when Peggy asked him if he had heard some snoring.

Their worry became fear when they saw the last door had a dim of light coming out the slit at the bottom. Peggy bit her bottom lip, anxious, and gathered all the courage she had left to knock on the door.
“Laurens?” she repeated the same action, almost automatically. “Maria?” Still no answer. This time, she had to swallow. “Mr. Washington?”

“Sir, are you alright?” asked Lafayette, taking one step closer to the closed door. “We… We brought you some soup” he informed.

They waited a few seconds, feeling the silence hovering over them. Both pressed their ears against the wood, hearing a slight cracking coming from the other side. They looked at each other, then, at the soup. Peggy shook her head, but Lafayette’s glare hardened.

“He also has to eat” he said in a low voice.

“Maybe he’s not hungry” she said, shrugging.

“Peggy…”

“Alright…” she gave in. She put one hand on the knob. “At the count of three” she informed, and the Frenchman nodded in agreement. “One… Two… Two and a half… Two and three quarters…”

“Peggy!” hurried Lafayette.

“Three!” she said, opening the door without thinking.

Before she could control herself, Peggy opened the door loudly and quickly, just being able to recover the control over her hands and movements to avoid it to hit the wall behind it. Lafayette peered into the room while Peggy scanned it slowly. They heard the cracking sound again, this time seeing it came from the right, and their heads turned around in that direction without a second thought.

Their blood ran cold when they saw George Washington sitting on a rocking chair, going forth and back slowly; the knife still raised in his right hand. Peggy jumped afraid when the sound of the shaking plate startled her. She hushed her workmate, and indicated him to enter and let the tray anywhere. Lafayette, at first, shook his head, feeling his feet glued to the floor. Peggy dedicated him a death glare, took him by the sleeve and dragged him in.

“He also has to eat” she mocked him.

Lafayette and she looked at each other, frowning. The woman pointed at the bed with her chin, and the man rolled his eyes. He tiptoed till he reached the bed, and placed the tray gently on the feet of the mattress. He began to walk backwards, both felt their hearts beating too fast to their liking.

Suddenly, George stopped rocking himself. Lafayette swallowed, trying to erase the lump in
his throat, meanwhile Peggy put a hand over her mouth in an attempt to silence her gasp. She and Lafayette held hands, trembling in fear. They began to walk slowly to the door. Peggy stretched an arm, wanting to grab the jamb and then run for her life. Her fingers were about to touch the wood when they saw George turning his head rapidly, eyeing them both. A lighting struck just in that moment, illuminating the whole room and making the knife shine, making it seem sharper than it already was.

“Run, run!!” screamed Lafayette, pushing her out the room.

Peggy tripped over her own feet when she started to get out, especially when the thunder was heard just above the ceiling. She screamed at the top of her lungs, while Lafayette closed the door with a slam, and began to run beside her, both trying to overtake the other.

When they reached the stairs, Peggy tried to take a hold on the handrail, but Lafayette pushed her once again, making her loser her balance and go forwards. She gesticulated exaggeratedly, trying to reach something to avoid a fall down stairs. Eventually, she reached Lafayette shirt, which only served to make both fall, screaming all the way down.

Downstairs, the rest of the team had already jumped afraid when they had heard the screaming and the door shutting with a thump. Hercules was about to go see what happened when they saw Peggy and Lafayette rolling downstairs, screaming and rolling themselves up to try to protect themselves from hurting their heads. They reached the living room falling on the floor with a loud thump, and they moaned while shaking.

“Mother of God, what happened?” asked Hercules, kneeling beside them.

Peggy sobbed, facing the floor and refusing to move or let go of Lafayette’s shirt. “Oh, Jesus, he saw us. He saw us…”

“Who?”

“Laurens?” asked Aaron, getting closer as well, cautiously.

Lafayette shook his head. “Mon Dieu, we are in Psycho; he was just like the old lady from Psycho!”

“Who??” asked Madison.

“Washington, dammit, Washington. He was rocking himself in a rocker and he saw us” exploded Peggy, jumping to her feet. “Are you happy now with your answer?”

“Have you found Laurens or Maria?” asked Hamilton from across the armchair, sharing a worried look with Angelica.

“Maybe he already killed them” commented Peggy, passing a hand through her hair.

“Jeez, Peggy, don’t be overdramatic…” said Hercules.
Peggy looked daggers at him. “Go to his room, brave man, go! And then you talk to us!”

“All right, everybody, calm down” said Jefferson, taking one step forwards. “We all are stressed and need some sleep”

“I won’t be able to sleep like this…”

“And you wanted to play the Ouija board” mocked Hercules. Peggy flipped the bird at him.

“Thomas is right, it’s been a long day…” said Angelica, walking to her sister and hugging her. “We should go to bed. Tomorrow we’ll see things in a new perspective”

“Especially if the storm pulls the house up” said Jefferson with half a smile.

“Shut up, dick” said Alexander, getting up and returning the jacket to Madison.

“Good to see you’re feeling better” said Lafayette when Alexander passed him by to go upstairs.

“Are you going up there?” asked Peggy.

“Bah, I’ve lived a good life. Whatever has to happen, I’ll let it happen” he waved his hand.

“Let me take you upstairs” suggested Aaron, going after him.

“No need to”

“Keep walking, I’d rather face Washington than the Ghostbusters” he muttered, both speeding up the pace.

Once they heard the others talking downstairs and they had turned the corner, Alexander talked again. “This weekend is gonna be the end of me”

“Don’t talk like that”

“It’s true. My brain is pounding, wanting to get out and have a vacation” he stopped at the third room he saw.

“Do you need some company?” asked Aaron, arching one eyebrow.

“No, thank you. Go rest wherever you want” Alexander shook his head. “My God, I miss Eliza so much”

“Yes, I miss Theodosia too”

“It’s true what they say that you do not know what you’ve got until you lose it” Alexander opened the door, seeing complete blackness and hearing the rain hitting the window mercilessly. He pressed his lips and faced Burr again. “Maybe a bit of company would be nice”

He let Aaron walk in first, receiving a nod of understanding and gratitude. Better than nothing, especially when Laurens seemed to be in unknown whereabouts. Besides, Burr didn’t ask too much, and that was a plus for him right then. Aaron turned the little lamp that was on the night table, pressing one button.
“Batteries” he said.

“Let’s hope they will last all night” added Alexander, heading to the bed. Without thinking, he said out loud. “Gosh, I wish Eliza were here”

Aaron nodded. “Same…” he said, looking in a melancholy way out of the window and thinking about his wife. “I hope she’s doing fine. Lil’ Theo is with her grandparents”

“Mine too” Alexander sat on the edge of the bed, with a sigh. “If Eliza were here, she would have avoided half of this, for not saying all”

“Yes, Theodosia is always talking about how her presence brings peace wherever she goes” Aaron took the liberty to sit beside his workmate, his eyes fixed on the floor.

“She is” Alexander nodded in agreement. “I miss her personality so much, she always knows what to say and do… She’s not a madwoman, she always thinks before acting and she’s so sweet, caring, calm and quiet…”

———

“WHO IS GONNA BREAK THE FUCKING DANCEFLOOR TONIGHT?!!”

“Eliza!”

“I CAN’T HEAR YOU!”

“Eliza!!!”

“ONE MORE TIME!!”

“ELIZA!!”

“YOU SAID IT! I’M THE E-L-I-Z-A! CATCH ME!”

Eliza threw herself from the table she’s been standing the whole time to the crowd below. They caught her and made her advance to the end of the horde. She landed on the floor, Theodosia waiting for her at the other side, laughing and with her cheeks pink. She handed one of the glasses she was holding to her friend. Eliza drank it in one sip.

“Jeez, Betsey, you’re on fire tonight!”

“You can bet” she saw her empty glass with sad eyes. “Hey, refill this, please, I don’t even remember when I finished it”

“Uh, I think we’re running out of alcohol”

“Already?”

“Well, you invited the whole street, and they invited their relatives and friends so…”
“No, no, we… We… We can’t run out of alcohol yet, the night is young, and so are we” said Eliza, slurring. She rubbed one eye and then proceeded to clap her pocket. “W-Where are… Where are… You know… That thing… You put it in that hole… And… Fiu”

“The what?” said Theodosia, swinging.

“You know… You get in that thing… that thing that does… Brrr brrr…”

“That’s my last name, I think…”

“No, no… The thing with the… the round thing…”

“Oooh, the car??”

“Ding, ding, ding!” said Eliza, faking a bell sound. “Th-Theodosia for the win!” she added, raising both arms up.

“What are you gonna do?”

“I don’t know…” she looked back at her glass once again and she snapped her fingers in realization. “Oh, yes! I was… I was gonna… Where are…”?

“The keyyyys?” slurred Theodosia, eyes narrowed.

“Double prize!” Eliza smiled and hugged her with one arm around her shoulders. “Gosh, Theo, you’re so fucking clever. I love having a so clever friend”

Theodosia giggled. “Shut up, flatterer!”

“It’s tr-true”

They stayed like that for a moment.

“Why are we hugging?” asked Theodosia.

“I don’t know…” Eliza looked down again, her eyes falling on the empty glass. “Oh, yes, the a-a-a-lcohol!” she managed to say. She finished the hug and clap her pants once again. “Where… Where…”?

“They keyyyys?”

“Yes… Wh-Where…?”

“Have you…” she hiccupped. “Have you looked at the key-chain?” she asked, pointing at the entrance.

Eliza looked over there. “Jeez, Theo, you’re so-so cl-clever… I’m so lucky to have a clever friend like you…” she slurred, hugging her again.

By wobbling, they reached the entrance. Eliza took the keys with a triumphant smile and
laughed, with superiority.

“Look at th-this… My order habits are useful after all” she commented. “You’ll see Alex’s face when I tell him” and she opened the door, stepping outside.

“W-Wait… Are you sure he’ll be fine with this party?” asked Theodosia, frowning in concern.

Eliza got angry all of a sudden. “Fuck him. He bought a laptop without asking my opinion, well, I’ll run a party, and if he doesn’t li-like it, then, then… Then… He can go… I don’t know, to a no-pretty place” she staggered out the house, the keys tinkling. Theodosia followed her, close behind. Eliza’s face and mood changed radically again. Now, she was at the verge of tears. “Gosh, I miss him so much… I think I just did this party because I can’t stand the silence anymore…” she began to cry.

Theodosia tapped her back. “D-Don’t cry… He wo-would have liked you to have f-fun!”

Eliza sobbed couple of times more before looking at her. “Who?”

“What?”

“I don’t know…” Eliza looked down, seeing the keys. “Oh, right, the alcohol!”

Eliza opened the car and got in. She fell on the pilot seat and then sat straight. With a trembling hand, she tried to put the key into the ignition. Theodosia got closer, seeing her struggle. When the key entered, they both cheered.

“W-Wait… A-Are you sure you’re in a good condition to dr-drive?” asked Theodosia.

Eliza waved her hand. “I’ve… I’ve got it… I’ve got it…” she promised.

Theodosia looked at her for a moment. She pressed a hand on the glass. “No, Eliza…”

Eliza rolled down the glass. “W-What?”

“Eliza, you can’t do this”

“But…”

“No, no…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“… You can’t go for alcohol and forget to bring ice. Please, remember the ice”

Eliza smiled. “I’ve got it!”
Eliza reversed the car, getting out the parking. She spun the steering wheel and then drove down the road at maximum speed, screaming as she did so. Theodosia was left behind, watching her go.

Theodosia waited on the sidewalk, not moving. From time to time, she looked at her watch, uselessly as she couldn’t remember the time it was the last time she had checked. Eventually, Eliza’s car came back, at full speed and with the woman’s scream in the background.

“Oh, who is that?” asked Theo, narrowing her eyes to try to see better. “Th-That car rings me some bells…”

The car kept speeding up, until it turned around too late. Theodosia fell backwards, her butt hitting the sidewalk as she saw the car crash against the wall that separated the two gardens from Eliza’s and her neighbours.

“Ooooh, terrible crash!” said Theodosia, jumping to her feet and running towards the car. Eliza got out, tottering and with a hand on the head. “Betsey, are you okay?? What happened??”

“Fucking wall ran to me and I couldn’t avoid it in time” she answered, looking at the now broken wall with hatred. She looked at the car, with the bumper all destroyed. Her eyes grew wide with horror. “Oh, no! Oh, fucking no!” she fell to the floor, devastated. “I forgot the damn ice!”

“Oooh, maaan” complained Theo, putting a hand on her shoulder, trying to comfort her friend.

Aaron had left Alexander’s bedroom once they had stopped talking about trivialities and he saw the short man was feeling better than in the past half hour. He looked at his watch, lighting up by pressing a button, and saw that it was three in the morning, and he still couldn’t fall asleep. The rain had eased off and now there was no sound around the cottage that could prevent him to drift into Morpheus’ arms. Still, he couldn’t manage to close his eyes, his glare fixed on the ceiling, his mind thinking about all the terror books he had read over his life.

He loved to read, especially due to his imagination. Sometimes, Aaron thought the only reason why he hadn’t gone crazy yet with so much noisy and annoying people back in high school and at college was because he always had his private place in his mind, where he could be at peace. Back there, he felt lucky to have inherited that trait from his beloved mother; now, he was cursing through his teeth, when he couldn’t close his eyes as old images of old stories filled his mind.
He glared at the mid-opened closet door, and cursed himself for not having closed it when he had had the chance; he looked at the window, cursing the clouds that still were up there, making the night darker than it already was; he looked forwards, seeing the mirror that was just in front of the bed and by the door. Aaron wrinkled his nose in disgust. What kind of person hangs a mirror across the bed? He thought, frowning slightly. The same kind of person who has a gun and names a caravan like a woman, he answered himself, another thing he was used to.

He rolled to the side, not wanting to keep looking at his dark reflection. Slowly, he began to close his eyes, only to open them up again. It was Sunday already, they still had a whole day ahead. A doubt harassed his mind: would they still have to go to work on Monday? Sundays were his days of relax, in which he rested from all the madness of his workmates… It seemed it was Washington’s as well. Poor man. Though he could kill any of them at any minute by now, he still pitied him. He had to put through so much. He remembered all the times Aaron had made jokes with Theodosia, both guessing between laughs when his boss would lose his mind. He even remembered a time they did a sweepstake, saying a random date that would be when George Washington would go crazy. Aaron tried to remember which date he had said back then; maybe this could have a good side and he would earn some money from this.

A scratch sound made him flinch. He sat up on the bed right after, eyeing his surroundings. Nothing. That was worse. He looked in every direction, hoping to see something that might have fallen, but everything seemed to be in the same place. Aaron shook his head, and lay down slowly, this time wanting to fall asleep for real. Another scratch. A thump. He turned his head, now knowing he hadn’t imagined it and that it came from outside. He waited for a bit. If he heard it again, he would get out bed; if he didn’t, he would cover himself up with the sheet and wait for his death to be quick and painless.

A thump. Louder than before.

… … He waited for a bit longer.

Another one, this time followed by low giggles and hushing sounds.

Well, if that wasn’t a signal, he would be damned.

He looked around the room, wanting to find something he could defend himself with. Eventually, he chose to simply grab the lamp that stood on the nightstand and went directly to the door. Knob in hand; ear against the wood. He heard muffled voices, hushing, giggles. Aaron swallowed and held the lamp tight in his left hand; his heart thumping in his ears.
When he heard another blow, this one against his own door, he jumped, like waking up from a trance. Aaron opened the door. A figure was at the other side, presumably holding against the door, and now was falling towards him. Without seconds thoughts, he pushed the silhouette and crashed the lamp in its head. The loudly sound breaking the almost silence of the cottage.

His gasps were shaky, and he pressed his sweaty face against his two trembling hands, not wanting to see the figure that was now lying on the floor. The aforementioned moaned, moving slowly, and Aaron looked around once again, desperately looking for something else he could grab and defend himself with. His eyes, however, fell on another figure on the floor. This time, the faint light of the window that was in front of the staircase let him see better this second silhouette, which was crawling its way up the floor, its long hair covering the whole face. It started to giggle while the other one that was closer to him turned around, starting to get up, wobbling, and moaning louder than before.

Aaron lost it.

His scream reverberated throughout the whole cabin, and it was followed by the footsteps of his workmates, who immediately began to open their respective bedroom doors, looking at him with wide eyes.

“Aaron, what’s wrong?” asked Alexander, who was next door.

“Oh, my God, what is that??” asked Hercules, pointing at the floor.

The figure at the stairs began to crawl towards them, slowly. Still, it made them panic.

“You did the fucking Ouija, didn’t ya?!” screamed Hercules, pointing at Peggy, accusatory.

“No! I’ve already had enough frights for a lifetime!” she shouted back.

Angelica was the only one who was clever enough to run back inside her bedroom, and get out with the lamp in her hands. She illuminated the figures, and they all saw Laurens and Maria on the floor. The first one with his hands over his head and a painful expression; the second one trying to get on her feet without much success and laughing at her own fails. Aaron paled when he saw Laurens.

“Jesus, Laurens, I am so sorry!” he said, kneeling beside him and help him get on his feet. “Are you okay??”

Laurens laughed while moaning. “What a stupid bang…” he muttered.
“Where were you guys?” asked Alexander, getting closer to his friend. He narrowed his eyes. “John, are… Are you drugged?” he asked, with wide eyes.

“Sssshhh, tell no one, you know I hate to share” said the man, giggling. Maria let herself fall spread-eagled on the floor, laughing.

“What is going on here?” demanded Angelica, her brow furrowed.

“Is that blood??” asked Peggy, worried, when she saw Laurens hand.

“What the hell is going on here?” asked Angelica again, red in the face, when she saw her two once missing workmates only laughed.

Aaron looked at her, guilty: “I am sorry, I hit him in the head with the lamp” he explained.

“You what??”

“I heard scratching and giggles… And the conversation at the kitchen replaying in my brain… I influenced myself, I’m sorry, it was an accident!”

“Man, you and your ‘accidents’ will kill someone one day” commented Alexander, indicating him to make John sit on the floor. Aaron did so.

“Shit, can we spend one minute together without attempting to kill each other?” asked Angelica, hand on hip. She looked daggers at Maria, who was still laughing. “Stop laughing!”

“And what am I supposed to do?” asked the receptionist. “Cry?” and she burst out in a loudly laugh again.

“John, what did you two take?” asked Alexander, taking a look at his head.

“Nothing…!”

“Look at his eyes, he’s beyond junkie” commented Lafayette, getting closer to the scene.

“We only smoked a bit’ explained Maria, mimicking to be smoking an imaginary cigarette.

“Smoked…? What?” asked Peggy.

“Chocolate cigarettes…” said Thomas sarcastically. “What do you think?”

Peggy gasped and put a hand over her mouth. “The happiness herbs??”

“Weed, Peggy, normal people with a normal IQ call it weed” said Lafayette, gaining a dirty look from the girl.

“And you didn’t share it???” asked Hercules at John, indignantly. “Man, I thought we were friends”

“It was just a tiny, tiny bit…” he slurred, giggling.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Fucking band of druggies…”

“Hey, don’t be a hypocrite” said John, looking at him angrily. “It was your weed”

“Mine??”

“Yep, I found it in your bag”
“And why the fuck did you…?”

“Oh, come on! You all know I have a problem!”

“Yeah! Let the poor man with his problems!” shouted Maria, still on the floor.

“Jeez…” muttered Madison, looking at them both with a worried glare. Thomas put a hand on his forehead, rubbing his temples.

“J-Jefferson” managed to say Maria.

“What” he spat.

“Johnny and I were wondering if you have a pipe here as well?”

That made him fume mad. “No. I don’t. And I didn’t have any weed either”

“Do not lie, I found it there” said John, raising his index finger.

“Mother of God…” muttered Alexander. “Where have you been smoking?”

“Yes, maybe I can still go and inhale some” said Hercules.

“No one will inhale anything” warned Angelica between clenched teeth.

“I am asking because if Washington finds out, I don’t know what could happen”

“It’s true” said Lafayette, paling. He looked at the only closed door in the hallway. “Do you think he’s asleep?”

“I am not going in there to find it out” said Peggy, shaking her head.

“Jeffersoon” slurred Maria once again. “Come on, be a good sport and give us the pipe”

“I don’t have any!” he screamed.

“Come on…” she slurred. She showed the little plastic bag, still with some weed in it. “I have this left, you can smoke it if you let us borrow it” she proposed.

“Nooo, nooo” said John.

“Don’t be… Don’t be Jewish” she said, finally getting up.

“Wow…” said Hercules, surprised.

“Maria, I don’t think you can say that” said Peggy.

“Pff, go and complain on the internet, as the rest of political perfect shit people do now…” she told her with a mocking tone, shrugging. “Jefferson”

“I won’t give you the pipe” he cut her off.

“Aha! You admit having one!” said John, with a triumphal smile.

“I don’t!” he said, defensively. “And that is not mine” he said pointing at the little bag. He took it, smelled it, and gave it back to Maria. “See? That smells like trifle. I wouldn’t buy that shit”
“I don’t know who is worse: these two for smoking with the situation we’re in; or you that are able to know that by only smelling it a bit” said Angelica, with a hand on her forehead.

“Guys, I think John’s head need to be checked” said Aaron suddenly.

“What a wound…” commented Alexander. “And then, you can’t even open a bottle”

“That was confidential!” said Aaron, enraged.

Before anyone could say or do anything else, the knob of George’s room began to move. Peggy and Lafayette gasped and hugged each other; the rest of them just saw that reaction and felt their blood running cold. The door creaked open, and started to open slowly.

“Here comes the president” urged Aaron in a soft voice.

“Everybody, get in your rooms!” said Angelica, running in her own and closing the door with a thump.

They all imitated her. Hercules and Peggy grabbed Maria by her arms and put her on the bed on Peggy’s bedroom, who close the door with a bang. Aaron and Alexander did the same with John. By the time George had opened the door enough to stick his head out, the hallway was completely empty. The head of the knife appeared as well, while George narrowed his eyes. He waited a few minutes, before closing the door again, quietly.

No one dared to get out their rooms in all night.

Chapter End Notes

Lunni: There was a Spanish puppet show called "Los Lunnis". I was referring to that.
The next morning was still cloudy, only a soft breeze remained from the storm that hit the place
yesterday in the early night. Angelica, being the first one to wake up along with her brother-in-law,
opened the windows, hearing Alexander commenting at her backs that she was obsessed with
opening them at each opportunity she would have. Angelica only answered by opening all the
windows she could find completely, and Hamilton rolled his eyes at her childhood response.

He prepared some coffee, feeling more relieved than he thought he would when he found
some in one of the drawers. Angelica sat on the table, drumming her fingers on the wooden table,
waiting for the coffee to be served. Madison made his appearance, breaking the silence with his
footsteps. Angelica saw him embracing himself while shivering. He entered the kitchen and talked
while sitting on one of the chairs.

“Why is it so cold in here? Is Walt Disney coming to pick us up or something?”

Hamilton answered him, not turning away from the coffee machine. “Talk to Angelica. She refuses
to admit she has a problem”

Angelica looked daggers at him. “Talk to Alexander. He has an obsession with saying everybody
has obsessions but him”

“Well, isn’t it nice to be this lovely in the morning?” asked Madison, rolling his eyes. He thought a
bit before speaking his mind again. “Are you feeling better, Hamilton?”

“How? Yes, thank you” he answered, turning around and handing out one mug to Angelica and
keeping the other to himself. “Do you want some?” he asked, pointing at James.

“With my heart rate? No, thank you” he shook his head. “Could you make some tea?”

“Yes, of course, do you want me to fan you as well?” asked Alexander, taking a seat beside
Angelica. “Make it yourself”

James frowned and got up noisily. “Fuck off, I hope the next time a storm hits, you have a heart
attack” he said, opening the cupboards angrily.

“I hope to see you fly away before that happens, Dobby” Alexander blurted out.

“Well, it can be felt we all slept last night” commented Hercules, getting in with Aaron and Thomas. “New fighting fills the air…”

“Really, could you drop it off?” asked Aaron, taking a seat. “Today we’re leaving depending on if we behave”

“Or on if Lee comes back” added Jefferson.

“It’s him!” accused Madison, dropping the pot vehemently on the counter.

“I just woke up, I didn’t have time to do a thing!” Alexander defended himself.

“The hell you didn’t”

“Stop it you two” said Peggy, groggily, entering the place as well.

Lafayette appeared right behind her. “Yes, let’s have a peaceful morning. It’s gonna be a hard day”

“When it isn’t?” asked Angelica, shrugging.

Moaning filled the room once Laurens and Maria walked through the door. Madison, unknown to their presence, kept dropping metal things on the counter with violence, wanting to let his wrath out somehow.

“God, stop that” said John, dropping himself on the nearest chair.

“Oh, look, if it isn’t the famous duo Lennon-McCartney right after a crazy night!” laughed Jefferson.

“How did the performance in front of the Queen go?” teased Hercules.

“You’re all so funny… Why don’t you try to join Comedy Central and let me be?” said Laurens, rubbing one eye.

“Are you feeling alright, Laurens?” asked Aaron, guiltily. “I am sorry, it was an accident”

“What a novelty…” muttered Hamilton under his breath.

“Yes, don’t worry, Burr. It wasn’t your fault; it was the karma” said Laurens, waving his hand to lighten the issue.

“You’re so annoying with that…” said Hercules, rolling his eyes.

“The karma exists, and it will put us all in our rightful place” Laurens promised solemnly.

“I’m so thirsty…” complained Maria. “Madison, are you making some tea?”

“Yes” was the sharp answer she received.

“Give us a cup when you’re finished” asked Laurens.
“I don’t fucking want to!” Madison almost screamed.

“Jeez, what a resentful brat” commented Hamilton.

“Look who’s talking!” they all said in unison.

“You all need some therapy” said Lafayette all of a sudden. “I haven’t seen so much bad mood and aversion in my entire life”

“I can do that… I mean, I’m not the therapist of the office for anything” said Peggy, shrugging. All the pairs of eyes in the room looked at her. “What?”

“Peggy, are you the psychologist?” asked John, with a cocked eyebrow.

Peggy shrugged once again. “Yeah”

The entire team looked at each other, in bewilderment. Then, they fixed their attention on Peggy again, a frown adorning each face. At once, they began to yell and insult at her.

“Why the fuck didn’t you say so??”

“Do you know how much I’m suffering here right now??”

“Do you even realise we could’ve avoided this if you have offered that back on Saturday?”

“Can you even think at all?”

“In which shitty college did you graduate?”

“Most importantly: who was the imbecile who let you graduate with that intelligence proper of a walnut?”

Peggy’s face burned with a blush of both fury and embarrassment. She hit the table with both hands and got up, throwing the chair to the floor due to the sudden and rapid movement. It served to silence all her workmates.

“Stop insulting me, people, I am not responsible of the shit that led us here! I was asleep when half of that shit happened!” she screamed. She gasped a few times, trying to calm herself. When she thought she was feeling calmer, she added: “Besides, sometimes, I forget it…”

At that, they all put a hand on their foreheads, feeling lost in thought after that declaration. Madison was serving himself a cup of tea by the time Hercules talk.

“Well, this can still be useful”
“How so?” asked Aaron.

“Isn’t Washington angry at us because we can’t be in the same room without being at each other’s throats? Well, we can tell him we want Peggy to do therapy to us!”

“Are you sure letting a psychologist who forgets to be a psychologist doing us therapy is a good idea?” asked Jefferson.

Hercules shrugged. “Better than nothing”

“And who will tell Washington the good news?” asked Angelica.

They all looked at the floor, not wanting to call the attention in any sort of form. Thomas pointed at Lafayette and Alexander while talking.

“He likes you two. Go”

“I’ve already gone yesterday” Lafayette reminded them, hands held up. “I am not going again”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “I’ll go… Immigrants, always getting the job done” he complained, taking the cup of tea Madison was about to drink out of his hands, and exiting the kitchen.

Madison looked daggers at him. “Let’s see if I’m lucky and he gets stabbed”

“Sir?” Alexander said right after knocking on the door. “Sir, can I come in? I bring you some tea” he informed. He waited a few moments, switching his weight from one foot to another. He knocked again. “Sir?”

When he was about to let the cup on the floor and leave, the door opened slightly. Alexander was taken aback for that, but shook it off and opened it completely, seeing his boss walking back to the rocking chair, the knife still in his hand. Alexander swallowed. Alright, maybe if he had seen that last night, in the darkness and with a storm in the background, he could have freaked out too.

“Can I come closer?” he asked. He did so when he saw George nodding. “Here, I brought you tea” he repeated, heading the cup to his boss. When he saw no movement, he took a few steps backwards. Clearing his throat, he added: “We’ve been talking and… It turned out Peggy was the therapist of the office all along, and…”

“She is?” George’s voice calmed him a bit, especially when it felt sane enough.

“Yes, sir”
“And I pay her for that or how does that go??”

“I don’t know… The case is we were talking and we agreed to go through a therapy with her… You know, before Lee comes back…” If he comes back, he thought, biting his bottom lip.

George shook his head. “Where did I go wrong?” he asked all of a sudden.

“Excuse me?”

“Where did I go wrong? I don’t even remember when all this…” he moved his hand in circles, wanting to let clear he was referring to the whole team “…went down the drain… All I know is that I rambled out last night and I dug in this room with a knife in my hand” he dropped the knife to the ground, to bury his face in his hands.

“Yes… Yes…” Hamilton pushed the knife under the bed with his foot, sighing with relief. “We all saw that, sir”

“I even think I threatened Burr and Madison, but I’m not quite sure”

“You did” Alexander nodded.

“At least, I made the dinner, right?” he looked at him, hopefully.

Alex shrugged slightly. “Angelica finished it”

“Poor woman, she’s vice president, she shouldn’t be standing so much all because I can’t handle it”

“Permission to state my opinion?”

“As you were…”

“Sir, for me, the only problem is that you put up with too much, and one day, one little thing happens, and you explode” George nodded, and took the cup Hamilton was still offering him. “Do you want a piece of advice? Instead of doing that, you should try to have little outbursts of ire. Like I do. If I didn’t have these little outbursts I have, I’d have set Adams on fire myself a long time ago”

“Little…?” repeated George, dumbfounded.

“The case is… Peggy is giving us a chance to talk things out with a supposed professional, and we all agreed to do so, for once”

“That’s reassuring. You all agreeing” he took a sip from the cup.

“Yes… Sir, you don’t have to go down there, but I think you should. We were worried about you”

George smiled at him. “I will be there, Alex, don’t worry”

George made an attempt to get up from the chair, Alexander bent down to help him. A metallic sound called their attention, and they both looked at their feet, seeing a flask. They stayed there for a few seconds. Without looking at each other, George talked.

“Alexander, is that a flask?”
“… Yes”
“Yours?”
“Mine”
“You brought a flask”
“Yep”
“To a business trip”
“Yep”
“Why?”
“Because my boxing bag was too big for the suitcase”
“…” George looked up, scratching his neck nervously. “Can I have a sip?”
Alexander met his glare. “Sure”

By the time George went downstairs with Alexander, the rest of the group had already created a circle of chairs and some of them were already sat. Peggy was with her back towards the stairs, her chair a bit separated from the perfect circle they had made, to make her stand out. She was holding a pen and a notebook was resting on her lap.

“Where did you get that?” asked Alexander, pointing at the two objects she was holding.
She gave a shrug. “I just took it from one of the offices upstairs”
“You shouldn’t… How do you know where to look?”
“John helped me”
“… You surely have to do a personal therapy with him and treat that bad habit…”

Peggy nodded vaguely, letting him see she wasn’t going to fulfil that promise. He decided to take a seat beside Aaron, who was at her left. George sat right beside him, seeing he was in front of Angelica who, at the same time, had John and Maria sat on her left and Madison and Jefferson at her right. Hercules and Lafayette got out from the kitchen, whispering a few things while eyeing Peggy. Eventually, Lafayette simply shrugged and Hercules rolled his yes. They got a seat on the only two empty chairs left beside Washington.
Everybody looked at Peggy, then, expectantly. The youngest Schuyler sister was biting the pen — a habit that always pissed her two older sisters off, and now Angelica was putting a lot of effort to not snap at her — and looking at the blank page in front of her eyes, as if there were a hidden message only she could read. Eventually, she raised her glare, and eyed them all. She pointed at them with the pen and sat straighter in her seat.

“Alright, first of all, I want to let clear that this is for us to talk. So, I don’t want verbal attacks — or of any kind, for that matter — and let’s try to say our opinions respectfully” she waited a couple of seconds and then looked at her notebook again. “Alright. Who wants to start?”

Everybody stopped looking at her, fixing their attention on the wooden floor instead. Peggy wrinkled her nose and knitted her brows. She crossed her arms, deciding to wait a moment, wanting to give them a chance. When she saw it was useless, she took charge of the situation.

“Mr. Washington” the mentioned one looked at her while the others looked directly at him. “Thank you for coming unarmed” she said with a genuine smile. “Would you like to start?”

George straightened himself in the chair and cleared his throat. “Where should I begin?”

“Why don’t you try to open the door to us?” she said, clapping her hands together and then extending her arms to mimicking a door opening.

“What door?”

“Today we’re going to open the door to our feelings. And I’m gonna help you do it” she explained.

“Marvellous” muttered Alexander.

“You should’ve started by saying that” commented Hercules.

Peggy looked nasty at him. “Excuse me, who is the professional here?”

“That is what we wonder” said Jefferson.

“You know what?” said Peggy, frowning and turning to face Thomas. “Now, you’re the one who is gonna start opening the door” she said, pointing at him with the pen. George sighed relieved under his breath.

Jefferson simply shrugged. “I don’t have any doors to open”

“We all have them, Jefferson” said Peggy, now with a more tender voice. “Don’t be afraid, we all are going to do it throughout this therapy” she encouraged him.

“Then, let someone else start; I’ll see how this goes”

“You don’t know how to open a door?” asked Alexander.

“When I have no doors to open, I hardly know how to” he snapped.

“You must have some closed, especially if you bring drugs to a business trip”
“Come on, boys…” tried to say Peggy.

Jefferson hit the floor with the foot at that. “I didn’t bring that weed!”

“But admit it, we all saw it” said Lafayette, shrugging.

“Now, seriously” said Maria, leaning on her chair to look at Jefferson, who had his face buried in his hands, trying to contain himself. “Do you have the pipe? ‘Cause… I have still some left, you know? And I was thinking…”

“I don’t, it wasn’t mine, fucking hell!” he screamed, red as scarlet. He pointed accusatory at Laurens. “Why are you judging me and not that magpie, who is always gossiping around?”

“Hey, have a bit of respect” said John, offended. “Junkie…”

Peggy raised one hand, calmly. “Now, Laurens…”

“Said the man who smoked it all” Jefferson rolled his eyes.

“Half of it” clarified Laurens, crossing his arms, offended.

“Just because I took the bag away from you” added Maria, with a frown. Then, looking at the rest of the team, she explained: “The man almost ended it all”

“Maria…!”

“And I deserved half of it, at least… I mean, I was the one who found the perfect hidden spot”

“And, where was it?” asked Angelica, with a cocked eyebrow.

Maria pointed at one door at her back. “There. In the basement”

“Brave people” said Hercules.

The receptionist only shrugged. “There were only a few papers and old magazines…”

“Can we go back to the therapy?” said George, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Or whatever the hell this is”

“Yes, that’s right” Peggy cleared her throat. “What was I doing…?” she wondered, closing her eyes and putting the pen on her temple.

“This is going well…” commented Alexander sarcastically.

“That is what happens when you let Peggy do a therapy” Angelica told him. “She only did this career because Eliza did so” And her youngest sister looked deathly daggers at her.

“Eliza is a psychologist as well?” asked Alexander, tilting his head.

“You don’t know your own wife?” asked Lafayette.

“We don’t talk about work” Alexander shrugged.

“And what do you two talk about, if work is the only important thing in your life?” Jefferson chimed in.

Alexander looked at him for a moment and, with a sarcastic smile, turned to Maria and said to her:
“Maria, Jefferson is a bit flustered, why don’t you give the rest of his weed to him so he can calm down?”

“Only if he gives me the pipe” said Maria, stubbornly.

“Jesus Christ…” muttered Aaron.

Jefferson hit his own thigh for irritation. “It wasn’t mine, dammit!”

“Settle down, settle down…” said Hercules.

Meanwhile, Peggy turned to her sister and spat out: “You know what, Angelica? If I studied this was you and Eliza’s fault, so you better shut up”

“Our fault?” said Angelica, sitting straight on the chair. “How is this our fault?”

“I’ve been inheriting your and Eliza’s things since I can remember: all your old clothes, your old text books, your old sheets… Dammit, even your old pencils!”

“Ooooh, ooooh, ooooh!” exclaimed Angelica exaggeratedly. “There she comes, there comes the martyr!”

Peggy was red in the face after seeing her reaction: “Yes, here I come, here I come because it’s true! And you both know it!”

“I didn’t hear you complain that much when you took my sweater!” she said, pointing at the clothes she was still wearing.

“You’ve always been a selfish brat! I’m sure that if this sweater was one year old you’ve already given it to me as a Christmas present, because that’s the way Dad and Mom raised you and Eliza!”

“Ppf… Don’t talk about Eliza, she’s not here to defend herself”

“Alright, let’s talk about you and your damn habit of only giving me the yellow dresses, what was that shit?”

“I thought you liked yellow!”

“Yes, I liked it, with the final ‘D’, you made me hate it!” Peggy turned to face all her workmates and boss, who were looking at her. “You see, dear friends of mine, here, my dearest sister, Angelica, just woke up one day and say: ‘Hey, let’s bug Peggy, I’m going to give all my yellow things to her’!”

“It wasn’t like that, I thought I was making you happy!” Angelica defended herself.

“It is called: pretending! And being polite!” screamed Peggy.

“Man, if this is the therapist of the office…” commented Laurens under his breath.

Peggy looked at him with glittering eyes. “I didn’t want to study this!”

“Then, why didn’t you pick another thing?” asked Aaron, taking the pen and the notebook in his own hands.

Peggy turned to face him. “I don’t know… I felt pressured…” she explained, with broken voice.

“By who?” asked Aaron, leaning on in his seat.
“I don’t know… My father? I don’t know” she sobbed. “I just wanted them to be proud of me… And Eliza is Eliza, she does it all fine and perfect”

“And how does that make you feel?”

“Well, pressured, she just told you that!” said Alexander.

“What kind of therapy is this?” asked Hercules all of a sudden. “The therapist needs more help than any of us”

Peggy sobbed harder. “I didn’t choose to feel this way!”

“No, no, I’m not saying that”

“Ignore her, she just lives for victimhood” said Angelica.

“Angelica, don’t attack” said Aaron.

“I don’t get it” said Laurens. “Is Peggy going to do us therapy or Burr?”

“What I don’t get is when my life became this” said Jefferson, suddenly, looking at the floor. “One day I was in France for a business trip and then I’m just told that Washington and King fought and now the office is teared apart by half and that other half is running independently and Washington called me to ask me to work for him, and when I’m back, this man” He pointed at Madison. “told me they have put this gremlin” He pointed at Hamilton, who looked at him with tedium at the nickname. “in charge of the economy of the company and he did ‘I don’t know what anymore’ and I find myself screaming at him each day with only Sundays free to rest from you all but not from my older daughter who seems to have made a pact with the banks of the country about ending my life the sooner the better, and being the only example for my younger daughter whose adolescence I fear the most, because I’m just seeing myself alone facing two ungrateful monsters… And as if with my life I hadn’t enough, now I had to stand you all on a whole weekend, trapped in the arse of nowhere in a cabin that smells like deer’s pee just because our personal manager is off his rocket but still owns a gun and threatened to fire us if we didn’t get out his father-in-law’s motorhome, which he named as woman because he can’t stand the fact that his marriage is dead and he has a hole inside he tries to fill with a giant and metallic vehicle… What kind of shit was that? And the worst part is that all this shit happened because of a fucking fork, what the hell is going on?”

Jefferson let out a sigh-sob when he was finished and put a hand on his forehead, crestfallen. Everybody looked at him and then at each other, moving uncomfortably in their chairs. After a moment, Peggy cleared her throat and broke the silence.

“Do you know what you just did, Jefferson?” she asked, receiving no answer. “You just opened the door” She felt everybody looking at her now. She took the notebook and the pen from Aaron, who was looking at her bewildered. “Thank you for that. Now, who wants to be next?”

“What the hell are you talking about?” asked Aaron, frowning. “You were just sobbing one minute ago”

“Oh, that, I was just pretending”

“Sure you were…” commented Angelica, rolling her eyes.
“I was” said Peggy, defensively. “I pretended to be in distress so one of you felt enough trust to imitate me”

“Man, you’re awesome” said Laurens, smiling. “I fell for it, Pegs, you’re an incredible therapist!”

“Hehe, yeah, I know” said Peggy, playing with her hair and with a big smile on her face.

“He’s lying, Laurens” said Alexander. “This was just luck”

“Thank you” said Angelica.

“Alexander, I’m seeing you stuck in scepticism” said Peggy, turning to face him. “Why don’t you open the door to us? You’d feel better”

“Well, I’m seeing you stuck in that metaphor, but I’m not pushing you to do anything stupid…”

“Sarcasms and insulting is the oldest way to protect ourselves in front our loved ones”

“Then, I owe Jefferson and Madison an apology… If that is true, they love me dearly”

“Go to Hell” said Thomas.

“I’ll see you both there when I die”

“Come on, we were doing fine” said Hercules. “Let’s just keep it that way”

“What way? Tell our shitty lives so then Peggy can pass to another depressive person in the room?” asked Angelica.

“Angie, sis, shut up if you don’t know what you’re talking about” said Peggy with a fake smile. “So, who wants to open their door now?”

“The only door I want to open is that one” said Lafayette, pointing at front door.

“You are free to leave, but not to come back” Peggy warned him.

“I’ll risk it”

“No, nobody gets out of here” said Washington, startling everybody with his harsh words. “The last thing I need is one of you dead or lost”

“People, focus” said Peggy, with a frown. “Come on, we already start, which is the most difficult part of a group therapy. Now, I’ll ask you again, who wants to open their door?”

The whole room fell silent. Peggy eyed them all: looking at their feet, the floor, the curtains, outside the windows… She was about to say one random name again when she caught Madison leaning on his seat, inspiring.

“I was the one who put that weed inside Thomas’ suitcase”

“… … … … … …”

“Holy crap…” said Hercules, breaking the silence.
“Plot twist” said Laurens and Peggy, sitting more comfortably in their seats and paying attention to what was about to happen.

Jefferson took a moment to talk; Madison refusing to look at him. “What?” he managed to say.

James inhaled again before speaking. “It was me. I put the little bag there”

Thomas looked at him from up and down, and down and up. “Alright… Can…” he swallowed, trying to control the volume of his voice. “Can I ask why did you do something like that?”

James bit the inside of his cheek, wringing his hands. “I… Please, don’t get mad”

“A bit late for that” commented Hercules.

“I found it…” He passed a hand through his short hair, trying to find the right words. He eventually decided to spit it out in one breath. “I found that in Patsy’s bedroom”

“Who??” asked Laurens.

“Jefferson’s older daughter” explained Angelica.

“Oh, thank you. I still don’t know all the characters of this soap”

“Please, a bit of humanity!” Aaron reprehended the two of them.

Jefferson took the moment their chat lasted to breath in and out and calm himself… “And why the heck did you hide it in my damned suitcase instead of telling me, you fucking asshole!” …in vain.

James finally turned to him. “Because I’ve already had enough with your screaming, I was trying to maintain peace as long as I could!”

“And you thought hiding my daughter’s weed in my suitcase and let me be the pot smoker of the office would be a better option?”

“The plan was throwing it away once we made a stop somewhere”

“Then why didn’t you throw it when we stopped at that gas station?”

“Because I forgot!”

“You forgot?? How can you forget something like that?”

“Maybe it’s because my brain was finally having a rest thanks to Peggy and Angelica’s idea of being normal!”

Washington sniffed at that memory: “Heartless sub-animals…” he muttered.

“Wait a minute, your plan was throwing it away?” Jefferson thought about that for a moment. “What would you do that instead of coming to me and tell me that my daughter is smoking that?”

“Because I didn’t want another fight. I’ve already talked to her and…”

“Oh, right, I’m sure she will never do it again” said Thomas, sarcastically. “Everybody knows teenagers are very reasonable and like to listen to adults”

James was red in the face in a matter of seconds. “Well, I’m sure she won’t listen to you, as you
spend half of your life at the office” he threw in Thomas’ face without a second thought.

Alexander made a face. “Jeez, I’ve just remembered Eliza…”

“Better start hiding the phones” commented Aaron, shaking at the feeling of a déjà vu.

“Oh, there we go again. How am I supposed to pay the bills then? Because I see you eating but not paying”

“Yes, I’m eating the food I previously cooked. You’re welcome, by the way!”

“You should be the one thanking me: I opened the door of my house to you when you had nowhere else to go after that building company defrauded you and that rip-off of a house almost knock down. And I didn’t even ask you for a rent, a very stupid move on my part, now I see!”

Madison sniffed. “It didn’t take you that long to rub in my face that I’m living there free…” Then, his almost crying state changed abruptly for pure rage. “Tell me how much I owe you” he demanded, starting to rummage inside his pockets. “How much!”

“No, I don’t… Don’t do that” said Thomas, with a face of boredom.

“No! Tell me how much! How much I cost you! Put a price to our friendship!”

“I don’t know about the friendship, but I know about the food, the light, the water…” Thomas began to count with his fingers.

“And I know about the bus, the school cafeteria, the private tutoring… Ah, no, wait, all those you have it for free because I do them. Instead of asking me for money…”

“I didn’t, but alright” Jefferson said at the same time, shrugging.

“…you should pay me a salary”

Thomas snorted a laugh. “Yes, of course. I have no better things to spend my money in… Like what you eat, what you drink, what you watch on the TV… Netflix, what happened with Netflix? You and Martha still have it because you begged me to not cancel the account”

“A Netflix account is the least you can give me in return for all the hard work I do for you and your family. The girls go to school every day because of me, and they have lunch because of me”

“And they can smoke weed because of you and your open mind, that comes and goes depending on how you’re feeling”

“I’m trying! I’m trying to cope with my anxiety and my depression, and it’s not easy when you have someone who is constantly reminding them to you and giving you zero support!”

“Zero support??? And what do you call to waking up at three in the morning to take you to the hospital because you drank that normal coke thinking it was zero when it wasn’t and you thought you were going to die for an accelerated heart rate?”

“When it’s done only so you can have something to throw in my face afterwards? I call it being a dick”

“I am not throwing it in your face. I’m reminding it to you, because I’m seeing you a bit off today” Thomas’ tone was starting to be a bit bitter by the moment.
“Yes, whatever you say. As always”

“Maybe it’s because all those pills you take as if they were Skittles”

The whole room tried to contain the laugh, seeing as Madison looked directly at Jefferson with a frown. He clicked his tongue.

“Maybe I take them as if they were Skittles because your screaming with your daughter makes me nervous? And that is why, we come back to the same again, I decided to not tell you a damn about the weed?”

“You don’t have a say about those things. She is my daughter, and that talk was a thing between me and her”

Madison nodded with vehemence. “Yes, yes, yes: between you, her, and the whole fucking neighbourhood”

“There we go…”

“I’m not the only one who is sick of so much screaming”

“Why are you complaining? My screams are doing good to you”

“Excuse me?”

“Of course, they hear me losing control and then you three are martyrs. The poor souls who have to cope with my unjustifiable anger. But they don’t know that before I scream I had to stand your comments, her comments…”

“Patsy never tries to make you lose your temper, neither do I, you’re being a bit selfish”

“Me, selfish…?”

“Especially, to your daughter”

“Me, selfish?”

“Yes, you’re a selfish bastard. When was the last time you took me out somewhere?”

“That again? I come home worn out, my work is stressing”

“I work in the same place as you! And I’m worn out as well, but weekends exist!”

“And where the hell do you want to go with the money we have left? And with your allergies and paranoias! Because, that’s another thing…”

“There you go again attacking me with my maladies!”

“Because you’re a walking malady!”

“I didn’t choose to be born like this!”

“But you’re choosing to become crazy over the tiniest things!”
“The last time I listened to that advise, I ended up in the hospital”

“I ended up there as well”

“None of us would have ended up in a hospital bed if you listened to me and looked at the expiration date”

“And who is throwing things now?”

“No, I’m reminding them to you, because I’m seeing you a bit off” Madison mocked him, making Aaron and Alexander to turn away their heads in an attempt to contain their laughter.

“Let’s see if one of these damn days you finally understand that when I fell sick it’s not like the rest. My system is special”

“Yes, specially annoying”

“Look, go to hell, to the fucking and hottest hell, and rot there!” he screamed, getting up from the chair. James looked at it for a moment, and then kicked it, throwing it against the wall and breaking one leg.

“The therapy would’ve been about this bad habit of breaking things, seriously…” commented George, with a hand over his mouth and shaking his head in bewilderment.

“Where are you going?” asked Thomas, exhaustingly, seeing James heading to the door.

“Away” the shorter man replied sharply.

Jefferson looked at him offended before saying: “Well, send me a letter when you arrive…”

“I’ll send what I want you to know now” he turned around and flipped the bird at him. “Ungrateful son of a bitch… I hope you burn along with your fucking house and your fucking food and your fucking everything”

“Oh, Eliza’s flashbacks again…” said Alexander, making a face.

“It’s a pity I don’t have my phone here to record this…” said Angelica.

“Weren’t you going to leave? Go, fast… I’ll wait you for dinner, as I always do after one of your scenes” said Thomas, crossing his arms, not making any signs to move.

“One of these days, I swear to the God above, I’m going to simply grab the door and leave! And then, you’ll miss me, then you’ll miss all the things I did for you for free!” Madison swore, hand in knob.

“Listen, if you want to leave, I won’t stop you. But leave the door alone, it hasn’t done anything to you”

“Let’s see who stands what I’ve been standing, let’s see”

“No, that’s what I say: what I’ve stood from you, it wouldn’t have been stood by nobody else. That’s why you are 36 and still single, because there is no human being who can stand your nonsenses”

“A nonsense is standing you and supporting you unconditionally. I should’ve done as the rest of your friends and family, they disappeared”
“Just you wait: you’re losing more than winning by leaving. Nobody will stand your shit the way I do!” By that time, Jefferson had gotten up and was pointing at his friend with one finger. “You’re going to end alone, surrounded by hundreds of hairless cats because you are allergic to them!!!!”

“You’re the one who is going to die alone, because not even your daughters stand you!!!”

“At least I have children who can hate me!!!”

“For your information, I’ve had my affairs!”

“When? I never saw one!”

“Yes, like I’m going to take them to your house. One minute inside that underworld and they are shooed away!”

“For taking them to a house, firstly, they have to know they are dating you”

“Don’t worry, I let you do it that way, you’re an expert in that matter. How is Sally doing?”

And then, Thomas simply took the chair he had been sitting on and threw it hardly against the floor. Maria and Angelica screamed when they saw the wooden pieces spread across the floor.

“Hehe, another chair victim” commented Hercules.

“Two less; six to go” added Laurens, failing in containing his laugh.

Alexander looked at Peggy: “And that is why you don’t help people open doors, you just sweep things under the carpet”

“Only the ones who know what sweeping is can do that” commented George, crossing his arms.

Peggy rubbed her temples with one hand, trying to think about the best option to maintain calm. Hercules’ raised hand distracted her.

“Yes, Mulligan?”

“Can you explain something to me?”

“Of course, I’m here for that”

“Why are we focusing on our personal problems? It was not our fault we ended like this, it was Mr. Washington’s”

“Excuse me??” their boss said, eyes wide. “How is this my fault?”

Hercules shrugged. “This is what I see: maybe we are not the perfect team, but we know how to do our job individually. What we have to improve is our teamwork, and that would not be possible if we are under the orders of a man who is incapable of put his quarrels with our personal manager aside,
who also needs to improve that” He leaned back, looking at the circle of seated people around him. “It’s like that old saying that goes: children are just the reflection of their parents, or something like that. Mr. Washington is like our paternal figure, for most of us here, in more than one way. I think we all could do our job better if he just opens the door first, and then we follow his example. At the end of the day, isn’t he the one we look up to, even though we have our differences and fights? He is the one who keeps us together, so, if he can’t be stable, the whole group goes down the drain. Of course, this is only a personal view, Peggy, you’re the professional here. Do as you think it is better”

The whole living room fell silent. A few pair of eyes looked at Washington, who was staring straight at Hercules, thoughtful; Peggy was biting again the pen. She cleared her throat, trying to erase a lump that appeared all of a sudden and refused to leave her alone.

“Alright…” she managed to say with a choked voice. “Alright, that… That was…” Maria raised her hand. “… … Yes, Maria?”

“Can Hercules be the therapist? Like, forever?”

Peggy felt her face burn from embarrassment and ire when she heard everybody commenting in favour.

“No. I know how to do this” she said aloud, silencing them.

“It’s just that I think you’re a bit rusty” said Maria. Angelica snorted a laugh, and Peggy had to put a lot of effort to not hit her with the notebook right then.

“Maria, I am not the one who has to find the path, that’s your job, I’m only here to help you if you get stuck” she explained.

“If you say so…” said the receptionist, not very convinced.

Peggy gave her a nasty look before talking. “Alright, em… Yes, I think Hercules said a good option… Please, Madison, Jefferson, sit down, you’re distracting” she said when she felt everybody was watching the two standing people in the room.

“We have no chairs” explained Jefferson.

“Sit on the floor then!” screamed Peggy. The two men obeyed immediately. “Thank you!” She panted. “Now, what was I saying…”?

“We were about to know what the hell happened between Washington and Lee” Lafayette reminded her.

“Yes, that, thank you…”

“It’s true” Alexander interrupted her sister-in-law, who only put her head in her hands, feeling defeated. Hamilton, unaware of that, turned to his boss. “What happened between you two? We always see you both fighting, but nobody knows what it is”
George shrugged, feeling terribly uncomfortable. “Bah, I don’t know, people… He always has like a bit of jealousy towards me…” He leaned back, his glare fixed on the floor as he recapitulated those years. “I think the last straw was when Lee one day…” he snorted a laugh. “He told me it was an accident, but, c’mon, who could have believed that? It was the last week before final exams, and it was the last month of the last fucking year!”

“What did he do?” asked Aaron, curious.

“The damned bastard spilled coffee all over my paperw…”

Something clicked inside George’s mind at that sentence. A feeling of déjà vu went over his whole body, and he felt himself shivering. The room fell silent once again, and now also felt a bit cold. George turned his gaze slowly to his right, staring at Alexander and Aaron, who seemed to notice what happened and shared a worried look. They smiled at him forcibly. George could even feel his face draining of all colour.

“My God…” he muttered. He looked at Laurens, with wide eyes. “You were right, karma is a bitch” John simply nodded. “I told you” he said, as a matter-of-factly. “I told you all, nobody wanted to believe me, but it’s happening”

“Oh, Jesus…”

“So…” said Hercules, calmly. “Now that we know where the root is, we should set off from there”

“I am the one who says what we do and how, Mulligan, thank you very much” said Peggy, upset.

“But you’re not”

 “… I’m seeing you a bit talkative today, why aren’t you the next to open his door?” Before Hercules could retort, Alexander talked. “You’re so annoying with that door. Jeez… Angelica is obsessed with windows, you with doors, Eliza with shoe racks… I’m going to call you the Ikea sisters”

“What do you say about Eliza and shoe racks?” asked Angelica, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Wish I know: she only wants shoe racks in every corner… I don’t understand why, she only uses two pairs”

“Oh, I do that too” said Lafayette. “I don’t understand why I do that, but I do”

“Can we go back to the disturbing past of Mr. Washington with Mr. Lee, which is too similar to Alexander’s and Aaron’s present?” asked Maria, raising her hand once again.

“If Hercules lets me do my job…” said Peggy.

“If you did your work, I wouldn’t have to do it for you” the man said, with a frown.

“If you stopped interrupting me with your nonsense, I could do my job right”

“Calling ‘nonsense’ to your patients’ problems is not very professional”
Angelica snapped. “Oh, for Christ’s sake, what professionalism? She’s only been drawing ponies in that notebook” And, to prove her point, she took the object away from her sister’s hands and showed the drawings to them.

Aaron tilted his head to the side. “Isn’t that one’s head a bit too big?” he asked.

Peggy took the notebook again and pressed it against her chest. “Leave her alone, she’s suffered a lot already because of it!”

“This unbelievable” said Jefferson, getting on his feet. “And useless” he added, heading to the stairs.

“No, Jefferson, you can’t break the circle!” said Peggy, with a worried tone.

“The circle was already broken, Peggy. Look around you: we’re not more than eight traumatized adults” He started to point at each workmate as he talked about them. “Lafayette’s family dishonoured him because he wanted to follow his own path instead of their instructions and he’s now in a whole different continent trying to fit in and pretending to be happy, though we all know he cries until he’s fallen sleep; Mulligan is here only because of pure fluke, because Mrs. Washington was one of his clients when he worked as a tailor and he has serious complex because he sees himself as inferior in comparison to the rest of us because he just knows he is here because of connections, and maybe that’s why he is always butter everyone up; Maria is another example, why do we need a receptionist? The only thing she does is reading magazines and we all know it, she doesn’t even go to the meetings, she knows she has no place there and she decided to apart herself from everybody because, deep inside, she’s aware that she’s useless, but she’s still working here because Burr couldn’t be a normal lawyer, take her money and leave her re-do her own life alone as the adult she is. No, he had to talk Washington about her and he hired her for pity. Because that is the only reason she is here, pure pity. And she knows it. I can see it in her face all mornings: she just stares at the white wall in front of her, saying automatics ‘good mornings’ to whoever enters the building or when she brings us drinks at the meetings… Angelica’s language is sarcasm because she is afraid of being hurt and she refuses to admit she has an inferior complex she tries to hide so that way her younger sisters do not imitate her and have a good role model, because, maybe, her parents put too much pressure and weight on her shoulders for being the oldest, and nobody took a moment to tell her that she’s fine the way she is, that she wasn’t born to be nobody’s role model and that not everything is her responsibility. Laurens, I’m sure you just gossip that much because your parents did so to you when you were younger; I’m sure you just smoked all that weed because you wanted to forget about your life that consists in returning home alone all nights because your parents also neglected you for your sexuality and you’re afraid of have something of them inside you, and before asking for help, you prefer to numb those thoughts and insecurities with stolen drugs or alcohol. Because, yes, I know it is you the one who took my alcohol from my office.

>>Maybe because of all that, you get along so well with Hamilton, who, when is not at the verge of an alcohol poising, is at the verge of fainting from exhaustion because all the hard work he does. Here comes another hung-up immigrant who overworked himself because he’s obsessed with the idea of letting the world see he’s worth something because his father abandoned him and he’s trying to fill that existential emptiness, not even realizing that he’s missing his children’s childhood and own marriage. Poor Eliza, I don’t know the woman, but something tells me she’s the typical housewife who married a man who is nothing more than a child that needed a mother instead of a wife, and she sees herself raising four children all by herself; I’m sure the poor woman is having the time of her life now that she’s alone in that house… Which reminds me of Washington, who spends his life hiring people just because of pity, as if that is the way business is done. He is still stuck in his mother’s criticism about how he’s unworthy and a loser, and each time he sees someone at the bottom, he just
feels the need to put them up and make them something of value, not matter if he has to risk his own company for that by spending too much money on unnecessary salaries. And as he couldn’t have children of his own except from his wife’s, which – stop fooling ourselves, we know it’s true! – will never be your actual children, and they will never see you as their father, no matter how hard you try or how well you treated them, decided to have a father-son relationship with Hamilton, who seems to be just like him, capable of messing things up for a spilled coffee, and he sees the opportunity of being a father to a man who accepts it willingly because, unconsciously, he misses his father and blamed his leaving on himself.

>>Talking about constant-guilty souls: here comes Burr, the man who smiles and do not talk because he thinks that could only get him into trouble, because he thinks that way it would be easier to cope with all the dead ones he has at his backs, because for some sort of bad raising, he thinks he needs to suppress his feelings in order to survive and he’s not realising that this way he’s hurting himself, his family and his whole environment, no matter how hard he tries to put himself inside a bubble to be apart from the world. The man who can’t realise that by doing that he’s just suppressing and accumulating ire that would be his downfall, because one day he’s just gonna kill somebody, and that would be a day to remember. And Peggy here thought she could fix all this shit just because she has a degree, a degree she didn’t want to have, a degree of a career she only studied because her older sister did and because she feels ignored by her own family and thought that maybe by following her perfect sister’s steps she would be somebody and maybe her parents would tell her how proud they are of her; the woman who is sitting here, talking about opening doors, when she lost the key of her own door a long time ago because her family made her a person without personality and personal opinion about anything, the woman who spends her days at work sleeping because not even her boss remembers she is there, because if he had, he would have said that to Lee and we would have had this rip-off of a therapy back at the office and not in the middle of nowhere. And I wouldn’t have to let my daughters under Abigail’s vigilance all weekend, who already has enough with being married to a piece of meat with eyes that can’t think or talk because he’s too afraid of criticism, of any sort. And I’m not going to talk about how my older daughter is a lost cause, and how my younger daughter has to stand us fighting all day, and how I can’t have a moment with them because I have to work pass night to pay bills because my father-in-law was in debt and now that my wife is not here I have to take care of it all by myself, and do I receive support for my family? No, not all. They used to come all weekends to have free food but now they simply disappeared, just like when our parents died, they only went to see what they have inherited and then rushed off. The only decent sibling I had was Jane, and she had to die as well, and then they asked me why I stopped believing… I don’t believe in a God that let three rats live and takes away the only human being in the family from my life… And the same goes to my supposed friends, the only one who stayed was James. But, honestly, he and I know that if he wouldn’t have that social anxiety and shyness that prevents him to socialize, he would have left me alone as well… Maybe because of that he does all he does, because he feels guilty, because he feels bad and tries to do good deeds to try to erase the guilt…”

Madison sniffed, calling the attention of the whole team, which had glittering eyes: “He just said such an ugly thing to me…”

There was a pause, in which everybody tried to contain the tears and catch their breaths. Jefferson sighed, overwhelmed. Looking at Peggy, he added.
“Life is a shit, Margaret. Nobody asked to be born, but we have to face the consequences of it, things we didn’t ask for either, like… fathers abandoning us, unsupportive families, or a call from the police station on a Friday morning to inform you your sixteen-year-old daughter has mowed down that clown figure of a McDonald’s because she was driving drunk…”

“Man, that’s sad” commented Laurens, sniffing.

Peggy grabbed Jefferson’s wrist gently and smiled at him. “Do you know what you just did, Jefferson?”

“Wrecking eight persons, even himself, in less than two minutes?” guessed Alexander.

“Nope. He just opened the doors”

“… Alright, and now what?” asked Alexander.

Peggy took a moment, then shook her head. “Nothing”

“Nothing?” they all said.

“Nothing” Peggy repeated, nodding.

“So… we just opened the doors to let all our shit out… and that’s it?” asked Lafayette.

“Yep”

“What kind of therapy is that?” asked George.

“One like any other: your life is not going to get better just because you tell your sad story to a psychologist, the only thing that happens is that… you learnt to see that everybody has their own ghosts, and that we have to keep going on. True happiness consists in living unhappy without you realising it”

“… … Wow” said Laurens, and he clapped. “Awesome. Awesome. I want you to treat me once a week, really, I’m a new man”

“For the love of God, she did nothing!” complained Hercules. He pointed at Jefferson. “She only let this man insult us!”

“I didn’t insult anyone” said Thomas. “I just defined you”

“To define something, you need to have an objective look on things” said Alexander. “Something you always lack”

“Said the man who attacks you when you don’t opine the same as he”

“I just want to let something very clear” interrupted Madison, getting up with both hands held. “If I’m alone, it’s because I want it to be this way”

“Yes, yes, of course…” they all said, nodding sarcastically.

“And I don’t spend my nights alone” said Laurens, frowning at Jefferson. “I’ve had my affairs as well”

“Your only affair is now married, so it doesn’t count” said Lafayette, looking at Alexander.
“And it happened too many years ago, John, I know I’m difficult to forget, but you need to move on” said Hamilton.

“Get down cloud nine, Alexander, it’s just that my work keeps me busy”

“You spent a whole day just playing hangman with yourself”

Laurens hit the floor with one foot. “That was our secret! One you weren’t supposed to know. Instead of criticising me, knock on the bloody doors, man!”

“Yes, didn’t they teach you you are supposed to knock before getting in a room back at that forgotten island you were born or what?” asked Jefferson. “You do that quite a lot”

Before Hamilton could answer with a brushoff, Aaron leaned on. “Really, could any of you explain to me what problem do you have with me? It’s my decision if I want to say my opinion or not, wasn’t this a free country?”

“This is the country of the hypocrites” said Alexander, leaning back, arms crossed.

“I don’t like any of this” said Angelica all of a sudden. “This is not working. Peggy, teach us how to close the doors”

“I don’t know how, I’ve only been taught how to open them”

“What was a bad idea was to think you could get this people to talk as civilized humans” said George, brusquely.

“Well, if I remember correctly, we were doing fine back at the motorhome” said Maria, narrowing her eyes at the president.

“Oh, yes, you deserved a prize for your good acting. Instead of laws, why didn’t you do dramatic arts? You already spend your lives being drama queens”

“How much will this last?” asked Alexander, facing Washington with a frown. “Yes, we were pretending, but it was for the best of the company, for the best of ourselves, of you, even!”

George shook his head. “You all lied to me!”

“Buf… Yes. Yes. Yes. We lied, lied, lied, liiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!” screamed Alexander, getting up from the chair, throwing it to the floor in the act due to his sudden movement. “Was that what you wanted to hear, sir?”

“No! Who the hell wants to hear that!”

“And why are you complaining?” asked Lafayette, eyeing his boss accusatory. “The plan was going perfectly fine, it would’ve been a success, but certain someone has to ruin it for a matter of broken pride”

“That’s true” said Maria. “I was even surprised at how well we could do it”

“Yeah, and how well we stood his provocations” said Angelica.

“What kind of boss provokes his employees so they can fight, even if with that he’s risking all our jobs?” said Hercules, glaring at all his workmates.

“Yes, yes… He keeps complaining and insulting us, but he’s no better than us” said Peggy.
“We are here because of him!” accused Lafayette, pointing at Washington.

“Yes, it’s true” some said, under their breaths, nodding in agreement.

“He almost cut my hand!” said Aaron. “What kind of boss do that?”

“The same who wanted us to be at each other’s throats to prove a point” answered Alexander.

“The same who, by doing that, let Lee abandon us here” added Madison.

George looked at them all, looking daggers at him. Slowly, they all began to get up from their seats and advanced towards him. Intuitively, he stood up as well, and started to walk backwards, his hands held defensively.

“What are you doing?” he asked, receiving no answer. “Don’t take another step!” he warned, but his seven employees kept advancing dangerously. “I’m serious, stop this at once!”

George kept walking backwards until he felt the wooden wall against his back. He looked around, seeing himself surrounded by seven pissed off persons who haven’t eaten or taken a decent rest from each other since Saturday morning. He moved his hands blindly, trying to reach something to use as a shield.

“Come on, don’t be stupid. Let’s talk things out like normal persons…”

“A bit too late for that” said Angelica darkly.

“You had one fucking year to do that” added James.

George finally felt the soft fabric of the curtains at his left. He grabbed it tightly.

“I’m warning you…” he said, straightening himself. “Stop right now”

“You can’t give us orders, this is the outside world” Peggy told him.

“And we are isolated from society, no one can hear you scream” added Lafayette.

When George felt too pressed against the wall behind him and saw they wanted to keep getting closer, he screamed and pulled the curtains down with all the strengths he had, stripping them off the wall. The employees took a few steps back, hands held in a useless attempt to protect themselves for any kind of hit. George grabbed the rail immediately before it fell to the floor and held it tight in his two hands. He pointed at the group with it.
“Stay back, shitty sub-animals, or I swear that I will make me an unemployed tapa for lunch!” he threatened, moving the rail back and forth.

Angelica took a leap forwards and put herself on one foot, moving her arms slowly in the air as she let out a war cry. “You stay back! I’ve practiced karate!”

“You only went two days to class” Peggy reminded her.

“More than enough”

“Don’t you dare, Schuyler, I don’t want to hurt you, you’re my third favourite person in the office” said Washington, narrowing his eyes.

Angelica imitated the gest. “You’re also my third favourite”

“Good to know another thing we have in common”

“Same”

They stayed like that for what felt like an eternity, the cold wind entering for the several windows that were opened. Suddenly, George tried to hit Angelica with the rail, only to miss her as the oldest Schuyler sister bent down. Then, she tried to reach the rail but her boss was fast enough to raise it until she couldn’t reach it without losing her balance and falling to the floor.

“That’s why a person needs to end their curses” commented Peggy.

“Angelica, take this!” said Alexander, throwing the leg of the chair Madison had broken before to his sister-in-law.

Angelica leapt in time to grab the leg in the air, and then faced Washington with a superiority glare: “En garde!”

The team began to cheer Angelica on when she and their president began to fight with the chair leg and the rail as if they were swords.

“You can’t beat me, Washington!” Angelica told him between gasps. “I went to fencing classes!”

“But you quitted it after the first day!” Peggy reminded her once again.

Angelica dedicated a nasty glare to her sister, and George took advantage of it, grabbing the leg and taking it away from his vice president. Angelica tried to reach it, but George threw it to the crowd of six witnesses they had, hitting Lafayette in the forehead. The Frenchman moaned and rubbed his temples, then looked daggers at his boss. With a scream, he threw himself against Washington, making them both to fall on the floor. George lost hold of the rail. Angelica grabbed it
and raised it above her head triumphally meanwhile Lafayette punched George in the face.

“This is for not giving me holidays on July!” he rebuked.

George kicked him in the stomach and turned around, now being him on the top of the Frenchman, and giving the punches back. “That was because I caught you faking that ‘horrible illness’ you said you had, and for which I gave you two months of medical leave, thanks to the photos you published on your Instagram about the big party you had at that yacht!”

The two men began to roll on the floor, insulting and hitting each other. Angelica tried to run with the rail, laughing like a maniac.

“Hahahahaha, I’ve got the power! Now, you must do my will!” she said, pointing at the rest with the rail.

“Oh my, God!” said Madison, worried. “She’s drunk of power!”

“And she has only had that thing in her hands for less than ten seconds” said Aaron.

Jefferson ran to her and grabbed the rail while she was still laughing, and both began to wrestle to have the upon hand on it. They went in circles across the room, the rest of the team giving them enough space to struggle.

“Give me that!” screamed Jefferson.

“Never! You don’t deserve it, I’ve been waiting for Washington to ditch and now my moment has arrived!”

“You have to let us decide!”

“No! I deserve to rule, let go the rail!”

“You’ll have to take it away from my cold hands of a corpse!”

Angelica paused for a moment and dedicated him a wide smile. “As you wish!” she said, before start going in quick circles until Jefferson lost hold of the rail, falling against the table beside the front door.

“Angelica! Are you out of your goddamn mind?!” Alexander shouted, walking towards her.

“Yes, I’m crazy, you better don’t test me!” she told him, charging towards him.

Alexander jumped to the right, and Angelica couldn’t stop in time before reaching the staircase. She tried to stop the hit by putting one of the extremes of the rail on the floor, but she only
made herself lift from the floor and a few steps, and crashed against the handrail, breaking in at the moment and falling to the side.

Meanwhile, Laurens had gone to help Alexander get up.

“Jeez, Alex, are you alr…?” something silver caught his attention. “Is that a flask??” he asked.

“Eh? Yes, yes” said Hamilton, hand on head.

“Why didn’t you tell me so?? You didn’t take a sip!” he reproached him, letting go and crossing his arms.

“You’re right, John, I was a bad friend. I should have shared it as you did with that weed. Oh, no, wait. You didn’t. Fuck you, then”

Laurens looked at him for a moment, then slapped him. Alexander also glared at him a few seconds before returning the gest. Laurens hit him again in return; Alexander did the same. They slapped each other for a long moment while Hercules and Aaron finally could get Lafayette separated from George.

“Man, stop it!” Hercules told him. “You can’t hit the president”

“Thank you, Mulligan” gasped Washington, sitting.

“You are not strong enough to choke this son of a bitch!” said Hercules all of a sudden, throwing Lafayette to the side and launching on Washington, hitting him again.

“For the love of God!” said Aaron, passing a hand through his head. “People calm down! Let’s talk things…”

Before he could end that sentence, someone hit him in the head with one of the books that were on the table next to the kitchen door. Burr turned around, seeing Maria holding a few in her arms.

“Maria, what the hell are you doing?” he asked, angry.

“Go to the hell with your fucking dialogue, you annoying pacifist!” she screamed, throwing him another book.

This time, Burr could deflect it. “Don’t throw things at me!” he said.

At the same time, Madison had got closer to Lafayette and helped him be on his feet. The
Frenchman smiled politely at him.

“Merci, Madis…” he was cut off mid-sentence when he felt the short man grabbing the neck of his shirt with force.

“Don’t *merci* me, you annoying prick, when the fuck are you going to give me my Tupperware back?” said James, angry.

“What?”

He shook his workmate with vehemence. “My Tupperware, where are they?” he demanded.

“Back at my house, where they are going to stay, son of a gnome!” replied Lafayette, punching him in the face.

Madison took a few steps backwards, and with the corner of his eye, saw one of the wooden pieces of the chair Jefferson had sat on. He grabbed one and threw it to Lafayette, who dodged it.

“So, this is what you want?” he said, standing still. “Alright, then!”

And both started to throw whatever they could grab at each other, advancing among their other workmates who were still fighting. Finally, James launched at Lafayette, making the Frenchman to try to hold the door to prevent a fall, only to break the upper hinge of the swing door. The fell to the floor and Lafayette crawled until he reached the counter, stood up and opened the closest cupboard. He grabbed a few plates and threw them to Madison, who only rolled on the floor to avoid being hit.

Meanwhile, Angelica had begun to get on her feet, feeling her whole body aching for the small fall and have destroyed the handrail. She rubbed her arms and torso while moaning. She snapped out of his self-unconsciousness when she heard two men screaming getting closer to where she was. With wide eyes, she saw Hercules and George fighting against each other, grabbing the other and running to the stairs to try and knock the other down. Angelica screamed and got on her feet and ran though her body was in pain. She decided to launch herself to the floor to reach what she thought would be the safest distance sooner. Right then, Hercules managed to throw Washington to the stairs, making the man now share her pain.

The great sound of the impact made the whole cabin to fall silent. They looked at each other: Jefferson and Angelica on the floor, gasping and moaning from pain; Hamilton and Laurens with red cheeks; Maria and Aaron frozen before any of them could throw another book more to their contrary; Washington moaning on the stairs; Hercules staggering right in front of him; Lafayette with glasses and plates ready to throw at Madison who was using a tray he was thrown a few moments earlier as a shield. Everybody had bruises or a bit of blood in their bodies or faces. They gasped for a few more seconds and then lowered their guards. Slowly, they began to smile and, then, burst out in a
shared laugh.

“Oh, Heavens, we really lost it this time!” commented Hercules, shaking his head.

“You are right, Mr. Washington, we are sub-animals” said Laurens.

“Well, you still can’t reach the master” said their boss, pointing at himself.

And they laughed again, the tension about to fly away… until Aaron was hit in the back of his head with a chair by Peggy, who watched him fall almost unconscious to the floor. She gasped, and when Aaron turned around, dizzily, to look at her, she simply said.

“That is for leaving me marked as ‘read’ with the double blue check. Nobody leaves me in read with the double blue check”

There was a moment of silence. Shared glares. Frowns. Clenched fists. Screams. Things flying and hitting the floor or the walls.

The war started once again.

“What the hell happened in here?” asked Lee. He feared to put a foot in when all the eyes dedicated him a death glare.

Washington’s team shared a complicity glance with each other as little smiles spread across their faces. Lee took one step back, feeling the cold breeze chilling him.

“We had a little therapy” began to explain Angelica.

“Therapy…?” repeated the personal manager, cocking one eyebrow.

“Yes, and we’ve learnt a lot of very interesting things” added Alexander, helping Laurens get on his feet.

“About ourselves and the persons we work with” said Hercules, standing up slowly.

“Really…?” asked Lee, still not wanting to enter the cabin.
“Oh, yes… And we also rethink all the things we have done wrong” explained Peggy, smiling.

“And we saw how unfair we were to you” added Jefferson, nodding.

“And that we had to make up to you for letting us live this fantastic experience” said Lafayette, helping a limping Madison to get out of the kitchen with him.

“This fantastic, lovable and secluded experience” added James.

Lee swallowed afraid when he saw the whole group getting on their feet and advancing towards him slowly. If it was for their injuries or to scare him, he couldn’t tell... Maybe it was a bit of both.

“Oh… No, I… I’m just fine seeing it worked for you guys” he said, giggling nervously, walking backwards.

He tripped when his foot didn’t touch any floor due to the stairs and could avoid a little fall thanks to Washington, who could grab him in time. Lee looked behind the man’s back, seeing his seven employees smiling at him.

“Come on, Lee” Washington say, leaning in forwards and putting an arm around his shoulders. “Let’s bury the hatchet”

“No, no, let’s hatchets in their respective places…” he said, starting to feel afraid.

He felt eight pairs of hands on him, pulling him inside the house. He fell on the floor and then heard the door being closed behind him. With a jump, he was on his feet and tried to open the door, seeing his efforts were in vain. He began to pound on the door.

“Open the damn door! Come on!”

“Thank you for letting the keys in the ignition!” Washington said from the other side. “Very considerate on your part, only because of that you will be here till Tuesday morning!”

“Tuesday morning???” repeated Lee. He felt his face burning with ire. “Washington, open the door or I swear to God I’m going to destroy you all in the audit!”

“Oh, by the way, there’s no food left!” Lafayette informed him.

“And half of the dishes are broken! And the glasses, you better start sweeping that or you could hurt yourself!” added Madison.

“And a storm hit just yesterday, and these clouds seem to be worse than the ones of that night” said Angelica.
“You have a knife under the bed of the last bedroom down the hall upstairs!” Hamilton informed him.

“Come on, you can’t do this!” said Lee, feeling his blood turning cold. “Come on, be reasonable… We all did stupid things this weekend…” A tap on the window made him feel hopeful. He saw Maria there.

“I’m going to pass something under the door for you” she told him.

“Oh, thank God, Maria, I knew you were the only decent human being here…” he said, smiling. He looked at the floor, seeing a little plastic bag with some herbs inside. He paused for a moment, and then looked back at the window, where Maria was still standing.

“I’d give you a pipe, but Jefferson’s a stingy” she said, shrugging. The horn honked at her backs. “I’ve gotta go, Mr. Lee. Have a nice trip” she bid farewell and then ran to the motorhome.

Lee pressed himself against the window, seeing Joanne abandoning him. “I thought a metallic vehicle would be more loyal than a woman… Life never gets tired of proving me wrong…” he muttered, sniffing at the betrayal.

They spent the first minutes in silence, just moaning from time to time when they pressed ice against their injuries or lay down anywhere soft and stuffing. George drove in silence, feeling the air returning back to his lungs at the sight of civilization ahead of the vehicle. Hamilton was sat at the co-pilot, Burr at his side, whispering something in his ear. Hamilton nodded and Burr took a seat on the set-in couch, sighing.

“Well, people” George talked, calling the immediate attention of his whole team. “I think we’ve learnt a good lesson today: it’s bad to repress our feelings, especially wrath and resent”

“Yes” they all nodded in agreement.

“I hope that, from today on, we do things correctly: we’ll pay our frustrations with the office’s furniture, as decent people do”

“Yes”

“You should’ve listened to me long ago” nodded Hamilton. “I can even bring the boxing bag to the meetings” he offered.

“Yes, that would be nice, good idea” the rest of them, Washington included, agreed.

“And if Lee says anything at all about our expenses in furniture, we will remember this beautiful weekend to him”

“Amen” they all said in unison, lowering their heads in respect.
Burr cleared his throat louder than he normally would. Hamilton looked over his shoulder, seeing his workmate nodding at him. The rest of the team did the same, and Alexander imitated the gesture. He looked at Washington uneasily.

“Hm… Sir?”

“Yes, Alexander?”

“My co-workers and I were wondering… if we have to go to work tomorrow?”

There was a brief pause, a heavy silence. Everybody looked at each other, waiting anxiously for their boss’ answer. Finally, George cleared his throat and answered with a hoarse voice.

“I… I think… I think we all need a rest… You know, from each other…”

The seven of them nodded. “Yes…”

“So…” Alex moved uncomfortably in his seat, feeling his workmates’ eyes in the back of his neck, pressuring him. “We… We’ll see each other on Tuesday?”

George took another too long moment to reply: “I… Hum… I was thinking about… You know… Like a week off?” he suggested. Then, he shrugged. “The man who says one, sometimes means two, I’m dropping it there…”

Hamilton looked over his shoulder, seeing everyone nodding aggressively. “We’re fans of even numbers” he told Washington.

“Good, good…”

“After all I’ve had to put up with on that hell of a weekend… Now, this”

“Man, but did she really do that??” Laurens couldn’t help but laugh after hearing the story.

“I wouldn’t believe it either if I haven’t seen that fucking wall destroyed… Here, see this” Alexander showed him the screen of his phone when they stopped at a red light.

“Oh, jeez… What did your neighbours say?” he asked, driving forwards when the light changed.

“Nothing, we have no neighbours at that side…”

“Well, that’s luck”

“If it had only been the wall. You should’ve seen the bumper of my car…”
“Didn’t you take a photo of that?”

“I’ll let repair shop do that job. I don’t want that image on my mobile… Maybe when my head cools down I’ll ask the mechanic to send it to me or Eliza”

“Man, it’s no wonder why you asked me to drive you to the office”

“I’ll have to take advantage of the two free weeks Washington gave to us to work there alone and in peace; something I won’t do at my house. It’s seeing her, and I want to put her through the fucking wall”

“Poor Betsey, for one time she has fun…”

“Well, couldn’t she have fun inside of the house? House that she and her unknown acquaintances destroyed by the way…”

“Isn’t ‘unknown acquaintances’ a contradiction in itself?”

“I don’t know, my brain is filled with only that destroyed bumper… It’s not the fucking dumper, you know? She could’ve hurt herself, or even kill herself”

“Aaw, so you’re not angry, you’re worried”

“Don’t do that sound again. And I’m not… Maybe a bit of both”

“You should try that therapy of emotional intelligence I told you about”

“John, I don’t want to hear the words: therapy, car or excursion ever again in my whole life… I don’t even want to know anybody named Joanne… Hey, isn’t this a different road?”

“Oh, yes, I… I thought about visiting Adams before going to the office”

“John!”

“Come on, I have to do this”

“Why? A quiche burnt your face, you have two staples at the back of your head and several injuries from the War of Resentment that occurred back at that damned cabin. The karma didn’t give you back the harm you made: it vented its rage on you”

“No, Alex, I have to apologise”

“You made him a favour: he can miss work with a good and believable excuse”

“Alex!”

“Though he’s not missing anything with these two free weeks…”

“Alex…”

“That man has no luck. I’m starting to pity him and all”

“Alex”

“And then you call me heartless… It’s not my fault people get the worst in me. Deep inside, I’m an angel”
“Yes, a fallen one”

John parked at the lot, took the plastic bag he had on the backseat, and, with Alexander entered the building and asked the receptionist where John Adams was. While they were heading to the door that had the number they had been told, John lectured his friend.

“I don’t want you to come in”

“You’re saying it as if you were punishing me…”

“Alex, I’m serious”

“You’re giving the best present ever. I’m not interested in getting in that room”

“Alex, I don’t want you even near the door. I’m serious. Don’t try me. The poor man has suffered enough”

“Alright, I’ll go get us some food from the vending machine”

“Can we use it? We’re just visitors”

Alexander shrugged. “We have to take advantage if it’s still working. It won’t last long that way if Adams is here”

“Alexander…”

“Come on, you know I’m right, I’m in charge of the accounts at the company and we had to call to repair ours thrice this month”

“Go feed yourself, let’s see if that shuts you up”

“You weren’t this disagreeable before you read that stupid book about Buddhism”

John waited until he saw Alexander disappearing through the door at the end of the hall and then knocked on the door in front of him. Adams’ voice sounded at the other side, telling him to get in.

Things went better than John first thought. Adams told him he didn’t have to worry because he knew it was an accident, and there were no hard feelings on his part. That didn’t stop Laurens from apologising at the end of each sentence or when he gave him the presents he had bought for him earlier that morning, before he received a call from Alexander, telling him he needed a cab driver.

John let the flowers on the chair put beside the bed for people like him, who went to visit the patients, along with the chocolates and a few books that, he thought, could entertain Adams during his stay at the hospital. Finally, he showed him the box of cigars he had wrapped cautiously while he
drove to Alexander’s house, taking advantage of the several red lights he found along the way.

“Oh, Laurens, you didn’t have to…”

“Yes, yes, I have” he said, taking one cigar out. “This is the least I can do. I’m very sorry for what happened”

Adams took the cigar. “I told you, I am not angry, it was an accident. And let’s be honest, we all are a bit responsible of the microwave’s death; we hit it everyday” he laughed.

Laurens took out a lighter and ignited it for the cigar. “Are you sure you can smoke here?”

“It’s safer than trying to do it in my house”

“Alright… Oh, wait, I have something more for you” he said, rummaging in the bag.

“Seriously, Laurens, you don’t need to…”

John took out one bottle of whiskey. “Here, I once read one of Jefferson’s conversations with you and know this is your favourite”

“Why did you…?”

“How many times I have to explain I’ve got a problem?” John interrupted him, taking out one plastic glass and serving him the alcohol. “Here, this is not the finest presentation, but I didn’t want to risk two glasses inside a plastic bag on a car” he told him, handing him the glass.

Adams smiled, the cigar in one hand, and the whiskey in the other. “Laurens, I’m starting to see the beginning of a very good friendship”

“Really?” said Laurens, smiling.

Adams nodded while he was about to end drinking, staining the hospital gown: “Oh, jeez, I’m so clumsy”

“Let me help you, dear friend” said Laurens, rubbing the wet clothe with his right hand; Adams saw it was the hand when he still had the lighter.

“Hm… Laurens, careful with…”

He couldn’t end the sentence, as John pressed the lighter unintentionally, igniting one little flame that became bigger once it landed on the alcohol he had on his gown. Adams began to scream, throwing the glass to the floor. Laurens screamed as well, and looked at the lighter before throwing it to the side, cursing it under his breath. He took the bouquet and began to hit the burning gown with it, trying to extinguish the fire, but it only served to set fire to the flowers as well. John screamed when he saw the burning flowers in his hands. He threw the bouquet to the floor and began to step on it, succeeding in extinguish that fire.

“Mother of God, what’s wrong with me?? Adams, take that gown off!” he screamed, running to the window and opening it with a thud. “Come on, I’ll throw it out the window and it will be the outside
world’s problem”

“No, don’t open the window!” Adams managed to say.

Before John could ask why, a buzzing sound almost deafened him. John saw a great number of bees getting in the room, flying through the whole room. Adams moved his hands exaggeratedly, falling on the floor at the uncontrolled and vehement movement.

“Roll, roll on the floor!” John advised him, trying to get the bees out.

“I’m allergic to bees!” he heard him say.

John stopped in his tracks to look at him, perplexed. “Are you fucking kidding me???”

“Hey, John, do you want a normal chocolate bar or are you again going through one of your diets you will abandon within the first wee… What the fucking hell happened in here???” Alexander began to ask, entering the room without knocking and stopped mid-sentence when he saw the room filled with flying bees above a burning and screaming Adams. “Jeez, John, again?? What’s wrong with you?”

“I don’t know!” John cried. “Please, look for help” he begged, taking the pillow in his hands and hitting Adams with it while he tried to shoo the bees away as well.

Alexander took a moment to look at the scene. “Heh… And then I wasn’t allowed to get in because I was going to vex him…”

“GO GET HELP, YOU RESENTFUL ASSHOLE!” John screamed, at the verge of a panic attack.

“On it… On it…” said Alexander, holding both hands in surrender.

He closed the door silently and then went down the hallway walking, hands on his pockets. He talked to the first nurse he saw, running to the room where the screaming was coming from.

“What is that?” she asked him.

“Ma’am, I was looking for someone who could help me…” began to say Alexander. “See, I was just visiting my granny who has taken ill, the poor woman, and then, when I was about to leave, I saw an unknown man on fire and another man, also and more unknown that the aforementioned, trying to help him”

“… What?”

“Oh, I almost forgot… There are bees flying all around the room. I closed the door just in case some get out”

“Oh, Jesus! I said we had to get rid of that stupid hive, I told so, but nobody wanted to listen to me!” she complained, while running to the closed door down the hall.
Alexander took advantage of the fact that he had the car keys to drive himself to the office and try to do the work he couldn’t do back on the weekend. Adams had to spend another month at the hospital. Thanks to his hatred towards confrontations, he could convince his wife, Abigail, to not sue Laurens.

Laurens wasn’t allowed to put a foot on that hospital ever again.
The day death almost gets us

Chapter Summary

Aaron liked stability, loved his monotony, to organize his weekly time and act as he had planned. Aaron didn’t only like to plan his week with things he knew he was supposed to do; he also liked to imagine all the possibilities, everything that could go wrong or right, and so be prepared for whatever that would happen. …And yet, he wasn’t expecting Theodosia telling him he’d have to drive to Alexander Hamilton’s house to pick him up because he had no other way to arrive to the office in time.

And yet, he wasn't expecting what happened (or almost happened) and the consequences it would entail for him and Alexander.

Chapter Notes

DISCLAIMER: Based on: Modern family S6E11 (The day we almost died), which gave me the idea to write this. The show belongs to its own creators. The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda

WARNING: Swearing, black (almost jet) humour and lots of craziness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eliza liked George Washington. She was first introduced to him when Angelica and he began to work together in order to get their own separated company. Washington used to come over her sister’s house, which Eliza frequented often to prove her parents she could be independent, and she have exchanged a few polite words that turned into friendly chat as the time passed by. And the relationship consolidated when Angelica became Washington’s right-hand woman and, later, vice president and, a couple of years later, her husband began to work for him as well.

In few words, Eliza was very close to her sister and husband’s boss; she saw him as part of her family, especially when she was aware of the relationship and trust he had put in Alexander and the way her husband looked up to him. But there had been no time, in all these ten years of friendship with George Washington, that Eliza had loved the man more than when her sister called and told her they were given two free weeks at the office for ‘she-didn’t-remember-didn’t-care-at-all-what’. When you receive that call in the middle of a horrible hangover, having flashes of the images of the many mistakes you made the previous night – like, for example, crashing your husband’s and your car against the wall that separated your garden and the, by the moment, non-existent neighbours’ garden, destroying it and the bumper of the car – you feel like you have been blessed.
Two weeks may seem like nothing to some, especially when you are married to Alexander Hamilton, the man who never forgets, and writes down every little detail of his life to be sure he would remember everything. But she was Elizabeth Schuyler, she knew who she married, and she was a mother, a job that blessed her with a more potent sixth sense than an average woman. She knew she could make up to Alexander in that time.

Alexander let her sleep all she wanted when he returned home, and even went to pick their children up from school – where her parents had taken them when they saw neither of them gave signs of life – and cooked dinner for himself and the kids. He let her be alone in their shared room till late at night, when he finished writing and decided it was time to sleep. Though it may sound like the perfect morning after a crazy weekend, she felt terrified. Alexander was more dangerous when he refused to talk, than when he screamed atrocities at your face.

The next morning, Eliza woke up earlier than usual, feeling a bit better. She made breakfast and prepared the children for school. Philip and Angelica were responsible for the deep cut she had in her index finger right now.

“Mummy, are you and Daddy gonna divorce?” her son asked her.

And Eliza lost focus on what she was doing when that question reached her ears, and she mistook her finger for one of the vegetables she was cutting. She cursed between clenched teeth while she pressed the injury and washed her finger under the faucet. She inhaled, feeling her forehead wet with sweat.

“Where did you learn that word?” she asked, once she wrapped the finger with one paper towel.

“We’ve learnt it in class” this time, it was Angie who answered.

“Class? You’re in nursery school!”

“Well, it wasn’t part of the subjects” explained Philip. “But our teacher is not having a good time in his personal life…”

“Your father and I are fine, children. Now, eat or your food will cool down”

“Like our teacher’s marriage?” asked Angie, curious.

“Or theirs, for that matter” commented Philip.

“You’re grounded once we are back from nursery school”

While hearing her children complaints, Eliza made a mental note about talking to Alexander to look for another nursery school. And cursed Angelica for have recommended it to her, in the first place.
Alexander didn’t put a foot in the kitchen that morning, but Eliza heard him closing the door quietly. And when Alexander didn’t make noise, it was more alarming than when he didn’t talk.

Days passed by quite slowly, in Eliza’s point of view, and the first week was a complete failure. Alexander established the ice law with her, and didn’t even call the mechanic to arrange an appointment, and that meant, each time she looked out the window, she had to see the destroyed bumper of their dark blue minivan. It was a sweet and silent revenge, she knew. Especially when, at Thanksgiving, she found the chair that faced the window vacant for her. She said nothing and just sat down, and tried to entertain herself with the conversation that flowed around her. She was never happier of having her relatives in her house to celebrate a holiday like that day. Angelica and Peggy felt the tension, but, for some reason Eliza couldn’t understand, said nothing at all. And it was then when Eliza felt the urgency to know about what happened back at that excursion, because her sisters and husband seemed to have made a pact of silence. She called Theodosia next morning, to see if she knew something, but Aaron was quiet. Quieter than usual when he was asked something about those two days.

Eliza was starting to feel helpless.

The next week, however, things felt a bit better. At least, that was what Eliza wanted to tell herself when she saw Alexander working on the living room, instead of in his office, kilometres away from home. It was the first time since he came back from that excursion that he decided to fill the silence of the house with his incessant typing. And Eliza was never gladder to hear him working as that day. She brought him a few coffee mugs, not trying to start a conversation. Still, she decided to read that book Angelica lent her eight months – almost nine – ago. It would be better to say: she tried to, as the sentences before her seemed to be written in a foreign language.

On Tuesday, the minivan was finally out of view. She assumed it was at the repair shop. Her suppositions became true when she heard Alexander talking to the mechanic on the phone. Alexander didn’t make any comments in that regard, and neither did she. On Wednesday, she found herself alone with the children when she woke up, a message from Angelica telling her she needed to work on something with Alexander. Eliza thought about making a visit, but then remembered it would be the three of them, and cast the idea aside. After that Thanksgiving dinner, she didn’t trust her sister to erase the tension. Whatever the hell happened on that weekend? She wondered each time.

On Thursday, however, she was glad to find Alexander working on the living room once she came back from dropping their children off at nursery school. She prepared him some toasts and coffee, and placed them on the table. This time, she thought it was time to start a conversation.

“It’s quiet in the mornings”
She received no answer and decided it was better to not push it. Even so, she (tried to) read the book in the living room, the tapping on the keyboard as her background music.

On Friday, Eliza did her routine of driving the kids to their nursery school and, as every Friday, went to the supermarket to buy all the things she thought would be needed for the weekend. She was surprised when she arrived at home and smelled the scent of coffee and toasts. She sighed, thinking about spending the rest of the day in her room or planning to meet Theodosia. She entered the kitchen, prepared to put the groceries in their respective places, when she was startled by the sight of Alexander sat on the table, eating and reading the newspaper. Eliza stood there for a moment, and when she saw no movements on his behalf, resumed her initial plan of placing what she had bought.

She had to stop again when she saw there was another plate and mug of coffee on the table, and the chair beside Alexander prepared for someone to sit on it. Eliza eyed the sight for a moment, and let the bags on the counter. She sat beside her husband and sighed when she saw the toasts weren’t burnt. That would be a very hurtful irony. She ate in silence, taking a few sips from her mug from time to time. She startled when she felt a hand upon hers all of a sudden. She waited.

Without looking up from the paper, her husband’s voice broke the silence.

“It’s quiet in the mornings”

Eliza felt a warm feeling wrapping around her heart and felt the hint of a smile spreading across her lips. She took Alexander’s hand in hers firmly, and resumed her eating.

By Monday, the house had get its habitual noisy environment back. And Eliza felt happier, for the first time, when she heard her husband screaming at the phone at first thing in the morning. And fuck the neighbours if they were disturbed, none of them payed her for the damages of that party.

She got out her room and went trotting to the living room, where she saw Alexander pacing from left to right and vice versa with the cordless phone. She pressed her side to the jamb of the door, smiling widely.
“No, no, let me tell you something, goddamn son of a bitch” began to say Alexander, red as scarlet. “You told me you would have my car first by Monday. Well, Monday arrived, you’ve been opened for half an hour by now, and I have no calls from your joke of a business. […] No, no, you calm down. And you better lower the price of whatever the fuck you’re doing to my car. I’m going to be there this afternoon, first thing I’ll do when I’m outta work. I won’t tell you the hour I leave, but when I get there, I want to see the car in perfect state for review! Good morni…! No, stop giving me excuses, this afternoon, the fucking car has to be fixed and perfectly perfect! Now, good morn…! I SAID GOOD MORNING!”

Eliza saw Alexander hanging up and prepared to throw the phone. She was fast enough to grab it and take it in her own hands. Alexander looked at her, acknowledging her presence for the first time since she arrived.

“Honey, it’s new…” she reminded him, pointing at the phone.

“What’s wrong with the world, Eliza?” he asked her, shaking his head and grabbing his papers from the table. “Why nobody can take their job seriously? They better have the car fixed when I go there that afternoon”

“Yes, if they love being alive, I hope they would” she admitted, nodding.

“Now, thanks to their fucking incompetence, I have to go to work by walking. I hope to get there in time” Alexander looked at his watch, groaning when he saw the time.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got you covered” Eliza explained, with a smile.

Her husband gave her a quizzical look. “You have?”

Eliza nodded. “I remembered you telling me John’s car broke on the weekend, and I texted Theodosia if Aaron could pick you up”

“… What?”

“Yes! So, you can drop kids off at nursery school today, because he’s driving there with little Theo!” she explained, happily. Her smile began to fade away when she saw her husband giving her a nasty look. “Is something wrong?”

“Eliza, honey, love of my life, light of my existence, best of wives and women, were you born this stupid or you simply are going to classes to improve your imbecility?”

“Excuse me?” she said, crossing her arms, offended.

“I’m asking because I’m curious. Why on Earth would you do that stupid thing if you were clever, right?”

“What the hell are you talking about! You needed a drive, and I gave it to you!”

“Mother of God, Eliza, you didn’t have enough with breaking my fucking car and you wanted to finish me off with this?”

“I didn’t break the car” said Eliza, defensively. “That wall just was in the middle of the road, I
couldn’t react in time”

“You shouldn’t have drunk in the first place”

“Oh, look, the drunk of the millennium giving me lessons about my alcohol consumption”

Alexander had his head between his hands. “Now, I’m gonna start the day standing Burr and his fucking habits of driving under the speed limit… That man can’t even risk it a bit with an amber light…” He looked daggers at her. “Thank you very much, Eliza, you just made my day”

“Fuck you. It’s the last time I have a detail with you”

“A detail is giving me a tie for Christmas, not trapping me in the same car with Aaron, the man who is overtaken by turtles”

“Buf…”

“And pray to God, because if that stupid man put that retro music on the radio, I won’t take responsibility for my actions”

“No, you better pray to God that, by the time you come back home, I haven’t burnt your whole collection of books”

Alexander smiled. “Wish you luck, I’ve hidden all the lighters of the house”

“Why???”

“Because I don’t want any of my closest ones to have anything to do with inflammable things ever again” Alexander closed his briefcase with a thump and raised the punch in a solemn way. “Never again I want to see a close one with one of those shitty objects!”

“What’s gotten into you??”

“ASK ADAMS!”

“Since when do you talk with him? YOU NEVER TELL ME ANYTHING!”

Eliza heard the door slammed shut and crossed her arms, kicking the floor, enraged. She looked at her right, seeing Philip and Angie holding hands, with their backpacks and a confused look. Eliza looked at them for a moment, and then said.

“Hey, kids, do you want to see Mummy do magic?”

The children looked at each other and shrugged. “Sure”

“Your father is gonna get in in one… two… three…”

She pointed at the door, and Alexander opened the door, looking everywhere. When his eyes fell on the kids, he gestured them to get out.
“Come on, kids, you need to go to school!” he hurried.

“You were the one who forgot about us” Angie reminded him, heading to the door with her brother.

“It’s your fault for being quiet. What kind of children are quiet nowadays?” Alexander complained. “I’m gonna give you a bell necklace for Christmas!”

Eliza sighed when she heard the door being closed. She looked around the house, arms in akimbo.

“Where would that little bastard put my lighters??”

Aaron liked stability, loved his monotony, to organize his weekly time and act as he had planned. When he married Theodosia and had a child, they decided to divide their parenting obligations fairly, and so, one week Theodosia drop her daughter off at nursery school, and the other week, he would do it. His wife had tried to convince him to change things those two weeks, saying she could take Theodosia that week as well so he could start his return to the office more peacefully. Aaron refused the idea as soon as he heard it, saying it wouldn’t be fair as he had two whole weeks to recover from the horrible experience at the cottage. Theodosia tried to ask him what he was talking about, but he sealed his lips, and she, more than used to that behaviour on his part, let him be.

So, Aaron woke up that morning earlier than he would so he’d have time to take Theo to the class and then drive directly to his office-war field. He prayed Washington had had enough time to cool down in those past two weeks. God, he wouldn’t even blame him if he didn’t appear until next month. Aaron didn’t only like to plan his week with things he knew he was supposed to do; he also liked to imagine all the possibilities, everything that could go wrong or right, and so be prepared for whatever that would happen.

…And yet, he wasn’t expecting Theodosia telling him he’d have to drive to Alexander Hamilton’s house to pick him up because he had no other way to arrive to the office in time. He didn’t dislike the guy, and their children were friends, so they were used to spend time outside the work hours, so he learnt to cope with him and also accept him just as he was. But, sometimes, his introverted side couldn’t manage to spend time with someone as outgoing as Hamilton. And the first day of work after a break of two weeks was one of those occasions.

He had managed to get away with it when he was a student. His grandmother and uncle and
aunt didn’t say anything about how he used to avoid people on the first days of school after each holiday. His parents had perceived it, but didn’t say anything, and couldn’t have the chance to change their tactic, sadly. Aaron still remembered when he told himself to wait until adulthood, that then he wouldn’t have to worry too much because adults could do their lives without depending on others. Aaron still felt stupid each time he remembered those days. Which happened to him quite frequently.

He could’ve been honest with Theodosia, and told her he couldn’t do it because he was feeling a bit uneasy, but he refused to be a burden to people around him. He learnt that at a young age as well. So, he simply smiled at her and pretended to be completely fine with going to work on the first day, after two free weeks, with one of the most extroverted and talkative people in his whole office. Theodosia simply bid him farewell with a kiss on the lips before calling their daughter so they could leave.

Maybe he could’ve been honest… But he didn’t like confrontations. Another bad habit he couldn’t get over with the years. So, he just helped Theodosia sit on her child safety seat and then got in, driving to Hamilton’s address. He turned on the radio, stopping at the 80’s music station, so he could calm himself and have something to entertain his mind. He just hoped Hamilton was having a good morning. They were going back to work, anyway.

He lost hope when he saw his workmate slamming the door shut and cursing under his breath, while trying to put a scarf on. He strengthened the hold on the steering wheel, and increased the volume, praying Hamilton could get the hint before he entered the vehicle rambling. He waited uncomfortably when he saw Hamilton getting in his house again. And shook his head while rolling his eyes when the man exited the place, now accompanied by his two children.

Aaron disabled the safety lock on the rear doors to let Philip and Angie in. The two siblings greeted him with a smile, and Aaron gave them a small nod in return, smiling when he saw Theo starting a conversation with her two friends as soon as Hamilton closed the door. At least, she hadn’t taken after me on that matter, thought Aaron, relieved. He watched as Alexander got in the car, closed the door, locked it, and put his seatbelt on without making eye contact and just muttering words.

“Good morning, Alexander”

“Good morning”

And there was nothing more. Maybe he could still have a peaceful morning.
The nursery school wasn’t too far away from the building they worked at. They thought it was one the reasons – if not the only one – Angelica had picked it when her son was too young and she had to go back to work.

It had been a quiet ride, except from the voices of the children at the backseat and the music. Aaron was surprised and relieved at the same time when Alexander said nothing at all about his driving, and even felt enough tranquillity to start humming the song that was sounding on the speakers. Maybe it was a way to put his attention in other thing that wasn’t the image of Hamilton stretching his foot, pretending to press an imaginary gas pedal, or the times Hamilton huffed when he let every car and pedestrian pass. Aaron could see the stop at intersection a few kilometres ahead from them; and, farther, the blue signal of ‘caution, school area’.

They were almost there. It would be only a few more kilometres. Then, he would drop the children off, give Hamilton a minute alone in the car to curse his whole family tree and then go back to the car to drive them to the office. Aaron had it all planned… except from the possibilities. Like, one distracted teenager crossing in the middle of the street instead of walking a few more steps to cross through the zebra crossing. Even so, Aaron braked… Alexander didn’t slow down the comment this time.

“For the love of God, Burr, are you kidding me?!”

“What?” he asked, after a brief startle. The kids had stopped talking, and were now paying attention to them.

Instead of answering him, Hamilton launched on the steering wheel and honked. Aaron leaned back on his seat, seeing as the poor teenager almost touched a cloud for the frightened jump they had provoked him. He looked at them, with a hand on his chest.

“The zebra crossing, anarchic of the traffic!” Alexander screamed, pointing at the thick white lines painted a few steps further. “There is one just there! Are you in a hurry to fall sleep in class, future national embarrassment??”

The boy looked startled at them for a moment, and then resumed his walking, looking over his shoulder from time to time. Aaron mouthed ‘sorry’ to him, and then resumed the driving.

“If you don’t cause a stir, you are not happy, right?” said Aaron, frowning.

“Don’t come to me with that, Burr. Gosh, I’ve been standing your stupid music and your turtle speed and your annoying ‘yes, yes, it’s alright, old lady, take three minutes to cross from sidewalk to
sidewalk because I have all the time in the word’ with my mouth shut, but I have limits!”

“Alexander, we do have time” said Aaron calmly. He pointed at the clock on the dashboard. “We’ll be at the office at half past seven exactly”

“But I want to arrive a few minutes before, because that way I can have my little time at the rest room without anyone pestering me”

“The ones who are always in the break room are your friends” Aaron reminded him, with a cocked eyebrow.

“I know, and I adore them and all that, but do I have to adore them at first thing in the morning?” Before Aaron could answer, he puffed again. “Amber, amber, amber, AMBER!”

“I’m seeing it!” said Aaron, slowing down.

“But speed up, SPEED UP!” Alexander hurried him, and complained when he saw the light, still a few meters away from them, turning red. He clapped slowly and sarcastically. “Bravo”

Aaron frowned. “Can you calm down? I told you we still have time”

“It’s not the time anymore, Burr, I’m sick of you driving like an old grandpa with cataracts”

“In that case, I’m an old grandpa with cataracts who drives safely” Aaron blurted out.

“Yes, and who lets everybody pass you”

“I’m not in a hurry” he said, shrugging.

“Well, if they are, then they would’ve left their houses earlier”

“It’s called being polite and putting in others’ shoes”

“Do you know where those two things get you? Nowhere. If this driveway were life, you would be homeless and unemployed” Alexander looked over his shoulder to look at his children. “This is what I talked about when I tell you have to fend for yourselves, kids; no one will do it for you”

Aaron looked at the rear mirror to see Theo. “Or you can be kind to others, like in ‘Pay it forward’. Nobody makes movies about bad ideas” he added, looking at Alexander, who was looking at him with eyes half-closed.

“And what about the ‘Sharknado’ saga?” asked Theo.

“That’s different, honey, those are movies which are made to make fun of them” answered Aaron.

“Well, it started to be sadder than funnier as the sequels went out” the little girl said.

“I can agree on that” said Alexander.

Aaron sighed, trying to contain the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose. Just a few kilometres more, the intersection, the nursery school, and then, finally, the office. “Look” he began to say, “you can’t spend your life throwing punches at every living thing that cross your way. I don’t want a confrontation”

“I see that. I’ve been seeing it for more than ten years already…” his phone buzzed and Aaron sighed, grateful. “Who is it now?” he complained, taking it out his pocket. “Turn that damned music
off already” Alexander spat, and Aaron did as he was told, not wanting another fight. Alexander answered the call. “Angelica, I’m not going to give Eliza the lighters back” he said as soon as he had the phone against his ear.

In the exact moment he was talking, Aaron’s phone rang through the speakers. He answered the call, making sure the children were already talking about their things and wouldn’t pay attention to the call. He still turned off the backseat speakers just in case.

“Hello?” he said.

Alexander dedicated him a death glare. “Unbelievable” he muttered, rummaging inside his briefcase to take his earphones out and plugged them to the phone; he was almost deafened when he could hear Angelica’s loud voice inside his ear. “What? Excuse me, Burr likes to bug me though he claims he doesn’t want a confrontation” he explained, looking at the pilot with the corner of his eye. He saw Aaron frowning, lips pressed and knuckles turning white as he strengthened the hold on the steering wheel. He decided to not pay attention by the moment.

“I said that what the hell are you talking about?” repeated Angelica.

“Nothing. I thought Eliza… Nothing, nothing” Alexander didn’t want to explain the fight right then, though Aaron seemed distracted. “Do you want something?”

“I need you to take care of Adams’ cases until he recovers”

“Why me?”

“Because the others are busy”

“Doing what? Saying stupid things, losing time in the break room??”

“The ones who spend more time in that break room are your friends”

Alexander’s face burnt with fury. “You as well? Mother of God, did you all create a chat group where you decided to ruin my day?”

“Man, stop being so overdramatic” Angelica snapped, tedium clear in her voice. “Washington wants you to take care of Adams’ cases, if you have something to say about it, then go to his office and say it to him”

“Of course I will, first thing I’m going to do when I put a foot in there”

“I’m only the messenger” Angelica had kept talking.

“That’s another thing: why do you call me? Instead of him?”

“Maybe because the poor man is having a horrible first day. And so do I…”

“And you decided to make it difficult for me as well?”

“Ugh, just take care of the walrus’ cases until he comes back, you annoying brat!”

“If I take care of one of those cases, then he would want me to do them all” Alexander exhaled,
trying to contain himself in front of his children. “You know that. The last thing that man needs is someone else doing his job” Alexander saw Aaron hanging up with vehemence, and cocked an eyebrow at that.

“Alexander, he’s not on vacation or faking ill; he was burnt alive. Twice” Angelica reminded him.

“Then, tell Laurens to take care of them!” he shouted.

“Do you want Laurens in a court? He barely knows why we pay him for in the first place”

“I have to take care of the accounts of this month, Angelica, I have to take care so the whole place doesn’t knock down”

“Don’t have such airs. Anyone with a calculator from the shop around the corner could do your job quieter and faster. Don’t test me”

“And anyone who could scream and insult without any regret could do your job; don’t test me”

Alexander could feel Angelica’s blush of anger in her voice. “Shut up, gremlin, and do what I’ve told you to do or I’ll be on Jefferson’s side in the next meeting!”

She hung up after that and Alexander was left looking at the phone with a quizzical expression. He put the mobile inside the briefcase while groaning.

“Why all the Schuyler sisters have to be crazy?” he wondered out loud. Aaron turned to face him, a frown of his face, but he nodded, letting him see he was going to listen. “Damned the hour I thought marry one would be a good idea…”

Alexander was cut off when Angie screamed, seeing a truck appearing in the intersection at maximum speed, ignoring the stop signal. Philip and Theo imitated her, covering their eyes. Their fathers shouted courses. Aaron turned the wheel abruptly, the screeches of the wheels almost inaudible thanks to their screams. The car circled twice before stopping in the middle of the street, horizontal just when the intersection started. They felt the vehicle inclining to their rights, but it didn’t fall to the side, a thing only the two adults, now in cold sweat, realised and were thankful for.

They were frozen at first, no more vehicles in the road or any person walking by to see them gasping for air and pale as ghosts. When they felt their hearts beating regularly again, they started to talk at once, just wanting to let their thoughts out and not listening to the other person.

“Oh, my God! My freaking God!” said Alexander, passing a hand through his hair.

“It almost crashed against us!” shouted Philip, holding his sobbing sister.

“I think I’m gonna be sick” cried Angie, clinging to her brother’s shirt.

“Jesus, kids, are you alright?” said Alexander, turning around.
“No!” Theo said out loud, trying to be heard over her friends’ voices.

“Dad, the truck!” cried Angie, finally letting go of her brother’s shirt and stretching both arms towards his father.

Alexander took one of her hands. “Alright, alright, it’s alright… Oh, Jesus Christ, saint Virgin, what…”

“I saw my life in front of my eyes” claimed Philip, with trembling voice.

“What would have happened to Mum??” wondered Theo, hyperventilating.

“For one day that I did my homework” added Philip.

“Your poor mother…” said Alexander suddenly, remembering Eliza. “She wouldn’t have found the lighters… What a way to remember our last conversation” he put a hand over his mouth.

The rambling kept going on. The only one who didn’t open his mouth, looking through the windshield, hands holding tightly the steering wheel, was Aaron. When Theo started to cry, wondering what would have happened to them if they hadn’t been that lucky, he seemed to snap out of it. He looked around him, seeing now Angie on her father’s lap, crying in his neck while Alexander held Philip’s hand. The boy talking with Theo, both talking about how huge was the truck and trying to understand what had happened. Or almost had happened.

“Alright, alright, the four of you, calm down” he said, clearing his throat and straightening in his seat. “Nothing happened”

When they heard his statement, they looked at him with wide eyes. They shared a glare and then fixed their eyes on him once again.

“Dad, what are you saying?” asked Theo, tilting her head.

“Aaron, it almost killed us, didn’t you see it?” said Alexander, holding her daughter closer.

He simply nodded. “Yes, you said it, Alexander: almost”

“Aren’t you afraid, Mr. Burr?” asked Angie in a timid voice, sniffing.

“I need more than a distracted lorry driver to spoil a day that started with a pancake with a smiley face made of syrup, little one” he explained, smiling slightly and warmly.

“I wanna go home…” muttered Philip.

Aaron watched in silence how Alexander got out of the car. Angie hanging onto him and he embracing her, though that would make his actions more difficult to develop. Philip followed his father’s example and got out of the vehicle, not before saying goodbye to Theo, who barely could
wave a hand in response, too lost in thought.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to give you a ride to your place, Alexander?” asked Aaron calmly.

Alexander shook his head and took a moment to reply, for the first time, not knowing how to express himself. “No, we… No, I think we rather walk back” And his children nodded vehemently, to show their agreement.

“Alright. Have a good day and rest as much as you can” he said, starting the car.

“Aaron”

“Yes?”

“Thank you”

“Not needed, Alexander”

Eliza had to turn the house upside down looking for the lighters. She had looked under the couch and its cushions; deep inside all the closets and shoe racks; behind all the closets and shoe racks, revealing to herself how strong she could be when the moment was worth it; inside the tool box; inside the boxes that they had in the attic where they kept the Christmas ornaments; inside every drawer of every desk; under the beds, under the mattresses, under John’s crib and little mattress as well, ignoring the questioning look the littlest of the family gave her; inside the drawers; under the sheets of the drawers; inside the hamper of the laundry… She even took out the garbage bags from the trashcan and emptied them all across the kitchen floor. She could clean it later, she would be alone until one pm, anyway…

Nothing. She scratched the back of her hair, feeling desperate.

“Where could he have hide them??” she wondered out loud, throwing the empty bag to the floor. She snapped her fingers. “Oh, the coffee machine?? No, I used it every morning for him… It has to be something I never use but he does… A pen is too small… Oh, maybe inside one of his folders?”

Eliza ran to his husband’s workroom once again and went to open the drawers she had seen a collection of thick folders. She knew Alexander hated when some of them touched his things, especially when they were things of his job, but Eliza couldn’t care less right then. She took one of the folders out, and began to pass sheets, and sheets, and sheets… She finally threw the folder to the air, making thousands of papers fly and fall around her and on the floor. She knelt, spreading the papers while she looked for something thicker and metallic…
“If I don’t find them before one pm” she started to swear, under her breath, panting desperately when she kept finding nothing at all. “I’m going to hide his computer, all pens, pencils, markers and even the razors, so he wouldn’t be able to even write with his own blood”

The front door was heard being opened and shut with a thud, and her face drained from all colour. She started to pick up all the sheets around her, in a disorganized way, gasping from pure nervousness.

“What the hell could he have forgotten?” she wondered under her breath, throwing the papers to the table, only to some of them to fall again at her side.

A series of rapid steps made her heart skip some beats. She felt calmer when she saw it was Philip and Angie… Wait, what?

“Mummy, mummy!” the children cried, throwing at her arms, hugging her with all their strengths.

“Kids, what are you…?” she tried to ask, but they began to talk at once.

“The truck…!”

“Mummy, it was huge!”

“The car circled, it went in circles!”

“I’m dizzy!”

“Mummy, mummy, it almost hit us!”

“Alright…” said Eliza, confused. “Alright, kids, that’s enough!” she said, managing to silence them. “I can’t understand you if you talk at the same time. Now, what are you doing here instead of being at the nursery school? Where is your father?”

Just as she ended that sentence, Alexander appeared at the door.

“Eliza!” he said, also throwing himself to her arms.

“Alexander” she said, feeling suffocated as the children were still clinging to her. “What… What are you three doing here? What happened?” she asked, feeling alarmed when he felt them shaking in her embrace.

“Mummy, the truck, the truck!” Angie screamed once again.

“What truck?” she asked. “Alexander, what’s going on?”
Her husband ended the hug, but still had his hands upon her shoulders. “Eliza, a truck… A stupid truck just skipped a stop signal and… God…” Alex stopped touching her to bury his face in his hands. “It skipped a stop signal and… And Aaron had to turn the car abruptly and we…”

“Oh, Heavens, Alexander” exclaimed Eliza, not liking what she was imagining with that poor explanation. She didn’t want to hear a better one. “Are you all alright?” she asked, giving him a tighter hug than before and then knelt to look at her children.

“Yes, yes” said Philip.

“Mr. Burr saved us” explained Angie.

“Oh, Aaron and Theo!” Eliza’s eyes grew wide with realization. “Are they alright?”

“Yes, nothing happened, but…” Alexander sighed. “God, Eliza, I saw my whole life in front of my eyes” he confessed. She saw the children nodding. “And the last thing I saw was our fight”

“We fight all mornings” she said, shrugging.

“No, but this time I couldn’t have come back to pretend it never happened”

Eliza took his hand, giving him a reassuring squeeze. “Well, I destroyed the wall outside, and the bumper of the car… And half of the house to look for the lighters… We’re even” she tried to comfort him.

Alexander just shook his head. “Gosh, and the last thing I’d have told your sister was that I could do her job better than her and that she wasn’t needed” he realised.

“What?” she asked, confused.

“I’ll have to apologise to her… I’ve got so many people to apologise to” he said, more to himself than to her.

“Honey, I think you need to calm down” she commented.

“I’m so sorry for everything, Eliza” he said, kissing her in the lips. “I’ll make it up to you, I promise. Things are going to change from now on”

“I don’t understand” she admitted.

“First thing I’m going to do” he said, taking his phone out his pocket “it’s to call Washington and tell him I need more days off”

“But didn’t you already have two weeks?”

“I’ve never used any of my free days that I deserve by law, Eliza, not even when I was sick. That company owes me at least two whole months”

“That’s true…”

“Second thing I’m gonna do: I’ll spend more time with the children. We’ll play. What do you think?” he asked, looking at the two still startled kids.

They gave him the hint of a smile, relaxing a bit after that. “Nice” they answered.

“But true games, not like when I made you play things like ‘Pretend to be your favourite furniture’ so
you could be quiet while I was working”

“You did what…?” asked Eliza, cocking one eyebrow.

“Which reminds me” Alexander kept talking. “Third thing: to the hell with working at home. I’ve got an office for something. I won’t ever bring work to this house again”

“What if is it important?” asked Eliza, taking one step closer.

“Nothing is more important than family, Betsey. Which reminds me, fourth thing: we are going to spend more time together. We’ll go on dates and you can talk to me about your day… We can even go skating and sightseeing, as you wanted to do on our honeymoon, but couldn’t because I was too busy, as always”

Eliza smiled at that image. “Better late than never, I guess” she joked.

“And I’m never going to be late for you or the kids again, Eliza. I want you to teach me everything about how to take care of the baby or about the washing machine”

“But I thought you didn’t understand those things”

“Of course I do, I’m not an idiot. But pretending to be one is easier and more comfortable”

“… Alright, I guess…”

“I’ll start by cleaning all this” said Alexander, finally letting go of her hand and kneeling to pick up the papers.

“No, I did all this…” she said, feeling bad.

Alexander stopped and looked at her in the eyes, serious. “And how many times have you cleaned our messes, Eliza? How many times?” And then, he kept picking up papers and throwing them unceremoniously on the table. Eliza looked at that with perplexed eyes. “And when I’m finished with this, I’ll take you and the kids to eat ice cream”

“Alright…”

“And you can show me the streets and nice things we must have around here! As you wanted to do when we moved, but couldn’t because, again, I was too busy”

“… Alright, yes, that… That sounds like a good plan” she said, taking a few steps backwards.

“That is going to end, Eliza”

“…What?”

“Being busy. I will never be. Unless for you and the children. We will go on vacation to those places you see on magazines or on TV and I always lied to you saying that I’ll think about it” Alexander ended up picking a great amount of papers and wrinkling them into balls.

“Alright, yes, don’t… Don’t hurry, the places aren’t going anywhere… Aren’t those important?” she asked, pointing at the papers.

“I don’t know. I don’t care. If I haven’t needed them in the last twenty-four hours, I don’t want them anymore” He opened the window and threw the ball-sheets out. “Fuck off”
“I think you should read them before…” Eliza tried to say.

“You know what? I’m not going to let this shit entertain me any longer” Alexander interrupted, looking nasty at the papers on the floor. “We are going for our deserved ice cream right now!” he declared, and the children screamed with happiness. Eliza saw them ran out the workroom and was surprised when she felt Alexander’s arm tangled with her own. “And I want you to tell me everything about you. From this day on, I will be the one who listens”

“…Alright?”

“Did I tell you that I found out you were a psychologist back at the excursion?”

“No… You didn’t know?” she asked, letting him lead her to the front door, where their three children were. Philip had wrapped John up to protect him from the cold and was holding him as his mother had taught him. She felt Alexander shaking his head.

“I missed a lot of things. But never again” he said solemnly.

“And what happened in that excursion, now that you talked about it?” she asked, letting him put her coat on. He stopped before reaching the shoulders, and she looked at his now frozen husband. “Alex?” she asked, worried.

Alexander shook his head again, this time more slowly, his lips pressed. “I’ll tell you one day, but, for the moment… No… No… It was too much… We all are going to need time to recover from that…”

“…Alright?”

Alexander clapped his hands, changing his mood drastically, now with a smile on his face. “So, who wants ice cream?” and the two older children screamed with jubilation. John looked at his siblings and laughed as well. “Let’ssss go!” he said, opening the door for them.

Eliza was left behind, seeing her family stepping outside, chatting cheerfully about what flavour they liked the most. Alexander looked over his shoulder and smiled at her.

“Betsey, come on, love!”

Eliza waited a few moments, her mind trying to process what was happening before her eyes. Something felt wrong, but she had longed for something like this for too long. She finally stepped out, and took the arm Alexander offered her. She wanted to enjoy the moment, but her mind couldn’t rest, her sixth sense was sending her red flags and, also, there was the question that was starting to bitter her mood:

What the hell happened during that excursion???
“George”

“Angelica”

“What is that?”

“A present I bought for myself for Thanksgiving”

“You don’t give presents in Thanksgiving, sir; you give thanks for what you have. Hence the name”

“I’m aware of that. But just before dinner I was thinking about what I was thankful of, and I realised that for each day I get out of here without killing one of you, that for each month that I give you all your respective salaries whether you have earned them or not… I deserved a whim”

“So, you bought yourself this?”

“Well, technically, you all bought it for me”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean”

“I simply took a bit from your Christmas bonuses until I’ve got the exact amount of money to buy this”

“…”

“Which reminds me: tell Alexander to redact a memo that says there’s gonna be an informative reunion on Wednesday morning to discuss the Christmas bonuses. Then, tell Jefferson to photocopy them. Then, tell Maria to hand them out”

“Wouldn’t it be faster if Alexander just do it all or if he just tells Jefferson, and Jefferson tells Maria?”

“And that is why you deserve no bonus this Christmas”

“But, sir…”

“You are going to start earning your salaries”

“But are you going to keep that thing here? In the office?”

“Where else? It’s here where it can work its magic”

“What magic?”

“The magic of calming me down and preventing me from biting your heads off”

Angelica was used to go to work and find strange things in her office; but she thought that what was in front of her eyes right now could never be beaten.

“Sir, are you planning to bring that to the meetings as well?”
“That’s the plan”

“But, sir… That’s a rocking chair”

“And the best spent money of my life. And yours, for that matter. Now, instead of screaming and hurting my vocal cords, I’ll rock myself. That way, I’d prevent an ulcer to appear as well”

Angelica looked at her president for a moment. She wasn’t expecting to get in Washington’s office and be surprised with the sight of him sitting on a rocking chair. She could only imagine what the others would say, especially when the subject of the bonus arose. Angelica decided to simply shake her head and do her job. She’d worry about the screams of her workmates on Wednesday morning, it would be a waste of time to do so before that.

“I’ve already called Alexander to inform him about the Adams’ cases”

“How did he take it?”

“As bad as we thought. In fact, he told me he’d talk to you once he arrives”

George caressed the armrests of the rocker. “Perfect. I’ll be able to try this wonderful thing”

Angelica fixed her glare on him, not believing what she was living at first thing in the morning. The phone on the desk rang, taking her out of her thoughts. George answered by saying the name of the company and then, his eyes grew wide in surprise.

“Alexander?” Angelica tilted her head to the side, sharing her boss’ surprise. “Son, couldn’t you wait till you arrive to talk to me?”

Angelica rolled her eyes when she heard the ‘S’ word getting out George’s lips. He was trying Alexander’s patience on purpose this time, she felt it. She waited a moment, seeing George’s face draining from all colour. Angelica raised a hand to her chin, worry sweeping across her whole body. She sharpened her ears to try and hear something, but then thought that wouldn’t be necessary if Alexander would’ve been screaming. In fact, it was quite difficult to hear her brother-in-law’s voice from the other side of the line, and that terrified her.

After what she felt as an eternity, George made a move. He nodded slowly, until he realised the other man couldn’t see him, and spoke.

“Yes… Yes, of course, Alexander, you can have as many free days as you think you need”
Angelica’s blood ran cold in that instant. She took a step forwards, stretching one shaking and hesitant arm towards her boss.

“Alright. Thank you. You too have a great day, Alexander” He hung up, and seemed incapable of taking his eyes off the phone.

“What… What happened?” asked Angelica.

“He just asked for the vacation days he has left” informed Washington, in a low voice.

Angelica could feel how pale she might have turned. “But… But he hasn’t used any of them in these two years, sir”

“I know”

“And you gave them to him?”

George finally looked up to meet her eyes, frowning. “What else can I do, Angelica? That man hasn’t missed one day of work. I had to convince him not to come when that snowfall cut off the circulation” George huffed and buried his face in his hands.

“Why would Alexander do that?” wondered Angelica out loud.

“The hell I know!!!” screamed Washington, getting up, taking the phone and throwing it to the wall, breaking it in the action. He started to pace from side to side. “Fucking gremlin, he just had to ask for his fucking days off this week!!” he complained, between gasps.

“George, calm down!”

“Yes, yes, you’re right” Washington agreed, nodding. He sat rapidly on the rocker and began to rock himself gently. “Oh, rocking chair, do your wonders, do your wonders…” he said, closing his eyes, and trying to calm himself.

Angelica waited until she saw him stopping and exhaling a long breath to talk. “Who is going to take care of Adams’ cases, then? Today’s one of them’

“You”

“Me?”

“Yes”

“Why me?”

“Because you’re here and I don’t want to look at the list of useless people I have working for me and get angry again”

Angelica was red in the face. She left the room, shutting the door with a thump and cursing Alexander under her breath. If this is a revenge for our phone conversation, she thought, enraged, I’m going to make him remember this day until his death… No, even after death. I’ll use a ouija board to contact him and remind him of the day he fucked up with Angelica Schuyler.
She turned around, went upstairs to her own office to pick all her things, and then, entered Adams’, to pick all the things she thought she could need. Then, she went downstairs, louder than before, making her heels hit the floor with all the strengths she had, wanting to let some ire out before reaching the car. She looked up when she arrived at the end of the stairs, having a clear sight from the rest room, where the persons, who were supposed to be working upstairs, were wasting time by looking at their phones and talking. She felt her blood boiling. She went directly to the entrance and hit the door with the palm of her hand, startling them all.

“Go to work, parasites!” she shouted at them, and turned around, missing their shared quizzical looks.

By the time she arrived at her corresponding parking lot, she saw Aaron’s car parked a few places away from hers. The man got out of the vehicle with a serene smile and, when their eyes met, he nodded as a greeting.

“Do you have a meeting today, Angelica?” he asked, approaching her.

“No. Adams had a case that Alexander had to take care of in his place, but, for some reason, he decided to pick this week to ask for his free days” she explained, not finding the keys of her car and cursing her luck.

“It’s that case about that car dealership, right?”

“Right”

“Do you mind if I accompany you?”

Angelica looked up, stopping the search of her keys abruptly. She hesitated in talking. “But… Aaron…”

“I can go as a co-counsel”

“I wouldn’t mind but… Are you sure…?”

He showed her the key of his car. “Yes, I am. Come on, I can give you a ride”

And without waiting for an answer, he turned around and walked back to his car, opening the co-pilot door for her. Angelica trotted and, when she was close enough, talked again.

“Really, Burr, you don’t have to…”

“Angelica, it’s alright. I know the case” he reassured her before sitting as the pilot.

“No, I’m not doubting because of that…”
“Come on, we can’t be late”

It was then when Angelica realised that Aaron hadn’t stopped smiling serenely. She waited a moment, seeing him starting the car. Finally, she sat at his side, closing the door, and trying to erase the bad feeling she was having about all this.

“Aaron”
“Angelica”
“Are you alright?”
“I’m alright” he nodded, driving out the parking lot. “Are you alright?”
“Yes, I am alright”
“Good”

They drove in silence except from the music of the radio. Angelica looked inside her briefcase and took the papers of the case out. A married couple swindled with a car that presumed to be brand new and in perfect condition. An accident during a night date convinced them on the contrary. She read the hospital report, the outlay from the repair shop and the document they made for them in which it was explained the bad state the car was in. She frowned, feeling as enraged as the first time she heard from the case, as much as when she was told Adams would be in charge of it because the couple couldn’t afford a lawyer of their own and had to bear with a public defender that was randomly assigned. Well, maybe this was a way life had to smile to the poor couple after that bitter pill they had to swallow.

She looked at the name of the dealership and pressed her lips, throwing a glare to Aaron with the corner of her eye. He was humming the song that was on the radio, driving calmly and focus on the driveway. She put the papers in the briefcase again and sat more comfortably in her seat. The humming stopped when she cleared her throat.

“Aaron, you don’t have to go if you don’t want to”
“I told you to not worry, Angelica” he simply said, smiling.
“We all know you didn’t want to take the case on its day, and we understood, we still do…”
“Angelica, I appreciate your worry, but it’s not needed”
“Are you sure?”
“I’m sure”
“Aaron…”
“Angelica”

“Are you alright?”

“I’m alright. Are you alright?”

She hesitated a bit. “I… Yes, I’m alright, but…”

“Good. You’re alright, I’m alright, the whole world is alright. Alright, alright, alright…”

Angelica looked at him for a moment, completely confused. She was distracted by how the car was slowly going faster and faster. She looked at the speedometer, seeing the pointer ascending. She looked forwards, seeing a traffic light in front of them, flickering in amber. She leaned back in her seat, pressing her briefcase against her chest.

“Amber” she said. The car kept speeding up. “Amber, amber, amber, AMBER!”

She ended up screaming, when she saw the light had turned red and Aaron kept driving as if it meant nothing. Angelica closed her eyes, waiting for an impact. What an irony it would be if she survived and told the story of where and why they were heading to that dealership. She heard a few angry honks and curses, but felt no bang. She blinked slowly, looking around her and seeing they were still safe and sound, Aaron driving, still with the serene smile on his face. She gasped for air, feeling her clothes sticking at her back due to the cold sweat.

“I was seeing it” Aaron simply said.

Angelica stared straight back at him, now her breathing caught up in her throat. She was about to ask him for the third time if he was feeling alright, but Aaron stifled her question with the horn. She looked at the windshield, seeing an old lady taking a few steps backwards at the verge of the sidewalk. Angelica and she shared a perplex look before glaring at Aaron, who just slowed down a bit to scream at her.

“The zebra crossing, ma’am, if you’re beyond arthritic and can’t walk three more fucking meters, then, don’t cross at all, *traffic-ruiner!*”

And then, sped up once again, leaving the astonished lady looking at them disappearing in the distance. Angelica panted a few more times, passing a hand through her hair.

“Gosh, Aaron, what was that?” she asked.
“Another old person who thinks that just for being old can do whatever they want. Well, no. Not with me, at least” he answered, shrugging.

“What…?”

“Hold on, pussycat, there’s another traffic light” he explained, pressing the gas pedal.

“Please, stop, stop, stop! STOP!”

Angelica screamed once again, covering her face with the briefcase this time. She heard a series of horns and curses, but this time felt too dizzy to even pay them any attention.

“For Christ’s sake, Burr!” she shouted, still refusing to open her eyes. “What’s gotten into you?!"

---

Aaron liked stability, loved his monotony, to organize his weekly time and act as he had planned. Aaron didn’t only like to plan his week with things he knew he was supposed to do; he also liked to imagine all the possibilities, everything that could go wrong or right, and so be prepared for whatever that would happen.

…And yet, he wasn’t expecting Theodosia telling him he’d have to drive Hamilton to work, because he had no other way to be there in time. And yet, he wasn’t expecting that wouldn’t be the worst way to go back to work after a break. And so, he answered the phone call he received after a brief one side-heated argument with Alexander about their different points of views about life in general. Maybe because of that he didn’t look the number before answering. Or maybe because he was driving and didn’t want to waste too much time looking at anything that wasn’t the driveway. Maybe he trusted Hamilton enough to scream at him again if he did something stupid while driving.

“Hello?” he said, feeling the annoyed glare that he gained from Alexander.

“Unbelievable” he heard his workmate complaining under his breath.

While Hamilton began to look for his earphones to listen to the caller clearer, the person at the other side of his line talked. “Aaron Burr, sir?”

Aaron inhaled slowly through his nostrils. “Mr. Prevost, I wasn’t expecting a call from you” he said, strengthening the hold on the steering wheel. He was glad to have been clever enough to turn the backseat speakers off before answering. *Theo doesn’t need to hear this.*

“Please, Burr, save the formality. It stopped making sense since you decided to keep my side of the bed warm for my former wife”

*We started soon,* Aaron sighed, trying to be as quiet as possible so Jacques couldn’t hear him. For the first time in forever, he thanked Alexander’s loud voice. “What do you want, Prevost?”
“I just wanted to wish you luck for today. Hope you have practised your speech enough times and that it consists of more than one sentence” Aaron began to count from zero to… whatever number he could get at till the end of that conversation. “Just to let you see there are no hard feelings on my part” added Jacques conceitedly.

“I am not in charge of that case, Prevost” Aaron clarified. And you know it, he thought, bitterly.

Jacques’ laugh from the other side of the line made his blood boil. “Well, it seems that your company knows what it’s doing. As they have you working for them, I really thought they were of little standing… Or is this man who’s coming on your league?”

“Look, Prevost, I don’t want a confrontation” said Aaron, trying to erase the tension.

“Don’t need to swear it. You let it clear to me when you gave up on Augustine’s custody”

This time, it was more difficult to conceal the bitterness of his tone or to control the volume of his voice. Thank Alexander and his loud voice, he thought again. Theo wasn’t paying attention to any of them, missing the ire in her father’s voice and actions. “We never gave up on his custody, you know Theodosia wanted to see him and to end the relationship on good terms, but you sent him on a boarding school in Switzerland, claiming it would be for his own good and promising her she would be able to visit him as much as she wanted to”

Jacques nodded sarcastically. “Good defence, Burr. Late but good. Have you been waiting for a good moment to use it?” he mocked. Aaron was feeling his face burning by then. “By the way, how is Yoko doing?”

“Theodosia…” said Aaron, angrily. He inhaled, wanting to control himself. “She is doing perfectly fine”

“Tell her I said hello”

“Of course” Of course not.

“I’m serious, Burr” Aaron calmed down when he heard the foreign calmness in Jacques’ voice. He felt an ounce of guilt. Theodosia and Jacques were married for twenty years, it was normal there was a bit of affection on Jacques’ part after all. “I pity the poor woman; not only she loses her son because for an inept lawyer but she also married him. I, at least, hope, she is in charge of the accounts; I wouldn’t want her to have to swallow another bitter pill at the court, with your defences, for lack of her child support”

And his laugh was just the last straw.

“Goodbye, Mr. Prevost, hope you can sort things out with my workmate” Aaron blurted out, ending the call by pressing the button with vehemence.

He felt Alexander looking at him with a cocked eyebrow, but paid him no attention to it. He thanked the Heavens for the third time when he saw Hamilton returning his total attention to his own call, voice raised. The last thing he wanted was to anyone to see how much he was shaking. He took advantage of Hamilton’s argue to take a moment to mend himself. The immigrant’s complaints
served to entertain his head.

“Then, tell Laurens to take care of them!” Alexander shouted. “I have to take care of the accounts of this month, Angelica, I have to take care so the whole place doesn’t knock down” Oh, so he’d have to thank Angelica as well for calling. Aaron looked at Alexander with the corner of his eye. How would it be like to be that secure about oneself? Sometimes he felt so envious. “And anyone who could scream and insult without any regret could do your job; don’t test me”

And then, silence. Almost complete if it weren’t for the kids’ conversation at the backseats. Aaron saw Alexander looking at his phone with perplexed eyes. Then, he put it back in his briefcase, red in the face.

“Why all the Schuyler sisters have to be crazy?” he asked out loud. Rhetorically, of course, but Aaron didn’t mind. Maybe a little Hamilton’s monologue would do him good and make him forget the conversation from a brief moment. Aaron knew he’d have enough with replaying it inside his head for the rest of the day, as it always happened to him. He felt his head about to explode, but still couldn’t stop frowning. Still, he looked at Alexander, to let him know he’d have his whole attention. “Damned the hour I thought marry one would be a good idea…”

And he’d let him talk. He’d let him ramble until they arrived at the office, until it was lunchtime even, because it would be a good way to delay the return of the impotence. Let Hamilton talk until he was out of vocabulary to curse the world; his voice would distract him. And that was all he needed.

…Instead, it was Hamilton’s daughter’s scream the thing that distracted him. He was taken aback when he saw that truck coming from nowhere, skipping the clear stop signal that was put at the end of intersection. It was one of those moments in his life when he didn’t think, just acted. He turned the steering wheel, the screams of his passengers muting the screeches of the wheels. Eventually, he joined them, thinking the car would fall to the side and crash. But, fortunately, nothing of that happened. They were safe, sound, alive…

Hamilton and his children began to talk shouting, and Theo imitated them. Aaron couldn’t make out what they were saying, and not only because they were talking at once. He still was holding the steering wheel with force, refusing to let it go as if it was some kind of good-luck charm. And then, there came a moment when he felt nothing at all. In fact, he couldn’t think straight. The only thing that crossed his mind was that he was alive, that his daughter was alive, Alexander was alive, his children were alive… Just because he acted by instinct, because he could turn in time, he let the survival instinct, something he never knew he possessed, take over him. That was the only reason he and his beloved ones were alive.

He hadn’t time to comprehend what happened or why he was thinking that, why he hadn’t
seen his life in front of his eyes – as it was so well-known to happen in those cases – when the commotion occurred but now. The images flashed inside his brain. And all he saw himself doing was just sitting, seeing the people passing by, letting them trample him, even though he had let them pass in his place… He saw himself waiting for something, he didn’t know what. He saw Theodosia devastated if he hadn’t act in time, too broken before the loss of her new family. He heard Jacques Prevost’s sardonic voice, he repeated the call inside his head too many times for his liking. And it’d keep repeating if it hadn’t been for Theo’s now louder tone of voice, trying to match Philip’s.

Aaron let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding, and then, turned to face Hamilton, now with Angie on his lap, crying in his neck, and with Philip holding his hand almost unconsciously, and talking (screaming) to Theo, who had glittering eyes.

“Alright, alright, the four of you, calm down” he said, clearing his throat and straightening in his seat. “Nothing happened”

Aaron drove Theo home, where she hugged her surprised mother. It was there when the little one broke in tears, happy to have her mother in an embrace. Theodosia waited for her daughter to calm down, rubbing her back and rocking her in her arms. When Theo was breathing normally again and had gained control over her tears, her older namesake talked to her husband, who had been holding both of them at first, and had now an arm over her shoulders.

“What happened?”

Aaron couldn’t tell if the surprise in his wife’s eyes was because he had told her the story with too many apathy or because she couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Aaron tried to comfort himself thinking it was because of both; though he was a bit worried over how he was able to tell the story without stuttering or breaking. Luckily, Theodosia was used to his cold appearance, so could let it go easily and focus on the important matter.

“I think Theo needs to stay home for today” he told her, holding her hand.

“I do too…” she agreed, lost in words. “We could watch some movies or…”

“No, I have to go to work”

His two Theodosias looked at him with wide eyes. “What? But, Dad…!” tried to complain the littlest.

Aaron smiled warmly at her. “I’ll be fine, dear. Don’t worry” he promised her, kissing her forehead.

“Aaron, are you sure? You don’t have to go. I can call Washington and tell him what happened if
you’re not in a condition to retell the event” his wife tried to persuade him.

He simply shook his head. “I’m alright, Theodosia” he promised again, kissing her on the cheek. “Though I think I may be home earlier than usual” he said as he got up.

Theodosia did the same, still with her daughter in her arms. “Of course, don’t overwork yourself today. Take care” she told him, kissing him briefly. “Promise?”

“Promise”

Angelica thanked God when she saw Aaron parking outside the building of the dealership. She clambered out the car and knelt on the street, respectfully.

“Land!” she chanted, feeling relieved.

Aaron got out the car without paying her any attention, and headed straight to the building doors, hands in his pockets and a serene smile again on his face. Angelica gasped a few times, wanting to feel herself on firm ground, and then saw him walking without waiting for her. She got on her feet immediately, trotting to his side.

“Burr, what the hell was that?” she asked, once they were side by side.

“A grandpa with cataracts. Take grandpa with cataracts now” he muttered, more to himself than to anyone else, still looking ahead to nothing in particular.

“What?”

“So, a one sentence speech, huh?” he kept jabbering. “You’ll see in what league I’m playing”

“I… I don’t understand a thing, Aaron” said Angelica, still trying to catch her breath. She stopped when Aaron opened the door for her, and looked at him intently. “Seriously, Burr, you don’t have to get in there… I… I don’t think you’re fine enough for this case, even as a co-counsel” she told him with a gentle tone.

Aaron’s smile only grew. “Angelica, I haven’t felt better in my whole life” he reassured her. Before she could try to persuade him again, he gestured with the hand to the open door. “Ladies first”

Angelica entered the building hesitantly. She only needed to see the man behind the counter a few meters away, talking to a couple, to regain her confidence. With her head high, she began to walk to where the owner of the dealership was, not noticing their presence…
…Until Aaron closed the door with a thump that startled even her. Angelica put a hand over her chest, seeing her workmate still with that serene smile that didn’t match his actions. Aaron passed her by, and Angelica bit her bottom lip when she saw the man at the other side of the counter changing his surprised expression for a Cheshire Cat smile. She was about to grab Aaron’s arm, stop him, tell him to get back in the car, assure him she could do this… But Jacques Prevost talk before she could’ve had the chance to even start walking to her co-worker.

“Aaron Burr” Jacques greeted him with a nod.

“Sir” said Aaron, imitating the gesture.

“I wasn’t expecting you here” admitted the owner of the company. “Were all competent lawyers busy today?”

Angelica swallowed and trotted to where Aaron was standing, completely still. His calm voice frightened her even more. “There are a lot of we don’t expect from life, Mr. Prevost” he simply said. “You think your ex-wife’s husband would not take care of your case and then here he is… Or you think you are only dropping your daughter off at nursery school as any other normal day and then a crazy lobby driver skips a stop signal and almost kills you and your daughter and your motormouth workmate…”

“What?” asked Angelica, eyes wide.

“I’ve only come here as a co-counsel, Mr. Prevost. My workmate here…” He pointed at Angelica. “…can be a bit merciless when she faces the scum of this world” he finished explaining dedicating his smile now at the astonished couple.

“Burr…” tried to say Angelica.

Prevost clicked his tongue in annoyance. “So, you came here to see a good professional do your job?”

“Please, Mr. Prevost, let’s be civilized for once. You’ve got clients over there. Good morning, by the way” He stretched one hand to them, and they shook hands hesitantly with him, while looking at each other. “Wanting to buy a new car, huh?”

“Yes” said the woman, shyly.

“Things are going well lately and we thought… Why not?” added the man, with a nervous laugh.

Aaron nodded and then rummaged inside his pockets. “Lovely” He handed them a small card. “This is my calling card. Maybe I’m not good in court, but I sure as hell am good at knowing good heartless lawyers when people need them after Mr. Prevost, over here, defraud them”

The woman took the card in her hands and read it, the man throwing questioning glares to the man across the counter, who was moving the tongue inside his mouth, trying to contain himself. Jacques ended up smiling just like the man in front of him.
“That is low even for you, Mr. Burr”

“Hehehe... Jacques, if you ever disrespect my wife or any of my beloved ones, ever again, I will kill you”

He informed him, with a small laugh afterwards. The couple looked at Angelica, who couldn’t get her eyes off Aaron; briefcase pressed against her chest and eyes wide in confusion. Jacques looked at the couple when he felt their eyes on him, and then looked up and down at the smiling man.

“There was a small pause. The couple had walked a few steps backwards, embracing each other; Angelica put a hand over her mouth; Jacques felt lost at words for a moment. He cleared his throat.

“Listen, Aaron...”

“No, you listen to me, goddamned son of a bitch. I didn’t waste four years of my life studying laws so now a resurrected louse* can laugh at my face and doubting my skills at court. At least I’ve got my job from working hard instead of wasting my time buming around because Daddy and Mommy had a mattress full of money if he tripped over his own laziness and fell on his lazy ass. By the time I was graduation with an average grade of A’s, you were pretending to be working at this inherited place that profits at the expense of poor unfortunate souls as this couple over here or the one we came today to defend and couldn’t even come to this meeting because that car crash almost killed them and are not in any condition to be here with all the pills they have to take for the pain thanks to your joke of a car, that you presumed to be brand new. This is not how business is done, old man, this is not how this country works. This is not why our ancestors die fighting for. But this is why I studied until I couldn’t understand what the fuck I was reading anymore: to get assholes like you down their cloud of carelessness and selfishness they live in. I want you, your father or whoever the fuck is in total charge of this shitty company to pay that poor couple what you owe them for being sons of bitches who don’t care about anyone else’s life instead of their own! Or I swear to God above I’m going to come after you. I’m going to be your nightmare, you’d realise Freddy Krueger is the fucking Easter Bunny in comparison with me. I’m not gonna sleep, I’m not gonna eat, I’m not gonna live until I find the way to close your family’s shady company, until I see you in debt, until I see you wrecked and trampled under a bridge. And I’ll visit that bridge each fucking day to greet you while you see me living my good life with a woman you didn’t know to value and never deserved to waste a fucking minute of her precious life with a dick like you, a daughter who is the light of my life, and a step-son who is finally going to have a family who cares for him for real. Now, did you understand me?”
Angelica had walked to the couple, now completely impressed by the scene before their eyes, and had put a hand on their shoulders, trying to assure them everything was under control (and also to steady herself). She looked at Jacques, who was now pale and sweating. When he gave Aaron no answer, the man hit the counter with the fist, making the woman jump afraid.

“Did I fucking stutter, Jacques?” he snapped. “Did you understand me?”

“Y-Yes…”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, they will have all they ask us for” he promised, nodding. Then, with a choked voice, he added. “Sir”

“Good” said Aaron, softening his features and straightening himself. He put both hands behind his back and looked at the couple, smiling again. “Have a good rest of your day”

“You too” they both said immediately.

“Oh, and don’t forget… If one day you just get in your new car and the smell of sulphur is too much to handle…” he pointed at the card the woman was still holding. “Call me” He winked at her. “I know a lot of exorcists as well who will make you a discount only for going for my part”

“We will” said the man, nodding.

Aaron nodded and bid farewell to them, heading to the door. Angelica let some papers on the counter, seeing Jacques’ eyes fixed on Burr.

“You… Read this, please, and call our clients as soon as possible” she informed him.

She left when Jacques nodded slowly. She also said goodbye to the couple, who waved their hands in response. Angelica trotted till she reached the door, opened for her by Aaron.

“What the hell was that, Aaron?” she asked, more impressed and curious than annoyed or angry.

“You just… It’s like you are another man!”

“Life is too short to live afraid, Angelica” he simply told her, shrugging.

Angelica saw him heading to the car. Head held high, light steps. She was left behind, seeing the man opening his car, getting in, starting in and driving to her so she wouldn’t have to walk. They didn’t park too far away from the door, but Aaron was just like that. He was a gentleman, a thing she always liked in any man… It wouldn’t be a lie to say Aaron didn’t try anything with her when they were young and met each other from the first time, it was clear the man tried to flirt with her, only to find negative responses to all his tries. But still they managed to be good friends, forgetting those
days as if they never happened. Aaron found Theodosia, and she had John, and they were happy for each other…

But after seeing that scene over there… Angelica felt the kind of attraction – that John didn’t make her feel after a whole year dating him – in less than a minute. The kind of flame she felt when she met Alexander for the first time, the kind of flame that could make her do whatever she proposed, that could make her convince anyone around her that they could do whatever they proposed themselves… The way Aaron talked, the way he acted, the way he made Jacques almost piss himself in front of two clients, the way he defended his wife’s honour…

Because Aaron loved his wife and his family, it would be naïve to deny it, but he had his own ways of showing them. Respectable ways, of course, but still… Not the ways she would’ve been satisfied with if she were in Theodosia’s position. Aaron usually was… meh. But today he was all… wow. And a doubt started to overwhelm her… *Was Aaron Burr sexy?*

“Do the lady need a ride?” asked Aaron, once he stopped the car in front of her.

Angelica blinked, back in the real world. “Eh… Yes, yes…” she managed to say, and entered the car.

Aaron waited until she had put the seatbelt on to speak again. “Hey, Angelica, do you want to do something crazy?”


“It’s something I always wanted to do. It’s been bugging me for a long time now” he confessed her.

“It’s right…?” she asked, turning her head slowly to him.

Aaron nodded. “We’ll need protection”

“This is not a good idea”

“Trust me. I’ve planned this a lot of times in my mind. Nothing can go wrong”

“But… in the middle of the day…”

“I’ll try to keep it quiet”

“I don’t think you’d be able to such a thing”

“Then, our dear workmates will have to just bear with it or simply put up with it”
“But, Aaron…”

“Come on, put this thing on”

“Really, this is wrong. What would the president say?”

“I’ll ask him for this the first days and he simply ignores me. In my language, that means I can do whatever the fuck I want”

“There are people in the break room next door!”

“There are always people in the break room next door”

“But…”

“I bear their fucking noise all the fucking days. I don’t care about them, if we disturb them in the slightest, then, I’ll be even happier for having done this once and for all”

“Aaron, I’m not sure about this”

“This is going to happen with or without, Angelica. I don’t need anybody to satisfy my wishes”

“But do you know how to do this?”

“Theodosia and I watch people doing things like this all Sundays on the TV”

“That’s not the same. It’s never the same on the TV than on real life. I know from experience”

“Well, are you just gonna be standing there, then?”

“I… I don’t know, this is… This is just gonna end wrong”

“You’re just gonna be there, then. Alright. Watch me and if you want to join me, feel free”

“Oh, God…”

The office was quieter than usual. Too quiet. James had informed him he hadn’t seen Hamilton in all morning, and they thought the man had come to the office even before the sun had risen, and was locked in his office, typing like if there were not tomorrow. But at the day went by, as the silence became almost unbearable, his friend and he decided to go take a look to see if everything was fine. They may hate the man, but if something happened to him, they were sure Washington would never let them hear the end of it… At least, not until they were both fired.

James came back a few minutes later, all that time he kept throwing glances at the mid-opened door his friend had let.
“Hamilton is not in his office”

Of all the things Thomas had thought about hearing from his friend once he had come back, that wasn’t one of them. Gosh, he didn’t even think he’d hear those words for real anytime in his whole life.

“Have you looked in the break room?” It was more believable to think Hamilton was finally taking a break than imagining him not going to work.

James nodded. “His friends were there. Lafayette told me they haven’t seen him in all this day”

Well, maybe God existed after all and liked to bless random people from time to time. It seemed it was Thomas’ turn today, and he was going to leverage this day to do his job peacefully, to talk to Washington without any pestering around him, without any critic to every word that he talked. And, who knew?, maybe it wasn’t thing of one day. For Hamilton to miss work, the issue must be big. Enormous. Colossal. All synonymous of the word ‘big’ that were invented. Maybe he had an accident while coming to work and he’d have to spend some time at the hospital; maybe he was diagnosed with a strange disease; maybe he wouldn’t have to see or hear the man ever again. He tried to ignore how heavy the silence felt, how it was becoming more stifling as the minutes passed by; that was because they were spoiled, they could get used to this easily. The rest of the world worked like this anyway.

Bang.

“What was that?” asked James, raising his eyes for the first time since he had come back.


“It’s coming from across here” said Thomas, getting up. James did the same.


Crash.

“Mother of God, Aaron!” they heard Angelica screaming through coughs.
They shared a look of worry, and Thomas finally gathered up his courage to open the door. A cloud of smoke met them, making their eyes sting and slipping through their throats. They coughed, covering their mouths with one hand and trying to dissipate the smoke with the other. They could see Angelica’s form a few steps forwards.

“Angelica?” tried to call James.

Maria’s shrill voice muted his. “Heavens! What is going on here??”


“Man, stop it!” they heard Angelica screaming.


“Oh, my, what’s this??” asked Laurens, coughing as well as the rest of the group.

“What’s happening?” said Lafayette.

“Jesus, it’s like working in the streets of London” commented Hercules.

“Somebody open a window!” pleaded Madison, coughing uncontrollably.

Thomas heard accelerated footsteps running in the opposite direction, and presumed Maria had gone to do as his friend said so. He helped James to get back in his office and sat him on the nearest chair. When he walked out, he heard a fan working, the smoke clearing from their surroundings. He saw Hamilton’s window opened, as well as the front door. Peggy had gotten out her office as well. Her window – just a rectangular whole that faced the counter Maria worked at – was opened, nonetheless.

His workmates became clearer slowly. Maria was holding a fan in her hands, turning around from time to time; Laurens, Mulligan and Lafayette were at the break room door, being the last one the one who asked Angelica if she was feeling fine. When they had a clear vision of her, they saw she had protective goggles over her eyes.

**Bang. Bang.**
They looked inside the office across Thomas’, seeing Aaron with a mallet in his hands and a wall full of holes in front of him. He hit it once again, breaking the wall a bit more. Thomas shared a glare of bewilderment with his workmates, looking at Angelica lastly. The woman couldn’t get her eyes off Aaron, nervousness all over her face. Before he – or anyone else for that matter – could ask Burr what was going on, or to stop him, the president’s door opened swiftly, revealing a frowning George Washington. He stopped at the frame of his door when he saw Maria with a fan in her hands and Angelica leaning on Lafayette, trying to catch her breath, clear uneasiness all over her face.

“What is the meaning of this?” he asked, arms in akimbo.


Thomas looked forwards, seeing now a dim light leaking from the little holes Aaron had made. George passed them all by and stopped at his employee’s door, taken aback when he saw the scene in front of him.

“Burr, what are you doing?” he asked cautiously.

“He wants a window in his office” Angelica answered from behind.

“…What…?”

“I’ve been asking for one these past two years” complained Aaron, hitting the wall with more force than before, teeth clenched. “I asked for it in good manners, you told me you would think about it, and so I waited for it, waited for it, waited for it, but it never came!” He ended up raising his voice and enlarging the hole. He gasped a few times, seeing the unperfect circle he had created.

“And I was thinking it was going to be a peaceful morning…” said Thomas, shaking his head.

“Burr, for the love of God…” said James once he had caught his breath. “Why didn’t you ask for an expert to do so?”

“He says he can do it by himself because he and his wife watch programs of people doing things like this on TV” answered Angelica.

“At least he could do it on night, when nobody is here” complained Laurens.

“Yeah, man, I was having a very nice dream” said Peggy, frowning.

“Don’t work a little bit…” said Washington, rolling his eyes.

Aaron took the gloves he was wearing off, along with the goggles, throwing the three objects on the table. He looked at the nine persons who were looking confused and scared, at the same time, at him.
“From today on, if I want something, I am going to have it. Not matter how much it may cost me. And if nobody wants to help me, I’m okay with it; I need nobody to reach my targets. I’m going to fend for myself, because nobody else will do it for me”

“Where have I heard that before?” asked Laurens, tilting his head to the side.

“Son” Washington started, stretching one arm inside the room. “I think you too should take a few days…”

Aaron cut him off, surprising their witnesses even more. “I am not your son” he simply said, grabbing his coat and proceeding to put it on. The rest of the workers shared puzzled glares. “Now, I’m gonna go to Ikea for some curtains; the little breeze bugs me” he stated, pointing at his boss with one finger.

“Alright, alright…” said Washington, nodding nervously.

“If the breeze bugs you, why did you make a window in the first place?” asked Thomas.

Peggy felt chills running up and down her spine when she saw the look Aaron dedicated the secretary. “Gosh, shut up and let him be!” she hissed, hand in knob in case she had to lock herself in her office.

Aaron took a moment to reply, making the tension for the rest too thick to bear. “Because I fucking want to. Because I am the only one who works in a room with no window. Because I’ve been asking for a window since this company exists. Because I deserve to evade myself and relax seeing the outside world from time to time, as you and Madison do when you’re not pretending to be working, when you’re just talking about whatever the hell it was what you did back in Monticello. Because I am the only one in this damned building that works in a hell of a hole. There are days when I don’t know if I’m a lawyer or a terrorist… I’m only lacking the turban, because sometimes I have no proper light, either. Because I am also the last one to be changed his bulbs”

“That’s because that room was gonna be a pantry…” explained Lafayette.

“…”

“Yeah, in fact, we even kept the mop and the cleaning things in there before we were assigned our offices” added Laurens.

“… … …”

“Please, just shut up…” pleaded Peggy when she saw how narrowed Aaron’s eyes were by then.

“Poor man, it was a matter of time for him to go crazy…” commented Jefferson.

Washington cleared his throat, and tried to reach a hand to his employee. “Listen, son…”

“Don’t call me son” warned Burr between clenched teeth. Aaron took a glare at his watch. “I gotta go. That damned building gets full of people as the hours go by” he declared, grabbing his briefcase and making sure he had everything inside there.

“Be careful with the arrows” advised Laurens. “One day, I went to buy some shelves, and I got lost, and I was found three days after in the section of living room furniture. I survived because I knew how to ration the avocado and the banana Laf gave me before leaving”

“Why did you give him that?” asked Maria.
Lafayette shrugged. “Something told me it was destined to happen”

Aaron got out of his office while they were discussing. Angelica elbowed Washington, biting her bottom lip anxiously. George cleared his throat once again, and followed Aaron till the entrance, being followed by the rest of his employees.

“Seriously, son, you should go home and…”

Washington was abruptly interrupted when Aaron stopped in his tracks. He turned around, red in the face: “If you call me son one more time!” he warned, and then punched the wall at his left, perforating it. Maria and Peggy muffled a screamed, taking a step backwards as the rest of their workmates, who were now looking at the president, nervous.

George swallowed nervously. “No, no, no, I won’t, don’t worry” he said in a hurry, holding both hands up.

“Isn’t this hallway smelling of déjà vu?” commented Hercules.

Aaron looked at the wall, gasping, then said: “As I’m already going to Ikea, I may buy some paint. I always hated this fucking white wall”

They saw him exiting the place, without looking at anyone one more time. They, on the contrary, didn’t move of their places or get their glares off him. They stayed glued to the floor even when Aaron’s walking figure was a simple memory.

“I hope he fixes the wall before painting it…” said Thomas.

“My God, what the hell was that?” asked Peggy.

“I don’t know… He acted like that when he accompanied me to the dealership” explained Angelica.

“To the dealership?” asked George, finally out of his trance. “But he…”

“I tried to tell him it was okay if he couldn’t, but he insisted” said Angelica. “He just went there and… Well… He said some things… I think we won that case; Prevost almost shit himself”

“Seriously?” asked Lafayette, impressed.

Angelica nodded. “I was terrified as well. I didn’t know his voice could reach that volume. It turned me on and all”

“Angelica” reprehended Peggy with a harsh tone.

“I thought we were gonna do it in the car or even in his office, but he just wanted a window. I misread his intentions, sadly…”

“Angelica, you’re married!” her sister reminded her, frowning.
The oldest shrugged. “By the moment… I’m waiting after Christmas to see how this goes…”

“Angelica!”

George, who had been looking at the floor the whole time, finally looked up at his employees seriously. “I think the better we can do is letting Burr be”

“What?” asked Lafayette.

“But, sir…” tried to complain Thomas.

“What has he done, anyway? Break a wall and paint another one? I can tolerate that as long as he makes us win more cases” he sighed, with a wee smile. “And I was feeling overwhelmed by Hamilton’s absence. Things just get solved if you go with the flow” he nodded, satisfactorily. “Now, if you can excuse me, I need my chair. I deserve some pampering for having solved another crisis” he declared, walking back to his office.

“With all due respect, Mr. Washington, but you are just letting one of your workers to break things” Thomas condemned him.

“With all due respect, Mr. Jefferson, if I cared about your opinions, you’d have a better position in this office instead of being the messenger man”

“To be honest, Mr. President, if you knew how much I hate you, you’d have simply fired me a long time ago” Jefferson retorted, offended.

George stopped in his tracks. Turning around slowly, he eyed Jefferson up and down. “Mr. Jefferson, if you only knew how much I hate you, you’d have simply quit a long time ago, leveraging the little bit of dignity you have left” said George; then, he around and closed the door quietly at his backs.

“Can we spend more than two minutes together without hating each other?” asked Hercules.

“What was that about the chair?” asked Laurens.

Angelica shook her head. “You don’t want to know”

“Yes, I do”

“Here comes the nosy” muttered Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“You’ll see it for yourselves on Wednesday. Oh, that reminds me… I’ll take advantage of having you all here to inform you we are going to have an informative meeting on Wednesday” said Angelica with her commanding tone.

“About?” asked Madison.

“… You don’t want to know”

“That’s why it’s informative” said Lafayette.

“Even though… I think it would be useful if you still are handed out a memo to remind you” Angelica said, more to herself than to anyone else. She eyed them all thoughtfully. “Hm… The plan was to Hamilton to redact it, but…”

“Talking about the gremlin…”
“Thomas, how many times do I have to tell you to not call that to my brother-in-law?”

“I’m serious, there he comes” said the secretary, pointing at the door.

They all looked in that direction, seeing Hamilton walking to the door with a cooler hanging on one arm. He stopped at the counter once he entered, taking a look at the flowers Maria had on the table. He smelled them, ignoring the confused looks he was receiving from his workmates.

“He’s like the teachers back at high school” commented Jefferson. “You were happy because you thought they weren’t going to come, but it only took one person to name them so they would appear”

“Thomas…” warned Angelica, throwing daggers at him with the glare.

Hamilton talked to them once he was close enough. “Have you seen the flowers on the counter? Since when do we have them?”

“How many years have you been working here, Maria?” asked Thomas.

“Hm… A year and a half, maybe?” she said, shrugging.

“Since then”

“They are lovely, Maria, did you choose them?” asked Hamilton.

“Em… Yes… I thought they could cheer up the office” she commented.

“Well, they actually cheered my whole day up!” Hamilton rummaged inside the cooler.

“Alright?” said the receptionist, looking at Angelica with the corner of her eye. The vice president just shrugged, being as quizzical as her.

“Here you go, Mari, dear” said Alexander, handing her an ice cream. “Oh, wait, what flavour do you like the most?” he asked.

Maria was astonished for a moment. “Em… Strawberry, I think…”

“With chocolate or cream?”

“Em… Cream”

Alexander put the cooler on the floor and took out one ice cream. “Here you go. For all your hard work”

Maria’s eyes shone with delight. “Thank you!”

Hamilton rummaged through the cooler once again. “Angelica, for your great task as vice president… Take this” he said, handing her a three-chocolate flavour ice cream.

“Oh, nice” she said, with a smile.

Hamilton began to hand the ice creams in the order he saw them. “Peggy, here is yours with chocolate and vanilla… Laurens, Neapolitan ice cream; Hercules, rocky road; Lafayette, mint
chocolate chips; Jefferson, Hokey pokey… And Madison, vanilla only” He looked around. “Mr. Washington is in his office?”

“Well, answer Angelica, focus on her ice cream.

“Then, give him this” he told her, taking out another ice cream.

“Yeah, yeah” said his sister-in-law.

“I better keep this…” said Lafayette, taking the second ice cream away from Angelica.

“What is all this about?” asked Jefferson, eyeing his ice cream suspiciously.

“I went to the ice-cream shop today with Eliza and the children” Hamilton began to explain, getting on his feet. “And before leaving I thought ‘I think it would be nice to have a detail with my workmates for all the times they had to stand me’ And so, I decided to bring you all ice creams as a thank you”

Jefferson snorted a laugh. “If that’s the case, you should have made us a chain of ice-cream shops…”

“Jeez, Thomas, you’re unbearable today…” said James, licking his ice cream timidly. “For one time the man has a detail…”

“You just see food and lose track of life…”

James stared straight at him before turning to Alexander. “Hey, Hamilton, when will you come back? Thomas will need his counterpart before he kills someone with one of his curve balls”

“Jerk” said Jefferson, rolling his eyes.

“I just asked Mr. Washington for my accumulated free days. I need to spend some time at home…”

“Yes, we heard something like that…” said Lafayette.

“Oh, I almost forgot… Jefferson, do you know how Adams is doing?”

“Oh, fine I guess? He’s already at his house, so I think he’s better” he shrugged.

“Could you please give me his address? I need to talk to him”

Thomas was quiet for a few moments, considering. “Yes… I’ll write it down to you now” he said, handing his ice cream to Madison and walking in his office hesitantly.

Alexander nodded and then rubbed his right arm. When he turned around he saw the great hole on the wall. “Oh, what happened there?”

“Om, Aaron wanted a window” explained Angelica.

“Ah…”

Jefferson got out from his office just then, handing Alexander a piece of paper. “Here”

Alexander nodded. “Thank you so much, Jefferson. You are always doing such a great job. I don’t know what we’d do without you here” he said, not paying attention to the shocked glares of his workmates as he kept the little paper in one of his pockets. He turned to Maria and handed her the cooler. “Maria, there are more ice creams in there; put them in the fridge of the break room and enjoy
The receptionist took the blue cooler in her left hand, a bit vacillating. “Okay… Thank you…”

“You’re welcome” Alexander turned around. “Have a good rest of your day, and give Washington my regards!” he told them, waving his hand before exiting the place.

“We will!” promised Lafayette.

“What in literal hell was that?” asked Laurens, once Alexander was out of earshot.

“I don’t know, but he scared me more than when he screamed at us” admitted Peggy.

“Well, if Adams ends up stabbed, I want you all to deny I gave him anything” said Jefferson, before returning to his work.

James shook his head while looking at the rest of the team, with cocked eyebrows. “As the days passed by, he’s more and more bitter… I don’t know him anymore”

Someone wouldn’t have guessed who was more surprised: if John Adams for seeing Alexander Hamilton at the other side of the door of his house, or Alexander Hamilton for seeing John Adams opening the door for him. Clothes covered great part of the injuries he had received a few days prior, and his face only had a few first-degree burns. The man closed a bit more the door when he saw who had rung the bell, a frown of worry adorning his features.

“Hamilton, what are you doing here?” he asked. There was no malice in his tone of voice, just a mix of surprise and fear. “Please, my wife and children are home. If you have something to tell me, wait until I can go back to work… Or write me another letter”

Alexander wrinkled his lips. “My God, poor man, I really picked on you. Here” he handed him a bouquet of flowers. “I’m sorry I didn’t visit you at the hospital. I hope you’re doing fine”

Adams took the bouquet in his hands, doubtful. “Yes, I am… Um… Is this… Is today April’s fool day?”

“No… That’s in April, as its own name indicates” corrected Alexander.

“Ah, that’s right” he said, blushing for shame.

“If it makes you feel better, in some Spanish-speaking countries is on December 28th”

“It does”

“Well, I just wanted to come by to wish you a good recovery and, also to tell you that if you need something, anything, just tell me”

Adams narrowed his eyes. “Alright?”

“I know we haven’t been in good terms, mostly because of me, but I just want to make it up to you”
“Why?”

“Because life is too short to live in constant confrontations” Alexander explained, shrugging. “I don’t want more confrontations”

“Since when?” asked Adams, surprised.

“Since this morning. Around something past seven”

“Ah… Well, it’s good to know” Adams gave him a smile. “If it makes you feel better about the whole situation, there are no hard feelings on my part”

“You’re so understanding and calm. What a pleasure to work with you” commented Alexander, stretching one hand to his workmate.

Adams shook it pleasantly. “Likewise. Oh, if you see Laurens, tell him I don’t hold him any grudge either”

“I will” he promised, nodding. “Well, I gotta go to my wife, I promise her I’ll cover making dinner for tonight”

“Goodbye” said Adams, about to close the door.

“Oh, yes. Give my regards to Abigail”

“I will, I will” Adams nodded, then closed the door after bidding farewell again. He looked at the bouquet in his hands, inquisitive.

“Honey” Abigail said, coming down the hallway. “Who was it? Where do those flowers come from?” she asked, pointing at the present with her chin.

“It was Hamilton”

“Oh, God…” said his wife, rolling her eyes. “Couldn’t he just send you a letter like the other times? Our children are playing upstairs”

“No, no” Adams stopped his wife when he saw her turning red. “He came to give me this to me. He wanted to apologise, and wished me a good recovery”

“He did?”

“Yes. Oh, and he also wanted me to give you his regards”

“How thoughtful on his part…” commented Abigail, with an ounce of sarcasm in her voice.

“Yes, he seems to have redeemed himself. Who knows, maybe the workplace would be a nice place to hang out from now on”

“Does that mean I can throw your pills away?”

“No, no, keep them… You never know when your luck will end…”

“Alright…” She fixed her glare on the door. “I think I’m going to cleanse the entrance, just in case” she said turning around.
Eliza couldn’t complain. Or, at least, she thought she couldn’t, thought it would be very selfish on her part. For once in their marriage, Alexander didn’t go to work, asked for his free days to spend his time with her and the children, actually spent the day with them, chatting and – most surprisingly – listening to whatever they had to say, and was now making dinner for her and the kids, while they watch some TV in the living room. From time to time, she tried to peer inside the kitchen, fearing to find it on flames; she sniffed once in a while, convinced that one time she’d smell smoke coming from the door next to the living room’s and she would have to run to the exit with three kids in her arms. She was still wondering how she would be able to do such a thing. Planning it distracted her more than the cartoons on the TV. If she had to watch Big Hero 6 one more time, she would throw herself out of the nearest window.

Alexander’s voice startled her, waking her up from her daydream, announcing dinner was already served. Philip took care of turning off the TV, and Eliza wanted to cry when she heard him talking with Angie – holding little John in her tiny arms – saying they could re-start it again once dinner was over. Her daughter returned her baby brother to Eliza’s arms when she had to climb up the chair she liked to sit on. Alexander helped her, tickling her in the act and making her laugh loudly. Philip joined them, and Eliza had to smile, though a bad sensation was still overwhelming her.

She couldn’t complain, though.

She sat her one-year-old son in his highchair and, before she could so herself, she felt Alexander’s hand on her shoulder, telling her he would feed the baby that night. Eliza was confused at first, moment Alexander leveraged to sit her on the chair he used to fill and start to feed the youngest of the house.

“You deserve to eat in peace from time to time” Alexander had told her, when he felt the confused look she couldn’t erase from her face.

After dinner, a vain try to tell Alex she could clean the dishes – wanting to avoid sitting in the living room to watch that animated movie for the zillionth time – and seeing her husband taking the kids to bed, claiming he’d read them a book of their choice, Eliza was left alone in the living room. She stayed sat on the couch, just facing the turned off TV, trying to understand why she couldn’t be satisfied with what life had given to her.
She sharpened her earing, hearing the laughter of the children from the end of the hall. Eliza knitted her brow and got up immediately, heading to the kitchen, where she had left her phone. Before she could dial the first number of the person she wanted to call, that same person called her, making the gadget to buzz in her hand. She didn’t waste a second in answering.

“Theo, I was about to call you” said Eliza in a whisper, throwing glares upon her shoulders from time to time.

“Eliza, has Alexander told you what almost happened this morning?” her friend asked her, also in a low voice.

“Yes… What a fright, the poor kids… And our husbands”

“Yes, I called because of that”

“What?”

“Has Alexander… been acting weird today?”

“I was calling you to ask you the same about Aaron”

“So, that’s a yes”

“What did Aaron do?”

“I’m not quite sure… It’s the way he’s acting. I mean, I got a call from your sisters”

“My sisters?” echoed Eliza, clearly surprised. She made a mental note about checking her messages.

“What did they tell you?”

“Well, it’s… It’s complicated. Peggy sent a message telling me Aaron destroyed the wall in his office”

“He did what?” she asked, trying to control the volume of her voice.

“I said the same” Theodosia nodded. “Then, Angelica sent me a picture of a hole. I’ll send it to you later…”

“I’m sure she has sent me, but I haven’t checked my messages” she admitted, feeling her worry to grow.

“They also told me they left sooner because they begged Washington to leave before he returned. It seems that he went to Ikea”

“Ikea?”

“Yes. He even bought some things we’ve been needing for the house”

“Well, that’s nice?”

“Yes, but… He’s been non-stop since he arrived. I mean, this morning he just came with Theo and told me all that happened, and insisted in going to work; he was acting a bit strange then, but I assumed it was because he was trying to control himself in front of our daughter”
“Yes”

“But then, this afternoon he came and… I had to stop him from keep making noise. He has repaired the stairs, varnished them, hung some pictures; then unhung them, painted the wall and hung them again… Because I told him to stop, ’cause if not… He wanted to fix the tiles of the bathroom”

“Oh”

“I told him ‘Honey, you’re going to disturb the neighbours’, and he told me ‘Fuck the neighbours, I never complained about their parties. I pay my mortgage for something’”

“Wow”

“Yes, yes. I don’t know, maybe he has a concussion?”

“If that’s the case, wait until he repairs the whole house”

“That’s what I was gonna do” Theo admitted, with a giggle. “What about Alexander? Is he alright?”

“Well, sorta. He’s been acting strange as well”

“What did he do?”

“Well, first of all, he threw some of his paperwork out the window”

“That’s terrifying”

“I know. Then, he called Washington to ask for his free days. He hasn’t used any of them, so he has them all. Two whole months”

“Washington might have paled”

“You can bet. I was pale as well. Then, he just drove us to an ice cream shop, where he asked me to tell him all about myself”

“Well, that’s sweet”

“Yes, kinda… He left because he wanted to do I-don’t-remember-what back at the office, and I let him, thinking maybe he’d come back home as his normal self”

“Clever girl”

“Alas, I admit it”

“Did it work?”

“Nope. He just came and even fulfilled his promise about making dinner”

“Wow”

“And now he’s reading to the children to sleep” she sighed. “I know I shouldn’t complain but…”

“No, no, I know what you mean. It’s strange”

“Yes” Eliza nodded with vehemence. “It’s like our husbands have been traded”

“It’s making me feel nervous”
“You as well?”

“Yes”

“I’m worried, and I don’t know why” admitted Eliza.

“Well, let’s see the bright side” Theodosia, as always, very optimistic. “Look at what we’ve got now: two husbands who do things for us: they cook, they spend time with the children, they repair the house, they’re more relaxed… Look at what we had before: Dopey and Grumpy”

“I know, I know… But…” Eliza sighed. “It’s overwhelming”

“… … I know”

“I can’t stand it anymore”

“Me neither”

“I swear to God if I don’t hear screaming and swearing in this house soon, I’m gonna explode”

“And if I don’t get mad because I receive only shrugs as answers, I’m gonna lose it”

“This is not the standoffish man I married…”

“And this is not the demure man I married”

“I miss having a roommate instead of a husband, someone who didn’t realise if I was gone for three days or three hours, and throwing it in his face”

“And I miss being the one who repaired this shitty house and then complain that I have to do everything alone”

“We need to see each other”

“Absolutely”

“Coffee in the afternoon?”

“Coffee in the afternoon”

Eliza nodded, smiling. “Thank you, Theodosia. It’s nice to be able to talk with someone as sane and normal as oneself”

“Likewise, Liz. Oh, I almost forgot: another crazy thing happened today”

“What?”

“Remember Jacques?”

“The dick you used to be married?”

“That’s a too nice thing to say, Betsey” Eliza laughed at her comment. “Well, he just sent me a message today, saying if I wanted to talk about Augustine’s custody”

Eliza’s eyes grew wide. “Theo, those are such good news!”

“I know! I don’t know what’s gotten into him, but maybe I can win this time. I mean, now my
“Wish you luck, Theo” Eliza heard her children’s bedroom door being closed quietly, and she whispered: “Gotta go. Goodnight and until tomorrow”

“Bye, Betsey, sleep well”

Next morning, Eliza was awoken by a nice smell. She blinked a few times, trying to accustom her sight to the matutine light and then stretched out. She turned around, passing a hand through her messy and loose hair, to see the clock on the nightstand indicating it was seven forty-three. She knitted her brows and complained under her breath. She looked over her shoulder, seeing the part of the bed that was Alex’s empty.

“Please, God…” she muttered, getting out of bed. She took the robe that seemed to be waiting just for her to wake up at the feet of the mattress and put it on when she felt the chills of the morning. “Please, let me find the new phone smashed on the floor… Please, let me hear the front door closing before I can reach the living room… Please, please, please…”

Eliza embraced herself and advanced through the hall, praying in her mind to see something broken, to hear some screaming, some cursing, to hear her children trying to contain their laughter in vain… She stopped when the smell became too strong and turned at her right, seeing Alexander taking one tray of cookies out of the oven. Eliza was frozen at the door at first, seeing her husband humming while he closed the oven door with one foot.

“And that is why I don’t go to church anymore, Dad…” she said under her breath, clenching her jaw.

“Oh, Betsey” said Alexander, after a brief startle. “You scared me. Didn’t hear you coming”

“Maybe you were too focus on baking, hon…” she said, faking a smile. “Why… Why are you baking cookies, honey?” she asked, scratching the back of her head, trying to sound casual.

“Oh, because, you know, I woke up at five in the morning and couldn’t fall back asleep” he began to explain.

*Maybe because you went to bed at ten pm last night, and you are used to sleep two hours or less and your body couldn’t handle it,* thought Eliza. “Aha” she simply said.

“And I started to think, and I remembered how happy my workmates seemed when I brought the ice creams to them yesterday”

“You brought them ice cream?” she asked, impressed.
“Yes, Betsey, honey, sometimes I think you don’t listen to me”

“Sorry, sorry…”

“Well, what I was saying, I remembered how happy they seemed, and told myself that I could bring them something homemade all mornings to wish them a good day at work, and then I can spend my whole time with you and the children”

“Aha”

“And so, I woke up trying to not disturb you…”

“Thanks…”

“Nothing, honey, it’s nothing. Then I picked up my phone and started to search for simple recipes, because I wouldn’t want to destroy our kitchen or break something, you know?”

“Yes”

“And I told myself ‘Hey, Alex, you can make cookies, they seem easy’. So, I opened the YouTube app and looked for video tutorials and I followed the steps they said”

“Oh”

“And I also found a good recipe about an apple pie. Oh, Eliza, I’m gonna cook that this afternoon”

“Alright”

“Just after I pick the children up”

“I can do that”

“No, no, you relax here and enjoy of your free time”

“… Fine” she said bitterly.

Eliza heard her children’s bedroom door being opened and saw her two kids coming to her, rubbing their eyes.

“Morning, Mum” they said.

“Morning…”

“Are you alright, Mummy?” asked Angie.

“Yes”

“Because you have that same face you had when Daddy cancelled our mountain trip for work” Eliza looked at her daughter with narrowed eyes.

“That won’t happen ever again, sweetie” Alexander promised her, covering the cookies with a plastic.
“Dad, what are you doing?” asked Philip.

“I’m gonna take this to the office” he explained. “And, this afternoon, you’ll try a homemade apple pie”

Eliza waited for the cheering of her children to make her even angrier, but she heard nothing at all. When she looked down, she saw the two kids sharing a frown.

“Well, this is done” said Alexander, returning his attention to them. “I’ll try to not take too long”

“No, don’t worry… Catch up with the fellas” said Eliza.

“You’re so comprehensive, Betsey” Alex flattered her, walking to her. He gave her a kiss and then petted his children’s heads. “I’m so lucky to have you” he told them, turning around and taking the tray in his hands. “Bye, I’ll come back later”

“Take your time” Eliza said once again, hopeful. She sighed when she heard the door closing.

“Please, take your time, I still hope for a miracle… Maybe he doesn’t even come back… Please, let him call me to tell me he’s gonna spend the whole day at the office…” she began to whisper again.

“Mummy?” asked Philip.

“Yes, honey?”

“Why is Daddy not screaming anymore?”

“Has he lost passion for life?” added Angie.

Eliza looked at them for a moment. “I… I fear so, kids, I fear so…”

“I promise you I’ll pay you what I owe you by the end of the month” said Thomas, trying to focus on the driveway and on the conversation at the same time.

“Stop signal” James warned him, making him brake. He nodded at his friend as a thank you.

“You told me that the last month” said the female at the other side of the line.

“And I paid you” Thomas reminded her, speeding up once James had looked at both sides and told him to do so.

“Yes, on the first day of the next month”

“And I still paid you at the end of that same month. May I remind you you didn’t reduce me the rent, but you increased it?”

“May I remind you you have nowhere else to go?” taunted the voice, amused. “By the way, how are the girls?”
Thomas clicked his tongue. “They’re doing fine, thank you”

“I’ve heard about Patsy’s car accident. I was commenting it with my lawyer the other day”

“After or before you decided to not visit her or even text her to know for yourself if your own niece was fine?” he asked her, annoyed.

“Uh, bad morning mood?”

“No, he’s like this all day” said James, shaking his head.

“Shut up” muttered Thomas, while her sister laughed.

“Well, Thomas, if you want to see me that much, maybe I can bring the date of my monthly visit forwards”

Thomas ignored James shaking his head. “Whenever you want, sister. It’s your house” he told her.

“Yes, yes, it is”

There was a long silence and both men thought the woman had finally hung up. James saw his friend rubbing his temples and was about to ask him if he was feeling fine when the woman’s voice talked again through the speakers.

“Oh, and Thomas? Tell my girls auntie Lucy said ‘hi’”

And that was when Thomas lost it and pressed a button angrily.

“It’s a miracle they remember your name, you two-faced and heartless bitch. Mum should’ve really felt proud of herself when she gave birth to such a hyena…”

“Thomas, you didn’t press the right button, she’s listening!” said James, alarmed.

Jefferson’s face drained from all colour and looked at the gadget, nervous. “What???”

James burst out laughing. “Hahahahaha, I was joking, you did hang up. Hahahaha! You should’ve seen your face!”

His laughter ended abruptly when Thomas slammed on the brakes, and his head hit the dashboard.

“Ow!” complained James, rubbing his forehead. Thomas smiled and kept driving to his correspondent parking lot. “Man, Angelica is right, you lack some sense of humour”

“And you lack a brain, but I don’t pick on you for that” Thomas answered back, parking the car.
“How embittered you are”

“And how am I supposed to be with all the good news I receive?” Both climbed out the car, and Jefferson closed the door with a thump, locking the vehicle up. “I’m just going to ignore everybody, let’s see if I can sort something out before my head simply explodes…”

“Why don’t you call Jay?”

“What for? I spend more time explaining him the case for the thirtieth time than he trying to actually help me solve it”

James opened the door for him and then entered, seeing his friend looking straight at Maria, who had her head too close to the table, focus on drawing something on a paper. She had a ruler and a few crayons spread over the table.

“Maria, what are you doing?” asked James.

The woman lifted her head swiftly, not having heard the door opening. When she seemed to remember where she was and recognised who was in front of her, she smiled. “Good morning, Madison. Jefferson” She held up the paper, showing them a colour timetable; some of their names were written in her handwriting, and a few parts were already coloured. “I’m doing the colour calendar Washington told us about two weeks ago. I’m finishing November” James and Thomas shared a glare, not knowing what to say. “I’ve got this month covered already, but you’re in time to tell me if you want any specific hours of the days of December” she told them.

“… Maria”

“Yes, Jefferson?”

“Do you think is normal for a twenty-four-year-old woman to spend her worktime colouring a paper?”

Maria frowned and curled her lips in annoyance. “Man, you just arrived, and you’re already bitter?”

“Told you” said James, matter-of-factly.

“You too?” said Thomas, offended.

“If I do things, because I do things; if I do nothing, because I do nothing… You are obsessed with criticising me, why do you dislike me this much?” she asked, hitting the table with the palm of the hand in which she was holding the blue crayon.

“I don’t” Thomas promised, shrugging. “I’m just indifferent towards you”

“If this is indifference, God have mercy of the poor people you hate” she blurted out.

Thomas narrowed his eyes. “You’re using too much excessive liberty towards us lately”

Maria looked daggers at him with the corner of her eye, infuriated. “Fucking and shitty classist; no wonder why Sally dumped you” she muttered.

“What did you just say?” asked Thomas, arms in akimbo.
Maria straightened herself in her seat and looked him straight in the eyes. “I said: ‘Fucking and shitty classist; no wonder why Sally dumped you’. Do you need me to write it down with some notes, so your snobbish brain can process my ‘lower class’ vocabulary more easily?” she snapped.

James took a step forwards when he heard Thomas clicking his tongue. “Jeez, Maria, chill, you’re salty”

“Tell this scumbag to leave me be, then” she complained, pointing at Jefferson with the blue crayon she was still holding. “Fuck, I was just trying to be nice!” She dropped the blue crayon and picked the magenta one. “Now, I’m gonna give you the worst hours to clean. Screw you” she swore, red as scarlet as she coloured something on the paper with vehemence.

“You spent too much time with Hamilton…” commented Thomas.

“And you spent too much time with your ego. Maybe that’s your problem” Maria talked back. Looking at James, she added, gentler. “You deserve Heaven to put up with him”

“Thank you” said James, gaining a dirty look from his friend. “Hey, could you give me some hour in the Friday afternoons? That way I could entertain myself while I pretend to be cleaning”

Maria changed her mood and smiled warmly at the shorter man. “That’s what I was gonna do on Mondays mornings, to have a nap between moping and brushing” she admitted.

Madison nodded in agreement. “Good idea, good idea”

“You’ll have Friday afternoons on December, then” she promised.

“Thanks, we’ll let you to it” said Madison, indicating Jefferson to get moving before another discussion arose.

“Oh, Mr. Washington and Angelica are on the pub; we’re free until further notice” she informed them.

“Perfect way to start a Tuesday” commented James.

“I know” she nodded, grabbing the yellow crayon and resuming her colouring. “John, Herc, Laf and Peggy have just left to the market to buy some food, if you want to go somewhere…”

“No, we’ve got some work to do” said Thomas.

“Yes, documents written by others don’t photocopy by themselves” Maria ridiculed. “I’ll send a message through the group chat to warn you if I see Mr. Washington or Angelica coming back” she added, looking at James with half a smile.

“You deserve a raise, Maria, seriously” said Madison, while Thomas rolled his eyes.

“Bit by bit” said the receptionist.

James talked again in a whisper when he was sure they were out of Maria’s earshot. “Why do you always have to pick on her?”

“Because she’s got too much airs lately”

“Well, I wouldn’t piss off the person who prepare our coffees”

“Look, I don’t want to know anything about anyone today. I’m just gonna lock up in my office and I
won’t get out from there until half past five” Thomas swore, opening the door of his office. “I don’t mind whatever the hell would hap…” He said as James entered the room, and stopped mid-sentence when he looked, with the corner of his eye, at the direction of Burr’s office. “… No” he shook his head. “No, no, no, no, no. No. That’s too far. No” he said, throwing his jacket and briefcase on his desk and heading towards the office across his.

“What are you talking about?” asked James, following him. When he saw what his friend was referring, he was taken aback. “Oh… That”

“No, no, I’ve got limits as well” kept talking Thomas. He knocked on the open door and his eyes met Aaron’s. “Burr, mind to explain to me what the heck are you doing with a pistol in the office?”

James got in the room, seeing his workmate had already hung a beige curtain to cover the hole he had made the previous day. A bit useless as the wind moved it at its will and the air still get through it almost completely. He shivered a bit and wrapped himself up in his coat. He had just recovered from a cold, and didn’t want to repeat the experience sooner than usual. His eyes fell on the table, where Aaron had a small gun he was cleaning with a cloth before Thomas had interrupted him.

“Yes, I mind” said Aaron, returning his attention to the gun.

“Rephrase: why do you have a pistol in the office?” said Jefferson, crossing his arms.

“I’ve got this old lady living next door with her eight thief cats, who have decided to enter my house and my garden whenever they like”

Thomas and James exchanged a glare. “Alright? What does that have to do with…?”

“I asked her in good manners to control them and, what a coincidence, after that time Theo and I have been awoken by the sound of pebbles in our window”

“There are annoying neighbours everywhere” commented James, shrugging.

“And some of them end up living in your house” said Thomas, gaining a death glare from James. “Why don’t call the police?”

“We did, and they didn’t do a thing. That, in my language, means I have to take justice in my own hands”

“Since when?” asked James, frowning with worry.

“Since yesterday morning, around something past seven” he explained.

“Ah…”

“You see, gentlemen, around that time I was driving my daughter to nursery school along with Alex and his children, and, in an intersection, a lobby driver simply decided that they were above the traffic regulations, and skipped a stop signal, almost crashing against us”

Thomas and James were frozen after that declaration, praying they had heard him wrong.
They wanted to believe that theory, especially when they heard the calm tone in Burr’s tone and how he was still cleaning the pistol.

“Is…” started to say James. “Is that why Hamilton asked for his free days?” he asked.

“The hell I know; if you wanna know about Alexander’s life go and ask him yourself. What am I now, the narrator of his life?” blurted out Aaron.

“No, no, but…”

“Let me get this straight” interrupted Thomas, passing a hand through his face. “You and Hamilton survived a wreck, and you have no better idea than to celebrate it by trying to get in jail for killing an old lady or her cats?”

“Oh both” added James.

Aaron looked up once again, serious. The two men took a step back. “Are you two idiots? I’m not gonna to kill anybody for two missing sardines and a few pebbles against the window” He held the gun up. “This is a blank pistol, for God’s sake. I’m gonna scare the crazy woman, that’s the only language that people understand”

James tilted his head to the side. “Are you sure about that? Because it doesn’t look like one”

“Madison, the next time you cast doubts on my intelligence, I’ll pay you a visit with the real one I’ve kept from my father back at my house, and you won’t like that visit”

“I wasn’t doubting your intelligence, it’s just that…”

“You know?” Aaron interrupted, glaring at the floor. “Something hit me yesterday morning when that truck didn’t hit me that morning: I’ve never been in control of my own life. I graduated sooner than the rest of my classmates because that was my parents’ dying wish; I studied Laws because that was my uncle and aunt’s wish; I even baptised my daughter because that would’ve been my grandfather’s wish, and he was dead by the time Theo was born. I didn’t even want to pick Alexander up that morning, but I did it because I didn’t want Theodosia to worry over my anxiety, which I’ve been hiding in case I could bother someone with it, with a thing I didn’t choose to have and haven’t experienced in the last twenty-four hours. Funny, right?”

Aaron took a pause, and James admitted he felt bad for the man and understood what he was talking about. He threw a rapid glare to Thomas, seeing his friend was trying harder to comprehend, but still with his mind put on the gun and thinking a way to make Burr change his mind. James thought he heard Maria’s voice greeting someone down the hallway, but couldn’t make out the name. She sounded joyful, though, so he relaxed because that meant it wasn’t either Washington or Angelica.

Aaron getting up, with the gun in his right hand and the jacket in his left one, returned his attention back to what was happening in the room. He still heard some conversation going on at the entrance, which would be followed by some walking later.
“Well, bad news for the world, good news for me” declared Burr, getting the chair in the desk. “Those days of passiveness, of anxiety, are over”

“Guys, guess who is here!” said Maria, approaching the office. Thomas and James looked at the door, hearing two pair of shoes getting closer.

“Now, if I want something, I’ll go for it. There’s no chance that…” Aaron kept talking, putting his coat on and grabbing the pistol once again, waving it a bit in the air.

Maria reached the door just mid-sentence, accompanied by Alexander. “Guys, I made you some cookies!” he declared, about to enter the office.

Aaron talked at the same time, not taking notice of anything around him. “…I am going to throw away my shot” he promised.

His last word was muted by the sound of an actual shot when the pistol shot itself when Aaron stopped waving it. Maria gasped when she saw Alexander falling on the floor, a hand upon ribs. The bang of the tray falling wasn’t enough to avoid them to be completely frozen, looking at the still form of their workmate on the floor and the blood coming out his chest.

Maria felt the air too thick to breathe, and for a moment she felt like an intruder in her own body. Thankfully, Madison’s voice woke her up from her sudden trance, and she was back to reality.

“You should’ve thrown that one shot away…”

She didn’t understand the words pronounced – which didn’t have any effect on the other two men – but she could snap out of it completely. She let out a small scream out her now pale lips and ran to the phone that – thank God – was already fixed when they had come back from their two weeks break.

While she was on her way, she heard Madison talking once again, saying something she couldn’t quite comprehend.

“That is what happens when you cast doubts on my intelligence…”

The four of them waited outside the ER. Maria and Madison were sat at each other’s side. The woman was shaking and hyperventilating, not understanding what had just happened, and
asking questions that were unanswered; the man, on the contrary, was completely still, arms crossed and with his eyes glued to the floor. Across from them was Aaron, crest-fallen, with both hands over his mouth, shaking his head in denial. The only one that was on his feet was Jefferson, who couldn’t stop walking from left to right. The only time he stopped was to light a cigarette.

“It’s forbidden to smoke inside a hospital” James told him, totally serene.

Thomas lighted the cigarette anyway and began to smoke, not throwing him a glare. “We are going to jail anyway, the hell I care about a damned cigarette”

“To jail??” repeated Maria, her heartrate increasing. “But not me, right? I didn’t even know what was happening back there!”

“You brought him to us” said James.

“And called the ambulance while you just stood there like imbeciles” she blurted out, enraged. “In fact, I may have saved his life! It was you the ones who didn’t take the gun away from Aaron!” she accused, pointing at Madison and Jefferson.

“I was in it, but this man” he pointed at James. “was always interrupting me”

“Hey, don’t pin the corpse on me; I was the one who told you both that didn’t look like a blank pistol”

“What were you doing with a fucking pistol, anyways?” asked Maria, looking daggers at Burr, who was still in shock in front of her.

“My God, my God…” muttered Jefferson. “All this shit because a truck almost hit you yesterday…”

“What?” asked Maria, eyes wide in confusion.

Thomas frowned at Aaron. “Bunch of fucking idiots with intelligence quotient below 60… Why can’t any of you be normal, dammit?... A normal person is almost hit by a truck, goes to their fucking house and spends a few days to calm themselves, but noooo, you are so special that you had to declare the war to the whole country for past traumas”

Aaron snapped out of it: “I thought it was a blank pistol, fuck it!”

“Can someone explain me what the hell is going on?” said Maria.

“You just had to kill him when he was starting to be submissive and kind” commented James all of a sudden. “You couldn’t kill him when he was a dick, right?”

“Jesus Christ, James, what are you saying now?” said Thomas.

“What? If I recall correctly, you wanted him to have a strange disease, so he wouldn’t be able to go back and so work in peace”

“Sweet Lord…” muttered Maria, covering her mouth and shaking her head in bewilderment.

“I also want to win the lottery, but it’s never happening, why would this be any different?” Thomas defended himself.

“It just pisses me off” said James, shrugging. “When a person is alive they can be a dick and a
demon but once they died they are perfect angels. Well, no, he was a prick before death, he will be after death”

“Don’t talk like that, he is not dead!” said Maria. “Right?” she added, looking hopefully at Jefferson.

“I don’t know, the son of a bitch who attended us doesn’t want to say anything”

“He can’t die, it barely grazed him” said Aaron, doubtful.

“Man, you shot him right between his ribs” said James.

“But it was on the right side, the heart is on the left, right?”

Accelerated steps were heard getting closer, and in a matter of second the rest of their workmates were there, gasping for air.

“We came as soon as Maria texted us” explained Peggy, trying to catch her breath. “What happened?”

“Aaron thinks he is Dirty Harry” said James.

“What??”

“This moron just shot Hamilton out of the blue!” shouted Thomas, overwhelmed. He pressed his back on the wall behind him.

“What??” Peggy screamed louder.

“Peggy, control your voice, this is a hospital” said James, calmly.

“Fuck the hospital!” she said. She turned to Burr. “What the hell is wrong with you?!”

“Man, you’re out of control!” screamed Hercules.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” said Aaron, shaking in his seat. “I swear I thought it was a blank pistol. It was an…”

“Say ‘It was an accident’ one more time and, God be my witness, you go next” said Jefferson.

“Wasn’t it Hamilton the one who said back at the cabin that Aaron was going to kill somebody one day with one of his ‘accidents’?” asked James, frowning with curiosity.

“Mon Dieu, it’s true” said Lafayette, exchanging a surprised glare with Hercules.

Laurens shook his head in amazement. “The world has a funny way to work. There’s something there. Call it God, call it energy…”

“Are you going to talk about your shitty beliefs now, with my brother-in-law in the fucking ER?”

“Jeez, Peggy, I’m just stating facts! I’m worried too!”

“But where did you shoot him?” asked Lafayette, looking at Aaron with a cocked eyebrow.
“Between his ribs…” whispered Aaron, and Peggy gasped, trying to erase that image from her brain.

“He fell like a Playmobil”

“James, what the hell is wrong with you?” asked Thomas.

“Humour is my defence mechanism against disgraces” he explained, a bit offended. “After all these years, you don’t know me?”

“All I know is that you’re putting me on my nerves!”

“Does Mr. Washington or Angelica know about this?” asked Hercules, looking in the direction they had come.

Maria shook her head. “I just messaged you, I didn’t think I would’ve been able to go into detail with them”

“I sent a message to Angelica, saying what you told us” said Peggy, looking anxiously at the door in front of them. “She asked me, but I didn’t know that this imbecile shot him. Oh, God” she paled suddenly and took a seat at Aaron’s right with trembling legs. “Oh, God, Eliza… I didn’t… I didn’t text Eliza… Should I…?”

Laurens sat beside her and took her hand. “I’m sure Angelica did it for you. Breathe, he will be alright” he tried to comfort her.

James leaned back on his chair. “I’ve just realised we killed Washington’s chihuahua”

“God, it’s true” said Jefferson, glaring at the floor. “And people tend to be very sensitive over their pets”

“Please, I bit of respect, his sister-in-law is here…” said Lafayette.

“And we don’t know if he’s dead yet” added Hercules, with a frown.

Peggy hit Aaron with her free hand, enraged. “All because you’re an idiot! In what were you thinking?!?” she shouted.

Aaron covered himself. “I thought it was a blank pistol, for the love of God! I am not going to repeat it anymore!”

Jefferson turned his head around the corner when he heard more accelerated steps getting closer to them. “I think you’ll have to, Mojo JoJo; here comes the Professor Utonium and his PowerPuff Girls”

And as he ended that sentence, Washington appeared, face sweaty and drained of all colour, though not as much as Angelica’s and, especially, Eliza’s, who had to be carried by her sister, her whole body shaking, and her cheeks wet with recent tears.

“Where is my husband?” she asked, with a choked voice.

“In the ER, chérie, we have to wait” said Lafayette, helping her to be on her feet by taking her free arm.
“What the hell happened?” asked George. The three new arrivals were startled when they saw the six of them pointing directly and rapidly at Aaron.

“He shot him” they said at the same time, accusatory.

They were taken aback at first. Eliza broke the silence that reigned with a surprised gasp and an almost fall if it hadn’t been for Lafayette and Angelica, who helped her kneel on the floor while she cried.

“Here” said the Frenchman, handing her a handkerchief. Eliza nodded in gratitude, blew her nose and then handed it back to him. “Non, non, keep that…” he said, wrinkling his nose.

George cleared his throat before speaking. “Burr, for Heaven’s sake, I know any of you at the office can be overwhelming, but there is a limit”

Aaron was at the verge of tears at the moment. “It was an accident, I thought it was a blank pistol!” He looked down at Eliza, who was hyperventilating while Angelica tried to comfort her, whispering reassuring words in her ear. “I’m sorry, Eliza, I’m sorry, I swear…”

Eliza started to rummage her jean pockets, looking desperately for something, finally, she got something out of one of them. In a blink of an eye, her broken expression changed for one of fury, and she got up on her feet quickly, surprising both Lafayette and Angelica, making them lose their comforting hold on her arms. Eliza flicked the lighter and launched over Aaron, who jumped on his seat, trying to get away from the fire.

“ELIZA, NO!” screamed Angelica, running to her sister when she saw what she was trying to do.

“She’ll burn him alive!” screamed Hercules.

“Eliza, put yourself together!” said George, helping Angelica to hold her back.

Eliza kept trying to get away from them, looking at Aaron with fury. “SON OF A BITCH, HE’S GOT THREE CHILDREN!” she screamed, kicking the air when her sister and husband’s boss held her in the air by the arms.

“Eliza, drop the lighter, drop the lighter!” screamed Peggy, hesitant about getting closer.

“Someone call a nurse that can sedate her!” said James.

“Don’t say things like that!” screamed Laurens.

“For Christ’s sake, people, calm down already!” shouted George, managing to finally get the lighter away from its owner and keeping it in his pocket. Eliza then turned around and hugged her sister, crying in defeat. George huffed. “Please, behave! We’re in a hospital, not in a meeting!”

“Thank you, Washington” said Aaron, a hand over his chest.

George touched Eliza’s shoulder, calling her attention. “If you want to burn him alive, wait until we
“Mr. Washington!” exclaimed Burr.

“My God, all of Hamilton’s partners are pyromaniac…” commented Jefferson, looking incredulously at his workmate’s wife.

“At least, I did it by accident” Laurens defended himself, offended.

“Please, not that argument again…” complained Hercules, overwhelmed.

Eliza turned around to face Burr and pointed at him. “Be prepared for when we get out, I’m only saying that”

“Betsey, don’t be a thug…” said Angelica.

“Um… Excuse me?”

They turned around, facing a doctor who was looking at them with wide eyes, and clearly hesitant in getting any closer to the group. He cleared his throat and looked at the papers he had on his board.

“Are you here for…?”

“Please, doctor, tell me my husband is alright” said Eliza, clapping both hands together.

The man took a moment and pressed his lips when he saw the hope in the woman’s eyes. He lowered his head. “I’m sorry, but… he died”

Eliza let out a cry of pain as she knelt on the floor once again, crying her eyes out; her sisters clapped a hand over their mouths before feeling the tears streaming down her cheeks. Aaron passed a hand through his face, muttering curses against himself and shaking from contain weeping. The rest of the group was disconcerted at first, and then the ones who were on their feet tried to hold themselves with walls or chairs, their faces totally paled.

“Son…” muttered George, taking a seat beside Madison, who spoke in a quiet whisper at the same time.

“After all the man had survived of, he died because of a bullet. This has no sense”

“He was in the prime of life…” cried Peggy, hugging Laurens, who was in so much distress as her. Jefferson frowned. “God, I’ve got the feeling that I lived this before…”

“You too?” asked Angelica, looking at him while hugging her sister.

“Alex…” cried Eliza before burying her face in her hands.
The doctor looked at her with wide eyes. “Excuse me, did you say Alex?” he asked, bending down to try to be on her same eye level. Eliza nodded. “Alexander Hamilton?” he asked once again, looking at the papers one more time.

“Yes…”

The doctor started to laugh at that, gaining surprised expressions mixed with fury. “Oh, Jesus, I’m sorry! I thought you were Mr. Smith’s relatives; he died of a heart arrest just now. Uf” he wiped some sweat from his forehead. “Good to know I still have a bit of time to prepare, when I saw so many people gathered here I almost had a heart attack myself”

“B-But… But what happened to my husband, then?” asked Eliza.

“Oh, he’s okay. He’s recovering in there, we are about to move him to his provisional room” he explained, looking at the notes. “Haha, what a stupid confusion”

He looked up when he heard nothing at all, finding the whole group looking daggers at him. Before he could react, Eliza took his board and was on her feet, hitting him with it. He heard the rest of the persons there cheering her, and then felt a series of punches and kicks, even when he fell to the floor, curled up in a useless attempt to protect as much as he could.

“Asshole, don’t get confused with things like that!” said Eliza, before breaking the board in half and throwing it to him.

He heard them all passing him by, cursing and insulting him. When the door at his backs closed with a thump and the silence reigned around him, he managed to uncurl himself and looked around him, feeling his whole body aching. One of the nurses stopped by and looked at him up and down.

“Did you get confused with the patient’s name again?” she asked, with boredom. “Man, I don’t even know how many times I’ll have to say you need to be given another job in here”

And with that she left him there.

The quietness of the small room was abruptly interrupted once a bunch of eleven persons got in through the door, talking nervously and in unison. Another person would’ve felt overwhelmed, but Alexander was glad; the silence was about to deafened him. He tried to get in a sitting position, wanting to ignore the pain in the right side of his chest. Eliza was helpful in his disgrace, as usual, even when she didn’t notice. She threw to his arms, hugging him as gently as affectionately as she could manage.
“Gosh, Alex, you scared me so much!” she said in a whisper, burying her face in his neck.

Alexander patted her back. “I’m alright, Betsey” he assured her.

Angelica put a hand on her sister’s shoulder while she smiled back at her brother-in-law: “How are you feeling, Alex?”

“You gave us quite the startle” added Peggy, by her older sister’s side.

“I’m okay, seriously” he admitted once again, nodding at his two sisters-in-law, who smiled warmly at him.

“Does it hurt, son?” asked Washington, walking to his left side, across the Schuyler sister.

“I’m so sorry, Alex” said Maria, by the president’s side, worry written all over her face. “I didn’t know, I…”

“I’m alright” said Alexander once again. “It’s okay, really. Maria, it wasn’t your fault” he assured her.

“We know” said Laurens, joining the Schuyler women along with Lafayette and Hercules. “It was all this idiot’s fault” he said, pointing at Aaron with his chin, who was entering the place hesitant right behind Jefferson and Madison.

“I’m very sorry, Alexander” said Burr immediately. “I swear to God, to my parents’ grave that I thought it was a blank pistol” he said, stopping by the bed feet and refusing to get any further. When he saw the fixed glare of Hamilton on him, he kept going, feeling pressured. “I swear, I promise. Why on Earth would I want to shoot you?”

“Why wouldn’t somebody want to” commented Jefferson.

“See?” said Madison, shrugging. “Now, he survived and he’s a dick again. Just what I was saying back there…”

Alexander cocked an eyebrow. “Oh, was it you, Burr?” he asked. “The nurse just explained what happened to me because I only had blurs of memories”

“You… You had…?” asked Burr.

“Yes. In fact, when she told me I was shot, I thought it had been Jefferson”

Thomas couldn’t stop the snort that escaped his mouth then. “Man, you were so close to avoid his hatred” he told Burr, who just made a face.

Laurens shook his head. “Poor man, all happens to him” he said, yet the beginning of a smile was forming in his lips.

“Don’t worry, Aaron” said Alexander. “There are no hard feelings on my part”

“There aren’t?”

“No. We both went a bit crazy these two past days” he admitted.

“Well, you gave flowers and ice cream to people. Don’t compare your sudden kindness with his
inevitable madness” said Lafayette.

“If it makes you feel better” commented Madison, all of a sudden. “Your wife almost burnt him alive back at the waiting room”

Alexander removed the hand from Eliza’s back immediately. “What? How could that be? I hid your lighters!”

Eliza kept hugging him, her head turned to the opposite side of Alexander’s face. “Yeah, that…” she giggled. “I kinda… Um… Bought a full box of new ones?” she admitted, with tiny voice.

“You’ve got a problem, woman” Aaron condemned her.

“Look who’s talking” said half of the room.

Alexander hit the mattress with one fist, making Eliza jump slightly, and getting separated from her husband. “Damnit, Eliza! I told you I don’t want any of my closest persons near a fucking lighter! In what language do you need to be spoken to? Not English for what I’m seeing! So, which one? French? Spanish? Do I need to learn a new language? Tell me, I’ll gladly do it because you’re out of goddamn control!”

“…Are you screaming at me?” asked Eliza with narrowed eyes.

“Of course, I’m fucking screaming, you’re trying my patience! Gosh, and then it’s my fault if Philip bites children at the nursery school… It’s a fucking miracle he hasn’t set fire to anyone yet!”

“Are you swearing as well?” his wife asked again.

“No, I’m going to talk all posh after all the shit I have to put up with you and your damn habits of burning things when you’re angry! Jeez, Eliza, I don’t know what I’m going to do! You… Why are you hugging me?” Alexander stopped mid-sentence when he saw Eliza throwing into his arms, hugging him tighter than before. He clapped her back. “Betsey?”

“Thank God, you’re screaming and swearing! You’re back!” she said, happily, not noticing the perplex eyes that were eyeing both her and Alex.

“What a strange couple…” commented Thomas under his breath.

Alexander looked daggers at him. “Better than yours, which you no longer have” he blurted out.

“Asshole” said Thomas, flipping the bird at him.

“Well, we finally are back to our constant aggressiveness… How much did peace last?” said George, looking at his watch.

“Peace…” said Hercules, frowning. “Burr teared the wall down”

“But painted another!” Aaron defended himself.

“And he hung up some nice curtains” commented Maria, as a matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, I’m sure thieves will be shooed away by those rags” said Laurens with a laugh.

“I’ll put a proper window soon…” promised Burr.

“Just see what a show we made, Aaron” said Alexander, trying to get up and not moaning in the act.
Eliza helped him leaned back instead. “I tried to let it go and you try to get what you wanted and look what that got us”

“I’m sorry” he apologised again.

“You should simply do things in your own way” advised Peggy. “If the almost accident traumatized you that much, you should’ve come to me”

Aaron and Alexander gave her a long look up and down. “Peggy, dear, if we had gone to you to make us therapy, we would’ve have ended up shooting each other willingly” said Alexander, rubbing his temples.

Peggy was red in the face in a matter of seconds. “Idiot!” she screamed, taking out something from her pocket and throwing it to him.

It hit Eliza’s instead. “Peggy!” she complained. “Don’t throw packs of gum!”

“She just can’t handle the truth” chimed in Angelica. “Haven’t you learned anything from what happened back at the cabin?” the oldest asked the youngest, crossing her arms.

“That wasn’t my fault! You had too much resent inside of you, it was a matter of time, it was destined to happen!” screamed Peggy, pushing her sister.

“Don’t push me” said Angelica, offended, and pushing her sister back.

Eliza saw her two sisters pushing each other, having a feeling of déjà vu from her kid days. “What happened at that cottage?” she asked, eyeing everybody in the room. They avoided her look. “Come on! I deserve to know!”

Thomas pointed at Washington. “Ask this man, it was his fault we ended up there, anyways”

“Oh, right, like you did so much better!” commented Alexander, rolling his eyes. “If I remember correctly, you were the one who undermined our moral”

“The chihuahua is barking already…” Alexander threw his pillow to him. “Don’t throw things!”

Madison rubbed his temples. “Please, behave, this is a hospital room!” he said, red in the face.

“It’s him!” Alexander and Thomas said at the same time.

Eliza frowned, hearing her sisters and her husband and Thomas screaming in stereo. She clenched her fists and teeth. “Enough with this behaviour, you’re all adults! We must be disturbing the rest of people in the hospital!” she screamed, kicking the floor once.

Washington saw the four persons getting quiet. “Mrs. Hamilton, that was incredible” he congratulated her. “What do you do on Wednesdays mornings?”

“Hm… Take the children to nursery school and do some shopping, like usual” she answered, shrugging. “Why?”

“Because that’s the day we have the meetings, and I’d like someone like you to achieve this peace”

“Sir!” complained Alexander.

“Well, the good vibes just lasted for a couple of minutes” commented Lafayette. Then, smiling, he added. “It’s a new record!”
“We should write them down” suggested Laurens.

“With all the craziness we have, we should write a book” said Hercules, rolling his eyes.

“I can write it, I’m doing nothing all day anyways!” said Maria, shrugging and with a tiny smile appearing on her lips.

George gave her a hard look. “Well earned salary, I see…”

“A book about us? No one would believe it” said Alexander.

“But even read it” added Burr.

“I disagree” Maria shrugged it off, already making a mental list of all the things she could need to accomplish her new idea.

Chapter End Notes

*Resurrected louse: I think the expression in English would be "new money", but I decided to translate it literally because it made me laugh the first time I heard it. As long as I know, it means that somebody who was a nobody or lost all their money now have it back or gain it and now it's rich.
Doors that were previously closed (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

“I think I might know someone who could help you” he commented, on the quiet.
Thomas arched one eyebrow. “Who do you have in mind?”
James eyed the microwave, not wanting to meet his gaze, and took a moment to reply:
“Please, don’t get mad”
“Who is it?...”
“You two work for the same staff”
“No”

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, slight anxiety and angst in the beginning.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda

It all started with the core of an apple. He was even embarrassed of admitting it inside his head; he needn’t to say it aloud to feel his cheeks burning whilst they turned bright red. How such a stupid and small thing could trigger such a mental block, raise so much anxiety inside his chest and ruin a whole day, James never knew. But not knowing never served to help him to get away from that experience. Ever. There were only a few who knew about his fits: his parents had to know at some point, though he was never in agreement with them knowing; it served only to put double efforts during one of his seizures to conceal it from them. A few classmates he used to hang out with eventually learned about his problem; he did remember, however, the frowns of frustration the days after he had made up an excuse about why he couldn’t join them on the weekend or to go to one of their houses to work on a group project.

Teachers knew first.

*It all started with the core of an apple...*

Teachers were supposed to teach you things. Relevant or irrelevant things, that was up to debate, but they taught them nonetheless. It was their job; and yours, as a student, was to pay attention, to study and to try to pass the exams in order to keep going. Like any other student, James was good at some subjects, very good at a couple of subjects, average in the majority and bad at one or two, which starred in his worst nightmares. As if he were following some kind of tradition for bookworm students, he hated Physical Education and the PE teacher hated him just as much. Neither of them showed it openly, though, that was a non-written well-known law in schools: you can hate
your students/teachers, but don’t let anyone else but yourself to know it or problems will come. Still, the bad vibes were too clear to ignore for someone as sensitive as James. And he still believed, to this day, that Mr. Henry was as sensitive as him. That or… he just saw he was the easiest target for a teacher. James was shy, introverted, always with his nose stuck in a book and missing half of the monthly classes. Yes, he surely was an easy target for teachers who were having a bad day.

And Mr. Patrick Henry sure had a lot of bad days.

*It all started with the core of an apple… Why didn’t I pick up the pear instead?*

Patrick Henry was straightforward, passionate in his own way but also a bit too hard headed to James liking. That was why he wasn’t happy when he saw that man was going to be his class tutor. He seemed to be the only unhappy child in his class, in fact. He wasn’t surprised, he was also the only kid in class who barely – for not saying, never – raised his hand in class or talk at all. Regardless of if he knew the answer. Just by knowing he would’ve been right was enough for him most of the time.

James had never hated History as much as that year. And he would’ve have created a new kind of loathing towards Physical Education as well if it hadn’t been for their actual teacher, whose name he had forgotten a long time ago. Why couldn’t he forget the names of those who had harmed him with the same ease, he never knew… Mr. Whoever was nice enough towards him, and never asked questions. But his school had the great idea of let one of the two weekly hours of PE in hands of the class tutor. An idea James never understood, and that year hated the most.

Usually, tutors let them play around the playground. Silly games like dodgeball, football or basketball. Anything that ended with the word ‘ball’ was enough to make a whole class of thirty kids happy. Except for kids like James, who was never fond of sports or teams. Especially when you are chosen the last one and clearly unwillingly. Thankfully, most of the days he could avoid the embarrassment and just spend the hour sat on the stands of the schoolyard, studying, reading or getting ahead of homework.

*All because of the core of a fucking apple.*

It’s funny how the human brain works. James couldn’t remember the name of the PE teacher who was nice to him, no matter how hard he tried, but he remembered Patrick Henry’s full name, his face and, even, his voice. He remembered the timetable of that year better than any other, he remembered the letter of his class – the letter B. The letter B of sixth grade. He had PE with the tutor on Mondays at last hour, from one to two o’clock. James even remembered his mother telling him to look at the bright side: he’d have all the homework for the next day assigned and could start it there and then not having so much to do once he was home. And he clung to that from September to June to survive. Especially when, in the middle of November, his last year in the Elementary School
He even remembered which subjects sent them homework that day. He remembered he had to write an essay for English; two activities from the Science text book about what they had read that day – the activities number 2 and 4 of page 24 – and five exercises of Maths about fractions and decimals the teacher had invented for them to practice. He remembered it was November the 16th, that it was a cloudy and windy day, and that he had tried to focus on the numbers written by him all over a piece of paper before writing the right ones cleanly on his actual notebook. He remembered how hard it was when the chill made him tremble and sneeze a few times, calling the attention of his tutor, who only threw him rapid glares before returning his attention to the football match his classmates were playing, filling the air with their (annoying) screaming. He remembered he looked at his bag too many times, seeing the sleeve of his dark blue jacket his mother always made him wear in the mornings before leaving their house to go to school. He remembered telling himself to stop looking at it, comforting himself about the fact that it was getting closer to the end of the hour and he would be home soon, far from the screaming and the not-so-discreet glares of Mr. Henry. He had looked at his watch countless times, he had watched the minutes going on too slowly for his liking, he had even stopped writing just to see the seconds passing at slow motion. It was only half past one. One thirty-one; one thirty-two…

He had sneezed, felt the beginning of a headache being born in his forehead. He had put a hand on it, and, even to this day, James would’ve sworn he had felt it warmer than before last period had started. He had sniffled and thrown another glare to his backpack, the sleeve of his jacket was tempting him more and more. He had looked at Mr. Henry, biting his bottom lip nervously. He had thought the teacher would’ve been too focus on the other twenty-nine children, who were running and pushing and screaming and jumping, to notice the quiet kid sitting on the stands of the schoolyard, just doing some homework without bothering anyone. He had thought it was more normal to be focus on the moving children in case some of them could trip and hurt themselves instead of him, who was just writing and studying in silence. He hadn’t been noticed in half an hour, and thought he wouldn’t be in the other half that was about to come. He had put his notebook aside as silently as he could and had reached out for his backpack, finally getting the jacket out and putting it on.

_All this started because of an apple… Gosh, I’m such a mess._

_

“Madison, what are you doing wearing that jacket?”

The voice had startled him on its day, it had startled him now that he was recapitulating that day, especially when it sounded so real inside of his panicked head. It had sounded just a second after he had felt the warm feeling of the clothe around him, protecting him from the outside chill. For a moment, he had thought he had imagined it. But it had only been necessary to look up and find the straight glare of his teacher to know his voice had been everything but a product of his imagination.
He was reliving the lump in his throat that prevented him from talking, from defending or explaining himself. He was eleven years old again, and it was terrifying.

“Madison, did I speak Chinese, so you couldn’t understand me? I asked you why were you wearing that jacket?”

He shrunk in his current seat as he had done twenty-five years ago. Jeez, for a moment he had to blink because he was seeing his former teacher in front of him, with his face more wrinkled than usual thanks to a frown he had provoked. He felt the silence surrounding him just as it happened to him that day, when his classmates had stopped playing, alerted by the volume of Mr. Henry’s harsh tone. Being told off by a teacher was bad enough without the attention of a whole class, but of course, if there were a way to make him feel even littler and worse, Mr. Henry was going to take it. He always took it.

“Can you talk, Madison?” The teacher had asked him, making him flinch in the stands. He had pressed his back against the wall behind him and brought his knees to his chest. “At least a syllable, I’m not asking for much” he had added, more mockingly. James remembered hearing a few giggles in the back of his mind, and it was as hard to ignore them as it had been that day. “Are you going to be polite and answer your teacher’s question, kid? Will I have to send you to the principal’s office?” James had shaken his head. “Ah, good, you’re with us” More laughing had sounded. “Now that it’s clear you’re here with us, can you explain why are you wearing a jacket that is not part of the school’s uniform?”

James had shrunk even more in the spot before answering in quiet voice. “It’s cold…”

“What?” the teacher had interrupted him. “Talk a bit louder, please, I’d like to hear the answer of my question”

He had swallowed, and prayed for them to not notice the slight shaking of his voice. “It’s cold… I could get sick”

James flinched at the memory of Mr. Henry’s eye-roll. “Madison, that’s not a proper excuse for wearing something that is not part of the school’s uniform. If you’re cold, you can put on the jacket of school’s tracksuit, which has a reason to exist”

“I… I was already…” he had tried to explain, feeling his face red when the fixed glares of his classmates were soon accompanied by mocking grins. “It’s just that…” he had stopped when the teacher had started to rub his temples, clearly annoyed.

“Madison, I think you need to learn you can’t do whatever you like only because you’re sick or because you’re going to fall ill”

“But…”

“Have you already gone to a doctor, as I advised your mother to do?”

“Y-Yes…”

“And what did they tell you?”
“I… They…”

“Louder, Madison!”

He had shrunk even more after hearing the harsh tone of the teacher and the laughter of his classmates. “I… It’s just that I’ve just recovered from a sore throat and…”

“That’s right, you missed all past week” the teacher had interrupted him once again. He had eyed him up and down, making his heartbeat increase and his vision to blur. “Do you have the medical certificate?”

“I… I’ve got a note from my mother”

Patrick’s eyes narrowed at that. “Is your mother a doctor now, Madison?”

“N-No…”

“I recall her being a housewife or something like that”

“She is”

“Did she get a degree in Medicine the other day?” More laughter.

“No…”

“Then, I’ll not be able to excuse your absence. You need a medical certificate in order to if you missed more than three days of class. You know the rules, or I assumed you did. Seeing the show you’re mounting just because you were cold I’m starting to doubt it. Did you miss the first day of class as well, when I handed out the memos with the centre’s rules?”

“I… I couldn’t come the first days…”

“How am I not surprised? You could, at least, ask a classmate to show the sheet to you. You’re old enough to know that, Madison”

“But…”

“Enough. Take that jacket off”

And, not even today, James knew what had gotten into him, because he could gather enough courage to say:

“No…”

“Excuse me?” the teacher had said, arms in akimbo and fire in his glare.

“I can’t”

“Can’t you unzip a jacket and put it back in your backpack, Madison?” More, and more childish laughter in the background.

“I can’t take it off, I could get sick again”
James remembered he had felt proud of himself for standing his ground, for facing that awful teacher and refusing to obey him, putting his health before anything else, as his mother had taught him. All that pride and confidence was gone faster than it had come when Patrick Henry talked again, a cruel grin making its way on his lips.

“You’re always getting sick again and again, Madison. Jeez, instead of a child, you look like more of a withered little apple-john”

And, just like that, the whole schoolyard burst into laughter. And, just like that, he had earned a nickname for the rest of the year, which had just started. And he would carry that name even when he went into high school, as some of his first classmates studied in the same centre as him. Not a very unusual thing, he was expecting to see familiar faces once he became a middle schooler, but he never imagined how much he’d hate it. In the first week, his lifelong classmates spread the rumour of his nickname, and he had to put up with it until he went to college, where he’d know new people and start from scratch.

“James?”

In a blink of an eye, he was back in the real world. He let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding and looked at his real surroundings. He was home. Well, Thomas’ house, but home nonetheless. He began to try to even his breath with small gasps, and lightened his hold on the kitchen island, a thing he seemed to have been holding all this time but just realized of doing so now.

“Are you alright?” his friend asked at the same time his breathing became steadier.

It wasn’t the first time Thomas had seen him in the middle of an attack, but each time it was more embarrassing, especially when the root of such state had been a stupid thing… Like today. James looked at his friend, a heap of papers in his right hand, half-way of being inside the briefcase on the kitchen island.

“Yes” he lied, managing to straighten himself on the stool.

“You sure? You were panting”

Though he knew it would be useless to lie to Thomas for the experience the man had with his problem, he kept trying to sound secure. “Yes, I am”

“Did you have a seizure?” asked Thomas, this time straight to the point.

James knew that then it would be even stupider to try to lie to him again. “Yes” he admitted.
“What triggered it?” he asked, concerned.

“Hm…” James felt his cheeks burning from the blush. “The core of the apple I just ate…” he admitted.

Thomas titled his head to the side, processing the answer. “Alright…” he finally said, sounding confused, but not pushing the issue farther. And James would always be grateful for that habit of his.

“But, I’m fine now” he assured him.

“You’re sweating like a pig” stated the taller man, finally putting the papers inside the briefcase.

“It’s hot” he brushed off, shrugging.

Thomas raised one eyebrow. “We’re in December”

“Global warming”

“James”

“I’m fine”

“You’re still pale”

“The light here is too bright”

“You haven’t turned it on”

“The natural light is too bright”

“It’s cloudy outside”

James frowned. “What a chatterbox, God have mercy on Hamilton today if you cross him”

Thomas imitated his gesture. “You won’t have to suffer if the occasion arises: you’re staying home”

“No”

“Yes” he turned around, facing the stairs at his left, without giving James another second to say his opinion on the matter. “Girls, come on, you’ll be late!”

“I can’t, I can’t find any proper earrings!” Martha complained from her bedroom.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Oh, sorry, Patsy, you’re right, I forgot about the new rule that says you must wear earrings to class to improve your hearing and concentration” he said in a fake understanding tone. “Come on, pick one pair and come downstairs!”

“It’s not my fault: Polly hides them!”

“Not true!” the littlest of the two defended herself. She stuck her head out the corner of her door. “I haven’t touched your things. Dad, I haven’t touched her things!”

“Thomas…” James tried to say.

“The fuck you haven’t!” Martha hollered.

“Language!” screamed her father, rubbing his temples. “Gosh, I’m having a headache already and
it’s only six in the morning…”

“Thomas” James tried once again.

“Dad, your daughter’s pester ing me!” the oldest complained, finally getting out her bedroom while putting on her earrings.

Thomas frowned at her. “My daughter is your sister! So, you better treat her kindly!” he told her.

Martha rolled her eyes. “Yes, maybe one day I’ve gotta need her to rent me her house when I don’t have a dime to my name” she blurted out, heading to the kitchen and picking a pear. Madison looked at it with sad eyes.

“Thomas…” he tried again.

His friend hit the counter with one hand, startling James but no his daughter as he had intended to.

“Why are you such a brat?”

Martha shrugged. “I don’t know. Ask my former teachers from the boarding school, who did the job of raising me in your place”

“… Look…” Thomas huffed. “We’re going to talk once I come back from work, young lady. Now we’re being late for everything. Polly, come on!”

“Coming!” the littlest said from the bathroom.

“Thomas” James said, finally catching his friend’s attention.

“You’re not going to work today” Thomas said, before the shorter man could’ve had a chance to say anything. “You’ll stay here and rest”

James frowned. “I don’t need to. I’m fine”

“The last time you said that to me, you ended up fainting at work” Thomas reminded him, seeing his youngest daughter coming downstairs. “And though now we work for Washington, who’s way better than King, I rather not live that again”

“That was because my immune defences were low that day”

“You are not going” Thomas repeated.

“Today is Wednesday, we have meetings on Wednesdays. I can’t miss it just because!”

“Just because your malaise if mental and not physical doesn’t make it less important” He sighed and petted Polly’s head with affection. “I’ll do whatever you had to do for today and tell you whatever we talk today at the meeting. Don’t worry over that”

“But today I have to give those papers to Adams, and you know he doesn’t miss a thing with us since you two fought” said James, beginning to feel his heart rate racing again.

Martha snorted a laugh. “Like that humanoid had any say in why people miss work”

“For once, you’re right” Thomas nodded. “Don’t think about it, James, stay here and sleep a bit more. You seem to need it”

James moved uncomfortably in his chair. “Alright…” he gave in, not fully convinced.
“Good”

“Daddy” said Polly, pulling her father’s sleeve. “Daddy, I love you”

“Love you too, sweetie” he said, petting her head once again. “What do you want for your lunch break?”

“Yes, we have open bar” said Martha, opening the cupboards one by one, showing them almost empty.

Thomas hit the counter again. “Martha, I’m warning you!”

“Don’t worry, Daddy, I know you try” said Polly, blinking innocently.

“Learn from your sister” said Thomas, making the oldest to give him an eye-roll.

“Daddy”

“Yes, princess?”

“I need carboards and markers and glue and glitter”

“When for?”

“For twelve o’clock today”

“… …”

Martha burst out laughing, and James had to bite his lip to contain his laughter. “Hahahaha, what did you say about learning from her?”

Thomas gave her a warning look before staring at his youngest child. “Polly, why haven’t you told me five minutes prior twelve o’clock, sweetie? I still have time to get you that and my own work if I hurry enough” he said sarcastically.

The little girl just shrugged. “I just remembered now”

“I can do it” said James whilst his friend sighed. “I can rest now and go to the stationery before twelve”

“You sure?”

“Yes, I’m not handicapped, I can do things…”

“I wasn’t meaning that…”

“Go drop the girls off, I can take care of the rest” James promised, nonchalantly.

Thomas gave a quick look to his watch. “Alright, but if you need anything, call me”

“Will do”

“Good. Come on, girls”

James waved goodbye to Martha whilst Polly gave him a kiss goodbye before taking her
father’s hand and the three of them headed to the door. Once alone, James felt the walls of the house looming over him, and knew he wouldn’t be able to fall asleep again. He looked at the clock on the wall. The stationery would be opened in two hours as much. He took a glare around him and decided it could be a good moment to clean a bit the house.

“Lucy could come anytime” he commented aloud, with a hint of worry.

Alexander was used to be called non-stop because his passion of being always doing something. Anything that could keep him busy. The nickname never bothered him, neither did the comments he heard at his backs – and whose owners thought he missed – but what did bother him was the fact that he wasn’t the only one in the office that was always in constant movement.

It may sound contradictory coming from someone as him, but there were days when Thomas Jefferson could put Alexander on his nerves without the need to talk or to do something directly at him. There was only one thing that could drive Alexander around the bend even more than just seeing the secretary going from side to side, from up and down and vice versa of the building without a break: how everyone took that activity for granted.

Though he would never admit it aloud, nor he would say anything, never, to increase Jefferson’s self-esteem by praising his job. That was the last thing a man like that needed, more people clapping their hands for each thing he did. He did comment the fact with Lafayette, the only friend of his who also shared friendship with the secretary. The Frenchman never said he should say those things aloud, because it always felt good to know your job was recognized. At least, aloud. Alexander always caught a glimpse of that thought in his friend’s eyes when they commented under their breaths how Thomas could photocopy, sign and read various papers at the same time. Even when the three documents were about absolute different subjects. Sometimes, they had even seen him talking on the phone with one complaining client as well.

When the weight of Lafayette’s glare was too much to handle in silence, Alexander always found himself simply saying.

“Just because I can admit he does one hell of a job fine, it means I have to tell him” Lafayette always answered with a shrug. “Never said you had” “Good” “The rest of the office seems to think the same, anyways” “For someone who claims to know very little English, you never do owt for nowt”
His friend would give him another shrug as a response, this time accompanied by a little smile, faking innocence. Alexander would always give in.

“Seriously, I don’t know how you can endure him” he would comment eventually.

“He’d say the same about you” would be the answer he’d be given. That morning, however, Lafayette had added: “Thomas is a good friend. Ask Madison if you don’t believe me”

Alexander couldn’t stop the puff. “Talking to Madison is not in my to do-list”

Both resumed their work and barely talked for the first hour. Alexander had simply leaned back on his chair, kept writing, drunk some of his coffee and, when he saw his mug was empty, excused himself and headed to the break room. Lafayette joined him, claiming he may use a drink as well. It was meeting morning, and the whole office tended to imitate Alexander’s caffeine consumption to be fully awake before entering the war field.

They would usually find anyone from their group of friends there, hanging around, but since last week, after the weekly meeting was over, they all had been trying to avoid that room in order to earn the Christmas bonuses again before December ended. As a friend, Alexander pitied them and wished Washington had a change of mind before the last month of the year finished; as the accountant of the company… Well, he kind of agreed with their boss. But that didn’t mean he agreed on what Washington had done with the extra money. He wasn’t going to say anything, though; contrary to popular opinion, he knew when to shut his motormouth and keep his thoughts to himself.

“Good morning, Maria” Lafayette’s voice took him out of his thoughts, and Alexander saw that, indeed, the receptionist was sat on the table, with a pen connected to her temples and a bunch of blank papers all over the table.

She gave them the smile they’d missed that morning when they arrived at the building and had seen the counter vacant. “Good morning, Laf. Alex” He gave her a nod.

“What are you doing?” he asked her, pointing at the untouched sheets in front of her.

“Oh, I was trying to see if I get inspiration to finally start writing my book” she answered, with a frown. “But all has been quiet for the past week”

“Well, after seeing Washington rocking in his new chair the whole meeting last week, I wouldn’t risk his fury either” commented Lafayette, sitting by her side. “Why don’t you write down some notes about things that already happened?” he proposed, while Alexander headed to the coffee machine.

Maria shook her head. “I tried, but I can’t remember all that happened. Which has been quite a lot, to be honest”

“Really, Maria?” asked Alexander, serving himself his fourth coffee of the morning. “You don’t remember anything worth writing? Isn’t the little breeze coming from Aaron’s office enough to
inspire you?”

“Hasn’t he put a glass or something yet?” asked Lafayette.

“How is he going to find a glass shaped in an unperfect circle?” he said, opening one cupboard and taking out the sugar.

“Touché”

“That’s the problem” Maria talked once they were finished. “I can only remember that, but I don’t want to start with it. I want to keep it from a few chapters forwards”

“What about you relate the story of the cabin?” Lafayette tried once again. “It started subtle”

“Yes, but I think that story deserves a whole book on its own”

“I agree” said Alexander, stirring his coffee.

“Oh, good morning, Mr. Adams” Maria said suddenly.

It wasn’t needed to say Alexander and Adams had come back to their hostility once the older man came back to work. Not before Adams cursed his luck when he saw Aaron’s quietness and Alexander’s voice filling the air and, especially, when he saw he had forgotten his pills back at home. As usual, they didn’t greet each other, though they acknowledged each other’s presence in the room. Lafayette and Maria, more than used to their passive-aggressive scenes, ignored the tension that grew all of a sudden, and kept going with their conversation in whispers now only the two of them understood.

Alexander looked at his watch, seeing it was only ten minutes left until eight thirty, when the weekly meeting would start, and assumed that was why Adams had gone downstairs to also serve himself a mug of coffee before the confrontation began. He looked at the wall at his right, where George’s office was at the other side, and wonder when he’d hear his boss dragging the rocking chair to the meeting room. He decided to sit at Maria’s left, and his two friends immediately made him part of their conversation.

Just when he was about to help Maria about how to start the first paragraph, Jefferson stopped by the door, poring over the room and just getting in when he spotted Adams. He passed him a few papers, barely dedicating him a look.

“Adams, here you’ve got the documents you asked Madison to write” Thomas informed him. He greeted Lafayette and dedicated a curious look to Maria, but quickly let it go. “Maria, have you talked to Washington about Mrs. Harrison’s call?”

“I was waiting to the meeting to begin” she said.

“Then, I can tell him myself” said the secretary with a frown.

“Then, do it yourself” said the receptionist, shrugging.
“Why are you here, then?”

“So, you can have someone to stand your nonsense without any risk of losing your job” she blurted out without a second thought.

Thomas looked daggers at Alexander. “This is your fault. You know it, right?”

“What have I done now? I haven’t even talked!” the accountant defended himself.

“What about you, Jefferson?” asked Maria. “Have you photocopied the colour calendar of December? It’s 13th already”

“I’m not going to photocopy a colour calendar that’s already hung on the bulletin board” said Thomas, leafing through the rest of papers he still had in his hands. He handed them to Alexander, who nodded as a thank you. “I’m not in an Elementary School, Maria, we’re all grown-ups and…”

Maria gave him a face of pure boredom. “Don’t tell me your life. Just do it” She raised her hand when she saw him about to open his mouth again. “If you have something to say about it” she pointed at the wall at her backs. “this is Washington’s office. Knock on his door and then tell him your drama”

Thomas looked at the wall for a moment, then clicked his tongue and headed straight to the photocopier on the corner of the left side of the room. He made a face when he saw all the wrappers and a few ring marks from several glasses on the top of it.

“Why is this a mess again? I just cleaned it yesterday” he complained, grabbing the cloth and starting to clean the machine. “I’ve already got two children back at home, I don’t need more in my workplace”

“Alright, Dad, calm down for your blood pressure” said Maria, mockingly.

Thomas looked daggers at her. “If only you knew how sick I am of coming here and always find a draft of the Olympic flag…” he sighed. “How comes am I always the one who cleans it? Who is in charge of cleaning this week?”

“If you’ve photocopied my colour calendar when the month started, as you were supposed to do, you’d know” said Maria, with a small grin. Thomas dedicated her another death glare.

“That’s not the place to have that, anyways” commented Alexander quietly.

“Hey, Thomas, where is Madison?” asked Adams all of a sudden, frowning at the words written over the recent papers he had been given.

“He couldn’t come today, he’s sick” Thomas answered almost automatically, throwing the cloth into the sink.

Adams groaned under his breath. “And what do I do with this now?” he complained, waving the papers in the air. “He misunderstood one thing and the rest of the document is all wrong”

Thomas plugged in the machine and sighed. “If you know what the problem is, why don’t you do it yourself?” he told him. Then, looking at the receptionist, he added. “Maria, can you please give me
the colour calendar?"

“Where is it?” she asked.

“Thomas…” tried to say Adams.

The secretary raised a hand to stop him. “Hung in the bulletin, I’ve told you a couple of minutes ago!”

“If you know where it is, then go yourself” she blurted out again, returning her attention to the blank paper in front of her.

“I’ll go, I’ll go” said Lafayette, getting up.

“Thank you” said Thomas, putting a hand on his forehead.

“Thomas” Adams called him again.

“What do you want me to do about that, Adams?” he said without thinking first, clearly overwhelmed. “If you know what’s wrong, fix it yourself!”

“It’s for today” Adams informed him, frowning.

“In that case, hurry, hurry” said Thomas, clapping in a mocking-supportive manner. Maria and Alexander looked at each other, trying to contain their giggling. “Time’s pressing”

“But…”

“Hurry” Thomas interrupted him, sharply.

By that moment, Lafayette was already on the door, with the colour calendar in his hands and footsteps could be heard going downstairs. Washington’s door would be opened anytime soon, as well.

Alexander and Maria watched as Lafayette handed Thomas the calendar and, when the secretary turned around to start with the photocopies, ignoring the frowning lawyer’s presence, Adams clicked his tongue and looked at the papers in his hands once again with hatred.

“Now, I’ll have to re-do this shit because Sneezy is always missing work” muttered Adams, heading to the door then.

Thomas closed the photocopier with a thump and turned around swiftly, arms in akimbo. “Beg your pardon?” he asked. He felt angrier when his workmate simply ignored him and felt highly surprised when Hamilton interrupted him… for defending Madison.

“At least, he does his job, no matter if he’s here or in his house. Something not everybody around here can say”

This time, Adams did turn around, staring straight at Hamilton. “Excuse me?”
“I said that I’m fucking fed up with your twaddle” said Alexander abruptly, taking a long sip from his coffee.

“Not with that exact words, but still…” commented Maria, rummaging in her pockets.

Adams frowned at the accountant. “Please, Hamilton, keep your cutting remarks for the meetings. And for yourself when you haven’t been insulted, like now”

“You have insulted my intelligence right now only by talking. In fact,” he put the mug down and focus his eyes on the papers that were given to him before. “I’d bet you lower the IQ of the whole Big Apple each time you open your mouth”

Maria and Lafayette tried to contain their laughter; Thomas was paying attention at the same time the photocopier did its job, rumbling due to bad maintenance. The rest of the workers were already heading to the meeting room, but stopped by the entrance of the break room when they heard the last sentence spoken and saw the grim look Adams had on his face.

“Just what I needed to hear…” said the lawyer, shaking his head. “The last thing I needed around here is you telling me when I can complain or when I can’t, when you’re the first one to make a fuss when something’s not done the way you want it!”

Alexander drummed his fingers on the wood before looking up from the papers. “I complain when any of you take my work and drag it through the mud. I’m not surprised you compare apples to oranges, considering how you miss more days of work than the man you just insulted…”

“Look who’s talking” interrupted Adams, rolling his eyes. “The man who called him ‘mad as a hatter’, three meetings ago”

“What’s wrong with the fat man, talking back?” asked Laurens to Angelica, who was closer to him.

The vice president just shrugged. “George for sure pours something odd inside the coffee on Wednesdays; we need more than caffeine to survive the meetings”

Alexander was now looking at the lawyer across him straight in the eyes. “Yes, and he insulted and screamed back. You know why? Because I keep my thoughts to myself, as you are always suggesting me, when the person I want to criticise and insult is not present” Alexander drunk the last sip of coffee.

“Wait, now he’d want us to applaud him for being cruel and weaken morals just when the victim is present”

Alexander stopped his drinking abruptly before Adams could even end the sentence. “Yes, I’m a son of a bitch, but I’m a straightforward son of a bitch, what you see is what you get. Not like you, reticent playing dumb when you’re even worse than me” He dropped the now empty mug on the table, with a thump. “The hand that rocks the handle, the hand that rocks the handle. Smiley, smiley and when you turn around: stab, stab, stab. Fuck” He huffed. “Look, I’ve read so many books in my fucking thirty years of life and I still haven’t found a proper word or expression to define such dicks as the one I have in front of me. I can speak three languages and I haven’t found it yet, I doubt it exists in any other language, I’ll have to invent it myself…” He looked at the papers the man across him was holding, with fury. “What the fuck are those, anyway?”
“… Paperwork”

“No shit, Sherlock! I mean what the hell is written there!”

“Nothing, something about the cases…”

“Something about the fucking cases that you were supposed to give Washington at the beginning of the month? And you couldn’t give it on time because you couldn’t come to work, and Washington then told you he’d give you until late December?”

Adams was red in the face. “I missed work because Pikachu burnt me alive twice!”

“Don’t call me that!” complained Laurens from the crowd at the door.

“Now, Laurens is to blame as well? God, it’s everybody’s fault except yours. How do you do it? I want to live like that as well, doing whatever the fuck I want with no responsibility”

Adams gave the hint of a smile. “You already live like that, with the favourable treatment Daddy gives you”

Lafayette, Maria and Thomas looked at Hamilton with wide eyes and shared a frown of worry. The workers at the door took a step backwards.

“My favourable tre…?” Alexander repeated at first, blinking dumbfounded. Then, he hit the table with one fist, making the mug shake. “YOU’RE A GODDAMN SON OF A FUCKING BITCH!”

“Why?”

“DAMN SCUMBAG WITH FLAT ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAM, DO YOU EVEN LOOK AT YOUR REFLECTION IN THE MORNINGS AND STILL THINK YOU’RE IN ANY POSITION TO INSULT OTHER PEOPLE’S POSITIONS AND WORK? I AM HERE BECAUSE I WORKED FOR IT, BECAUSE I Fought FOR IT, AND BECAUSE I MIND TAKING A BIT OF TIME IN READING AND EDUCATING MYSELF. YOU ARE HERE BECAUSE OF PITY, BECAUSE YOU ONLY KEEP IT WITH RIGHT PEOPLE. NOT EVEN GEORGE KING WOULD WANT YOU BACK. THAT IF HE EVEN REMEMBERS WHO THE HELL YOU ARE. DON’T YOU REALISE THE ONLY FUCKING REASON WASHINGTON TAKE ATTENDANCE IS BECAUSE HE FEARS HE MIGHT FORGETS ABOUT YOU?

"FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, EVEN MARIA HAS DONE MORE FOR THIS COMPANY THAN YOU! SHE HAS DONE THE FUCKING COLOUR CALENDAR, WHICH I ASSUME YOU HAVEN’T READ BECAUSE TODAY YOU HAD TO CLEAN AT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING, AND YET, HERE YOU ARE, COMPLAINING ABOUT HOW SOMEONE ELSE DID YOUR JOB WRONG! I’M SURE MADISON DID IT AS RIGHT AS HE COULD WITH THE POOR EXPLANATION YOU GAVE HIM! WELL, “EXPLANATION” IS SUCH A STRONG WORD FOR THE SHIT YOU DID YESTERDAY… BECAUSE I WAS THERE, ADAMS, I WAS THERE WHEN YOU ASKED MADISON IF HE COULD DO YOUR JOB BECAUSE YOU HAD NOT A CLUE ABOUT HOW THE FUCK YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO DO IT! HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLE KNOW IF THAT DOCUMENT IS WRONG WHEN YOU DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO DO IT, IN THE FIRST PLACE?”
“… Because he mixed up two names and now it’s a mess to understand which case was which case and…”

“And if you know what the problem is, why don’t you change them back and re-write it?!”

“… Because I’ll have no time”

“You’ll have no time? How? How on Earth could you not have time, Adams? Because Madison did have time to do the job completely, along with his own paperwork, I know that for sure, and to have it all for today’s meeting! Something’s odd around here. Could it be that Madison can because he’s used to work, and you are not?” He looked at his sister-in-law. “Angelica, do you remember what I told you last week?”

“Hm?” the vice president blinked, taken aback by being part of the conversation suddenly. “Em... About?”

“Didn’t I tell you, when you asked me to take care of Adams’ cases, that the last thing this… This… This amoeba, who likes to fantasize about being a person, needed was people doing his work in his place?”

“…Yes, you did” she nodded.

“And what’s happening now?” he pointed at Adams with one hand before returning his attention to him. “Look, for your information, we all had to share your cases and work out, because you haven’t wanted to know anything about this company in all the days you were sick. I understand that you can’t work in a hospital bed, but I saw you quite healthy a week ago, when I saw you at the pub around the corner with some friends. It’s…” Alexander sighed, feeling tired all of a sudden. “It’s just that you’re an idiot. If you want to keep missing work, do it, you’re a grown-up man, but at least be a smart cookie and don’t hang out near your workplace, because your alibi loses weight and credibility. No wonder why you are only called to work on cases when the client can’t afford for a good lawyer themselves… I’d hide under a rock, I’d became a hermit, or would re-start a new life in another continent, far away from here, with another name, because I’d feel ashamed of myself if I only got to have clients like that. I’m serious. I’m not saying this just because I don’t like you, but because it makes me cringe to even think about someone living and working like that and still with enough shamelessness to drag a workmate through the mud just for missing work. For justifiable causes… Because I’ve never seen Madison hanging out on a work day right after letting us know he couldn’t come. The only way to see him doing that is because he went to the doctor… Which reminds me… Look, I wasn’t going to say anything, I swear, but I think you need to be told already, and in front of all these people, let’s see if you finally feel ashamed”

Alexander took the papers Thomas had given to him a few minutes earlier, and began to leaf through them, muttering words to himself. Maria, who had taken her phone out right after seeing Alexander had replied to Adams’ cut remark, got the phone closer to the accountant. She heard someone murmuring her name and she looked at the door, where Angelica was mouthing her to send her that record later. Maria gave her a thumb up and the vice president nodded, smiling. Thomas and Lafayette shared a glare meanwhile, which the first one broke to collect the now photocopied calendars and turn off the machine. He had bent down to unplug it as well when Alexander talked out loud again.

“And I’ll take advantage of seeing you all here to already tell you that we’re 13th, and Lee’s monthly
visit is around the corner. Washington and I talked about it yesterday when you all were locked up in your respective offices, trying to do in one month what you should’ve done in this whole year... Good luck, it’s never too late to start to be normal and mature, by the way. If you continue at that rate, maybe one day you could do in one day what I can do in one hour. Don’t lose hope”

He took a couple of two stapled sheets, still not making eye contact with anyone. He took out his glasses from its case, which he kept in one of his pockets, and put them on, reading more clearly the words written in front of him.

“As I was saying, Washington and I were talking yesterday and not even he knows where that hung-up would come. It could be tomorrow, it could be past tomorrow, it could be before Christmas’ break… We don’t know. We can only hope Joanne doesn’t come with him this time. And, well, you see, each month, before that man comes, I’m given some reports about what you’ve done from month to month and here it’s written your days missed or the cases you’ve won or lost. Whatever. Everything. And here… Just here…”

He put the papers on the table and started to pass the finger on it, looking for something.

“Here it is. Adams and Madison… Let’s compare, as I see we like to compare a lot around here. As you, especially” he looked up for a moment to point at Adams, who was now crest-fallen and a bit pale. “like to compare why some of us are in charge of the accounts or of replacing the toilet paper depending on how much Daddy loves us” he spat, returning his attention to the names on the sheet. “Here… According to this, you, Adams, have missed 23 days of work out of 30. Washington hasn’t seen a medical certificate or anything similar, you simply come or leave as a phantom. The Phantom of Washington and Co., that’s what I’m gonna call you. Some people claimed to have seen you, but no one can ever be sure about if it was true or just an illusion” He looked at Maria. “Here, there you have another story to write. Though it would be a very short one”

The receptionist giggled a bit, and bit her bottom lip to contain a louder laughter. The workmates around them also imitated the sound, and put hands over their mouths or looked at the side, trying to contain themselves. Even Thomas used the photocopies to cover his lips. Alexander either ignored them or didn’t hear them. Maybe a strange mix of the two.

“Now, let’s see. Madison has only missed 12 days of work out of 30, and was always sure to let us know by phone calls, medical certificates on the next day or Jefferson, hereto” He looked up to look at the secretary. “By the way, thank you for giving me these on time this month, especially after what happened”

“You’re welcome…” said Thomas, shrugging.

“You should do it like this all months, but I think that’d be like waiting for a rock to bleed, right?” Thomas moved the tongue inside his mouth, a bit upset. Alexander half-smiled. “Heh, it’s beyond clear Washington threatened us all a week ago about not giving us Christmas bonus this year for
incompetent… You know what? I was going to talk to him about the matter today, as half of you, for not saying all of you asked me to do. It seems that being Daddy’s favourite doesn’t bother you that much when you can get something from it, right?”

“He has enough repertoire until 2030 with the fucking sentence…” commented Laurens under his breath.

“Funny how everything I ask Washington for is never for me. If I’m his favourite, I should give it a try. I should try to steal money from the accounts, because I’m sure no one would realise, because there are only a few who pass college by studying and not because Mummy and Daddy could bribe the teachers in June” He clicked his tongue and shook his head. “Shameless fat ass motherfucker…” he muttered. “Let’s keep going, because there’s more” he said aloud, taking the paper now in his hands.

“No, please…” said Adams, scratching the back of his head, nervous.

Alexander looked directly at him. “Please what? Please shit. Don’t “please” me now, mister. For your information, I’ve been knowing this for a long time. I’ve known this shit for two years, I’ve talked with Washington about this for two fucking years and we both decided to let it go. Mister ‘You should stop saying everything you think aloud’. If you all only knew how many things I don’t say. If you only knew… I swear to God, you’d think twice… What am I saying? You’d think thrice! Before trying to insult me and calling me a devil… Keep, keep, keep dedicating me black candles and keep wishing me for the worse, Adams. You and the witch you’re married to, who is always in the middle because you can’t defend for yourself when the occasion arises, because you’re only good at insulting people at their backs and when you’re caught, because you’re useless even for that, you go run to your wife” He sighed loudly, before turning his eyes back to the paper. “Let’s see…”

Adams frowned slightly. “What’s gotten into you today?” he asked, clearly annoyed. “Making a fuss about a man you barely stand”

“I stand you less!” screamed Alexander. He hit the table with one hand. “And this is because I’m sick, Adams, I am truly sick! I AM SICK OF YOUR STUPIDITY, OF YOUR CYNICISM, OF YOUR HYPOCRISY, OF YOUR INJUSTICES! I AM SICK ALREADY TO STAND ALL THAT SHIT FROM A MAN WHO SHOULD BE QUIET ABOUT THE REST. WE ALL, IF WE WANTED TO, COULD MISS WORK DAYS UNTIL AFTER NEW YEAR’S EVE, DID YOU HEAR ME? EVERYONE BUT YOU. BECAUSE HERE, EVEN THE PEOPLE WHO ARE, OR USED TO BE, ALL THE FUCKING DAY IN THIS BREAK ROOM HAVE LESS MISSED DAYS THAN YOU, MORE WON CASES THAN YOU, HAVE CONTRIBUTED FOR THIS COMPANY MORE THAN YOU HAVE, AND YOU STILL THINK YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO COME HERE AND SAY SHIT ABOUT SOMEONE WHO IS NOT EVEN HERE, WHO HAS DONE YOUR WORK WITHOUT ASKING FOR SOMETHING IN RETURN. YOU ASKED MADISON BECAUSE YOU KNEW HE WOULD SWALLOW AND DO IT, BECAUSE WE ALL FEAR WHEN YOU GO BERSERK, AND YOU DIDN’T ASK AARON BASICALLY BECAUSE YOU’VE HEARD THE STORY BEHIND THAT HOLE ON HIS WALL AND YOU’RE A COWARD. TRASH IS WHAT YOU ARE.

"YOU HAD ONE FUCKING MONTH AND A HALF TO DO THAT PAPERWORK, MISTER. AND A HALF! THAT HALF WAS BECAUSE WASHINGTON GAVE IT TO YOU BECAUSE… I DON’T KNOW WHY, I SHOULDN’T HAVE DONE IT, TO BE HONEST, I WOULDN’T READ THOSE PAPERS UNTIL YOU HAVE DONE IT YOURSELF, AS YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO… I didn’t have time, he said, I didn’t have time… YOU DIDN’T HAVE TIME IN ONE MONTH A HALF, FOR THE LOVE CHRIST? WHO DO YOU THINK YOU’RE GONNA FOOL? MADISON DID IT IN ONE NIGHT, IN ONE NIGHT. I’M SURE
OF IT. YOU CAN FOOL WASHINGTON, YOU CAN FOOL ANGELICA, YOU CAN FOOL YOUR WIFE, YOU CAN FOOL EVEN LUISA DE MARILLAC, PATRON SAINT OF THE WORKERS, BUT NOT ME.

"NOT ME, BECAUSE I’VE WORKED WITH THAT MAN, I’VE WORKED WITH HIM AND HE STILL DOES HALF OF MY JOB, HE DOES HALF OF THE ACCOUNTS, HE TAKES CARE OF HAVING EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL AROUND HERE, OF HAVING YOUR CASES UNDER CONTROL AND WRITTEN DOWN. HE’S THE REASON WHY WE CAN CHANGE THE VENDING MACHINE ONCE A WEEK BECAUSE YOU BREAK THEM ALL BECAUSE YOU LOSE YOUR TIME EATING INSTEAD OF WORKING! STOP EATING, ADAMS, THAT’S WHY WE CALL YOU THE FROWNING COW! NEVER MADISON HAS EVER GIVEN ME SOMETHING WRONG, NEVER. IT'S TOO MUCH COINCIDENCE THE FIRST TIME HE DOES IT IT’S IN ONE OF YOUR PAPERWORK. TO BE HONEST, I’M STARTING TO THINK HE DID IT FINE, AND YOU ARE THE ONE WHO HAS GOTTEN THE NAMES WRONG! GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT, AT LEAST DO THAT, IF YOU’RE NOT GOING TO DO THAT PAPERWORK FOR YOURSELF, AT LEAST, GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT SO THE REST OF THE WORLD CAN DO YOUR JOB RIGHT!"

Alexander hit the table with his two hands now, dropping the papers, and got up from his seat, making the chair almost fall to the floor if it hadn’t been for the counter behind it. The accountant began to collect all the sheets in front of him, red as scarlet, and with a frown adorning his features. Maria hesitated about ending the record there, Lafayette had his two arms crossed and was looking at the table with a thoughtful expression; Thomas had the photocopied papers in both hands, reading them in order to not make eye contact with the short-tempered man. By that time, Washington had gotten out his office and had his head stuck out the corner of his door.

“Favourable treatment he said…” muttered Alexander, shaking his head. “Favourable treatment, he dared to say…”

Alexander looked at the reports in his hands once again, frowning even deeper. He hit the table once again with his fist, making Maria jump in her seat. Alexander looked up at Adams once again, pointing at the paper he had read to him before.

“If I were the one with all this missing days, I’d shut my mouth! I wouldn’t dare to say anything about anyone! Twenty-three days out of thirty… Out of thirty. How many days have you come to work? Do you even know enough Maths to answer that question? Have you at least made yourself that question? Don’t overdo yourself: the answer is seven. Seven days. Which can be considerate a whole week. Not a full week, because you like to come work one day and the miss the other, but in total, seven days make a week. If I were in your shoes right now, if I were the one in this situation, my head would drop in shame” Alexander gave a rapid glare at the papers once again. “My head would drop in shame if I criticised each of you and the way you do your job if I were in this situation… I know I do, I know sometimes I even go too far, but I am not in your situation. I do my job. And I do it fine. As fine as I can, I spend sleepless night, so you can have your salaries and comfort.
"Do you think it’s easy for Washington to pay you with all the expenses we have in this office? The phones, the doors, the chairs, the knobs, the walls, the light, the water, the power, the food, the cleaning products… Alright, I use all that, I even break things, I admit it. But the difference between half of you and me, is that now, when my head cools down, I’ll go back to work, and I’ll write until my wrist has no more to give. And after breaking the phones and the chairs and… and… and… I don’t know, whatever, after whatever I have already given my papers to Washington, I have already talked to Laurens to know if some of you have a problem, I have already juggled with the numbers so Lee doesn’t crush us. And you dare to say I have favourable treatment? If I have it, then I use it more for you than for myself. I can count with the fingers of one hand all the times I asked Washington for a personal favour. And there would be fingers left.

"Shameless creature… I am the first one to arrive and the last one to go. I spent plenty of nights here, you know? Damn, Eliza has put a pillow and a blanket inside my desk. I’ve been neglecting my wife, my children, my life, my family… for this? For you to call me upstart? No. No. I don’t want a red carpet to welcome me every morning, but I could use some respect. I think I deserve a bit, right? I’ve been working non-stop since I was fourteen, fourteen. A one and a four holding hands: fourteen. Favourable treatment. Wish I had one. Wish. I had. One. Well, worry no more, because now I’m not going to use it anymore, at least, wrongly. Now, I’m going to use it correctly. If you start to see things disappearing, like every morning coffees, cupboards full of food, comfortable chairs, or even a fan for the summer, but you see all those things in my office, you know what happened"

Alexander removed his eyeglasses and put them back on its case and then took all the papers and headed to the door, where Adams was still standing, with the rest of the workers at his backs, shifting his weight from one foot to another. Alexander stopped right in front of him.

“I’ll recommend you start re-writing all you have there. Now I wanna see those when they’re finished. As I said” he looked at everybody then. “Lee is around the corner, and the day he arrives here, I’ll simply locked myself in my office, and read a book, write a journal or whatever I’m up to that day, and I’ll let him see shit when there is none. Though I doubt there is a corner in this building that is not full of shit. I don’t care” He turned around and pointed at Jefferson. “Our secretary, over there, just photocopied the colour calendars, let’s see if that’s more useful than hung it on the bulletin – as it’s done and enough in any other normal company – and finally someone that is not Aaron, or me do the cleaning”

He exited the door, being watched by his ten workmates. Alexander muttered all the way to his office.

“Shitty rascal… All the fucking days standing their shit. Favourable treatment my balls. You’re going to see what true favourable treatment is… If only you knew how many chances I had to do whatever the fuck I wanted with the company’s money… But I didn’t do it, because I have decency. I’m a street rat orphan nouveaux rich, but I have more decency and principles than any of the fucking preppy with airs I work with and who are always insulting me. Don’t worry, I’ll give you a good reason to insult me. That’s how evil I am. Devil he calls me and then he seems to always try to reach my level. Ratbag son of a bitch… Fucking Monstro, let’s see when he finally eats Pinocchio and goes to hibernate"
They heard the door being slammed shut while they tried to contain their laughter. Then, the silence reigned in the hallway. Adams went upstairs, all eyes on him, crest-fallen and with the papers in his hands. When he disappeared from the stairs view, Washington talked, looking at Angelica.

“And then you dared to wonder why I needed a rocking chair. We haven’t even gotten into the meeting room and there are already bad vibes in the air” He opened his door completely to let her in. “Come on, help me carry her to the meeting room, though I think half of what’s going to happen from now on is already settled”

Angelica shrugged and went into her boss’ office, lost in thought. Laurens raised one eyebrow.

“No way, Washington’s rocking chair is a female” he commented.

“To each mad person their own” said Thomas, shaking his head.

Maria looked at her phone, smiling. “This is gold, pure gold. I can feel the inspiration already in my veins” she said, happily.

“What I’ve just said…” Thomas shook his head and then exited the place with Lafayette.

They saw Burr walking directly to Hamilton’s door and getting in the accountant’s office right after knocking. After the door was closed once again, this time, gentler, Thomas talked again.

“What a fuss he just made for being called boss’ pet. Seriously, Gilbert, I don’t know how you can endure him” he told his friend, not for the first time since he had met Hamilton and learnt he was friend with the Frenchman.

He was already expecting the shrug Lafayette gave him along with the verbal response: “He’d say the same about you” He wasn’t expecting, though, the long up and down look his friend dedicated him before adding: “Alex is a good friend. Ask Laurens if you don’t believe me”

Thomas couldn’t stop the puff. “Talking to Laurens is not in my to do-list” He arched one eyebrow when the immigrant gave him a little laugh as an answer. “What?”

“Nothing… You just reminded me of someone”
“This is what you understand by ‘rest’?” Was the first thing James heard before the door shutting at his friend’s back.

He shrugged, finishing cleaning the windows. “The house needs cleaning. We don’t know when Lucy would come” he said, throwing the used cloth to the trashcan.

“Forget about my sister. You don’t need to overdo yourself for her”

“I’m not…” James rolled his eyes. He checked the clock, seeing it was four forty-five. “What are you doing home so early?”

“Jay called me. He’s going to come by around five”

“Guess it’s good to have the house spotless then” said James with a cocky smile.

“Like that man had any right to judge anybody by their house condition”

“True. Hey, what about Adams?”

Thomas took a moment, in which James moved in his seat, uncomfortable. “Well, he… According to him, you mixed up two names…”

“That can’t be” said James, shaking his head, immediately. “I wrote down all the names and details he explained to me the day prior. And I followed those notes as I was redacting his document. Maybe he mixed them up when he told me, because he was having a hard time explaining it to me”

Thomas frowned slightly. “Fucking gremlin, he was right after all…”

“What?”

“Though, if I’m honest, his today’s rambling was one of the most coherent I’ve ever heard from him since I know him” he kept talking to himself.

“Hamilton’s?”

“Who else?”

“What did he do?”

“Well, nobody knows what’s gotten into him today, but he got angry after Adams said…” he thought for a moment. He changed the sentence he had almost said. “After he said you did the document wrong”

“Ah”

“Then, Adams talked back and said that Hamilton had favourable treatment because he was Washington’s favourite… Well, he used the ‘D’ word, so that just made everything worse”

“Gosh, in what was he thinking? Is he a kamikaze or what?”

“Well, thanks to that trifle, Hamilton spent about ten minutes or so screaming and wallowing Adams in misery”

“Normal”

“In front of the whole office, because everybody was going to the meeting room”
“Oh, yes. What did you talk about?”

Thomas shrugged. “Between Hamilton’s speech and Washington and Angelica trying to get the rocker in, we only had thirty minutes left, and nobody said much… Washington still evades the Christmas bonus subject… By the way, Hamilton, before locking up in his office for the rest of the day, swore that he wasn’t going to do a thing about it, and that he doesn’t care if Lee is about to come”

“Ah, right, it’s that time of the month already…”

“So, don’t worry about Adams, because I think he’d do a vow of silence for the next few weeks”

“Good”

“How was your day? Where are the girls?”

“They’re upstairs, I was about to clean their bedrooms now”

“James…”

“I’m fine”

“They can do that themselves”

“They’re studying”

“Opening a book to hide their mobiles from us is not studying”

“At their age, it is”

“Tell them to help you” He looked at his watch. “I’m going to look for the papers before Jay comes. Hope this time he can say something of value and that the reunion doesn’t last until after dark” he commented, before going upstairs.

John Jay wasn’t one of Thomas’ first options when he had asked for a public defender, but he was the only option he was given, and he was forced to take it to, at least, get some help and work done. Though he had a good reputation as a law clerk, it was clear why he barely worked in litigations. Maybe it was the age – though Thomas doubted it, being just two years older than him – maybe it was the many cases the man had had to take care over the years, or maybe it was just that he had lost interest and he was too old to re-start another career that may give him more life. Whichever the case was, it was putting Thomas’ patience at test.

He looked at his watch and sighed when he read it was quarter to eight already. And his pile of papers was in the same order, completely untouched, since his lawyer had got in the room. The only thing that had changed had been the papers Jay brought with him in a large folder. All of them had started being inside the folder; then, some had been spread all over his desk, and now were all over the floor. Thomas looked at them with the corner of his eye, praying none of them were his.
“I’d have sworn I put them here before leaving” Jay muttering, skimming the papers in front of him. “Oh, here it is”

“And it only took you half an hour” commented Thomas, sarcastically.

Jay didn’t seem to hear him while he read the paper. “Here, yes, now I remember” he looked up, smiling slightly at him. “Don’t worry, Mr. Jefferson, we’ll convince your wife about joint custody”

“Excuse me?”

“I know you wanted the whole custody, but you have to understand mothers use to win this kind of cases always, so the best way is to give her what she wants, and everything will flow more easily”

“What are you talking about?” asked Thomas, frowning. “My wife died five years ago!”

Jay stopped for a moment and then read the paper once again. “Wasn’t your wife’s name Lucille?”

“No, it was Martha. And you are here because of my sister, not of her!”

“Aaah… What was your sister’s name, again?”

“Lucy”

“Ah, yes, hence the confusion” Jay nodded and threw the papers to the floor, carelessly. “I think I… read that name in one of those…” he muttered and then knelt on the floor, scattering the papers previously dropped. “Here. Here”

“Finally!”

“Here it is. Don’t worry, now we can sort your triplet issue out”

“What triplet?? I only have two daughters!”

Jay stopped once again and read the paper in front of him. “Twins, then?”

“No!”

“Ah… How old were they, again?”

“Sixteen and ten!”

“No, not twins then…” Jay shook his head and threw the paper his was holding aside. He began to scatter the rest of the sheets again.

Thomas passed a hand through his face. “My God…”

“Here. Here. Now” said Jay triumphally. “Now, let’s get this done”

“Yes, please”

“So, your wife wants the whole custody of Penelope and Robin…”

Thomas hit the desk with the palm of his hand. “What Penelope and Robin, Jay! Martha and Mary, those are my daughters’ names!”

“Are you sure?”
“Of course I am!” he raised his voice, indignant.

“If you say so…”

“And I’ve already told you: my wife left us five years ago!”

“Oh, but that’s abandonment. Why didn’t you tell me before? Now, maybe we’ll have a possibility…”

“With ‘left’ I meant ‘died’!”

“How is she asking for the custody of the twins, then?”

“What twins?! I’ve told you a few seconds ago they are not twins!”

“You sure?”

“I was there when they were born!”

“Alright, alright, you don’t have to shout” complained Jay, with arms in akimbo. He took a look at the papers. “But if your wife is no longer here, that’s it, right? She, with all due respect, can’t ask for anything”

“That’s because she never did! It’s their aunt!”

“Your sister Lucille?”

“Lucy!”

“Ah, yes, right, I remember you telling me something like that in some moment…”

“Uf…”

“So, let’s get this straight”

“Yes”

“Your aunt had twins and now you want their custody”

“What…?”

Jay shook his head. “That’s not nice, that’s not the way you’re supposed to treat family”

Thomas was red in the face by then. “It’s not my aunt’s children what I want!”

“Then, whose custody you want?”

“My sister’s!”

“How old is she?”

“No, wait…” he rubbed his temples. “Gosh… She wants the custody of my daughters”

“Your aunt”

“My sister”
“And what about the aunt?”

“What aunt?”

“I don’t know, one you talked about”

“No, I didn’t”

“Yes, you did”

“Well, my sister is their aunt”

“Whose?”

“My daughters’”

“Ah, the triplet?”

“There is no triplet!”

“Seriously, Mr. Anderson…”

“Jefferson!”

“Who?”

“But… Are you playing me for a fool, mister?!”

“I don’t know if you’re a fool, but you’re not very serious”

“Excuse me??”

“I’ve got more cases in my hands, I have no time to lose just because you don’t remember your own family’s names”

“…”

James looked at the clock on Patsy’s nightstand with a frown. It was almost eight pm and Thomas was still assembled with Jay. He shrugged it off and resumed cleaning the older girl’s room, while she read something on her phone, with one earphone in and the other on the mattress, filling the room with a soft music.

“Is this also for laundry, Patsy?” he asked her, filling the basket with the clothes he found on the floor, and now pointing at the pile on the top of her swivel chair. The girl looked up for a brief moment and then nodded. “Dinner would be ready in a few” he informed her.

“Alright… Pre-cooked?” He nodded, gaining a groan from her. “Why can’t we order a pizza? It’s just as healthy…”

“But not as cheap”
“Did Lucy come already?” she asked, finally looking him straight in the eyes.

James hesitated a moment, before deciding to answer. “She’s around the corner…”

Patsy puffed. “She could at least call…” she complained under her breath, before resuming her reading.

James nodded in agreement, and proceeded to exit the room, basket in hands, before he tripped over something that made him fall forwards, on his knees, and throwing the basket and the clothes that were in it all over the hallway floor. James complained under his breath, rubbing his knees and looked over his shoulder, seeing the girl’s backpack on the floor.

“Patsy, how many times do we need to tell you to not throw your backpack? Chairs, beds and desks exist for something!” he told her off, while Patsy simply ignored him. James groaned. “I can’t believe you or your sister sometimes…” he added, in a whisper. He got up and took the backpack from the floor, making some sheet fall at his feet. “What’s this?”

He bent down and took the paper in his hands. After reading it, he felt a lump in his throat and black dots invaded his vision. The purple backpack fell to the floor, with a thump. Patsy still didn’t move or pay him any attention. James frowned at the girl on the bed, and approached her. He took her mobile away, finally catching her attention.

“Hey!”

“What is this?” asked James, showing her the sheet.

“Didn’t adults know everything?” she retorted. “Tell me yourself”

“Don’t be a smarty-pants with me, young lady” said James, frowning. “Why haven’t you told us anything about this notice from your school?” he asked, raising his voice unintentionally. He read the written words before him once again. “You’re in danger of failing half of your classes due to absence issues! What absence issues are they talking about?”

Polly appeared at the door then. “Are you screaming, uncle Jemmy? Is Patsy in trouble?” she asked, clearly excited.

Patsy frowned at her enthusiasm. “Shut up and go away, little devil!” she screamed at her, throwing her her pillow.

It hit the littlest right in the face. “Ow! Idiot!” she insulted back, throwing her the crayons she had brought with her. Patsy covered herself with one arm, feeling the hit in there.

“Girls, stop it!” said James.

Patsy got up from bed, her other pillow in her hand. “Fucking result of a broken condom!” she shouted, hitting her sister in the head with the pillow.

“Patsy!!” James reprehended her.
Polly grabbed the first pillow that had hit her and fought back with it. “Disgrace of the family!”

“Polly!!!” screamed James, while he watched the pillow fight of the two sisters.

“I wish you were never born!” screamed Patsy.

“Then, Dad would’ve never had a reason to come back home!”

“You’re a spoiled brat!”

“And you’re the worst older sister ever! I wish you were in college already!”

“And I wish somebody kidnaps you one day after school!”

“I’m gonna take this room once you’re gone!”

“Over my dead body!”

“Girls, that’s enough!” said James, putting himself between the two and separating them. The girls still tried to reach each other, stretching their arms, grunting. “I said enough!” screamed James.

It was enough for Polly to throw the pillow she was holding directly to her sister’s face and laugh at her revenge for Patsy to try and reach one of her curls and pull her shoulder length hair. James stopped her and the little one by grabbing them by the shoulders and stretch his own arms as much as he could to maintain them separated from each other. The three of them began to scream at the same time.

“I’m gonna tell Dad! Evil, you’re the worst! Leave this house already!”

“You started this! Noisy, brat, good for nothing! Spoiled devil!”

“My God, you’re going to be the end of me someday, you’re going to drive me crazy, I swear!”

They all got silent immediately when the door at the bedroom’s left was abruptly opened and followed by the screams of the oldest person in the house. They saw clearly, as Patsy’s bedroom door faced the staircase, John Jay going downstairs with a frown in his face, holding disorganised papers that he tried to put into his briefcase. Thomas followed him right behind.

“Get out of here! Get the hell out of here! You’re fired. Do you understand that word, at least? F-I-R-E-D, fired!”

They stayed at the doorstep, hearing Thomas opening the front door and slamming it shut not a second after. James swallowed, afraid.
“Mr. Jay made Daddy angry” commented Polly.

“Doesn’t he always?” asked Patsy rhetorically.

James looked at the notice in his hand, frowning in worry. “We are not going to tell your father any of this. Not now at least, did you hear me?” he whispered to the two girls. “Now, go downstairs, set the table, and, after dinner, we’ll talk about this” He narrowed his eyes at the older. “I don’t want a fight, I don’t want nasty looks or comments during dinner, did you two hear me? Patsy, don’t tell your father about this until his food has settled. He’s had enough for one day…”

“Yes…”

“I’m serious, Patsy” He indicated the girls to follow him and the three of them headed to the stairs. James folded the paper. “This goes for you as well, Polly. No fights, no insulting, no throwing things. Not a word about this notice until his food has settled, understood?”

“Alright, alright” said Patsy, holding her hands in surrender. “I’ll wait until he farts…”

“Patsy!”

“I said I understood!”

They turned left as soon as they reached the end of the stairs, finding the kitchen island and its stools. James moved his head, pointing at the cupboards, and the girls went straight to collect the dishes and glasses for the dinner. James made a frown when he saw Thomas serving himself a glass of whiskey. He looked around and saw the newspaper on one of the stools. He took it and, slyly, put the notice inside.

“Thomas, it’s only eight” he told him once he had put the newspaper out of view. Patsy eyed him, but didn’t say a word.

His friend only shrugged. “It’s always 2 am somewhere” he responded before taking a long sip.


“Because I’ve got a limit…”

“And what are you going to do?”

“By myself I’m more useful than with him”

“Well, yes, but your sister is not on her own” James reminded him. “And she is already a hard nut to crack by herself”

Thomas rubbed his temples. “I can always search for someone else, but that’s a lottery”

James passed each girl two dishes to put on the table along with two glasses. He saw them heading to the table by the French window and bit his bottom lip, processing his thoughts, debating if he should speak his mind or not. The sound of the dishes being put upon the table by the two sisters
seemed to untangle his tongue.

“I think I might know someone who could help you” he commented, on the quiet.

Thomas arched one eyebrow. “Who do you have in mind?”

James eyed the microwave, not wanting to meet his gaze, and took a moment to reply: “Please, don’t get mad”

“Who is it…”

“You two work for the same staff”

“No” was the rapid answer he received before Thomas headed straight to the table his daughters were already sat at.

“Hear me out!” said James, following him close behind.

Thomas stopped abruptly mid-way and talked in whispers, so the girls couldn’t hear them. “There’s no way in hell I’m going to let the gremlin be part of any of this”

“Thomas, think about it. You, yourself, said that public defenders are a lottery. We work with Adams, and can vouch for that”

“Any public defender is better than having Hamilton around here, feeding from my family’s misery”

“You don’t say? All Hamilton’s defendant got acquitted, and, should I remind you he does not only specialise in family cases, but he also ended up being the CFO of the company just because he was good at it?”

“I don’t want him inside my house, imagine how much I want him near my accounts”

“You’ll tell me what the hell you’ll do when Lucy comes, and you don’t have all the money she’ll ask for you. That step is broken again as well as the immersion heater”

“I called to fix it the other day”

“It was a miracle that man knew what an immersion heater looks like” James shook his head. “At least, think about it”

“I already did, and I know it will go wrong”

James hit the floor with the foot. “We’re already at the bottom of desperation, we cannot get any lower”

“He’ll bring a shovel to make you see otherwise. Besides, I prefer to owe money to Lucy than to Hamilton”

James waved a hand nonchalantly. “Ah, don’t worry over that. He won’t ask you to cover any fees, this is just a little favour”

“Well, I feel calmer now, I’m sure he won’t deny a favour to two of his favourites persons in the whole office… Or the whole country, for that matter”
“Come on, that problem we three had is two years old. I’m sure he has already put it behind”

“That man doesn’t put anything behind; everything is a personal slander for him”

“Hey, he forgave Burr for shooting him. If that’s not being a decent human person, may God come down from Heaven and see it”

“But they have a very strange relationship. It’s like the one Tweety and Sylvester had: when they are together they try to kill each other, and when they’re not together they miss each other”

“I told you to not go too far with him, I told you so, because you never know… But nothing, you acted just like if you heard raining”

“You’ve got a nerve! You were the one who told me to not have any mercy, and now you come to me with this?”

“No, that doesn’t sound like me; I’m not that resentful. That’s you, because since Sally dumped you to go out with that entrepreneur back in France you’re more bitter than a lemon”

“Why the hell do you have to bring that up any time we are discussing something?”

“Are we going to eat before midnight or how?” asked Patsy from the table.

“We’re coming, Patsy, the food has to get cooked first!” said Thomas, finally looking at the two bored girls.

Polly pointed at the direction of the object. “It’s just that smoke is starting to come from the microwave”

James gasped before running to the kitchen. “Now the cannelloni burnt because you distracted me!” he accused Thomas.

“Everything is always my fault…” said Jefferson, passing a hand through his curls. “Put gloves on, don’t be like Gilbert!”

“I’m not an idiot!” said James offended, though he had to stop his hand mere inches away from the hot machine before turning around in the opposite direction to take a pair of oven mitts.

Thomas rolled his eyes before taking a seat at his oldest daughter’s right, who shook her head while she tied her long wavy dark brown hair in a high ponytail.

“As if eating precooked food at night wasn’t bad enough…” she commented under her breath, seeing Madison taking the food out of the microwave, cursing under his breath and then trying to scrap the burnt parts of the cannelloni.

Thomas sighed, seeing the same scene with tedium. “Patsy, it’s all there is”

“I’ve got a level of cholesterol higher than recommendable for a girl my age” she said, changing the fork from position several times to keep her hands busy. “You’re obstructing your daughter’s arteries”

“If you moved a little more doing something productive, like doing some laundry or cleaning the
house, instead of being all day with the phone”

“Dang” said Polly, between giggles.

Patsy looked daggers at her before returning her gaze to her father. “Why would I? Each time I try to clean you’re behind me, telling me how to do it or simply getting in the middle”

“Because you do it wrong”

“Teach me, don’t do it yourself!”

Thomas sighed, more tired than before. “Don’t start with me tonight, disappointment of my life. I’ve had one hell of a day and I want to have dinner in peace”

“Can we watch some TV, Daddy?” asked Polly.

“Yes, take the remote and put whatever you like” he said, shrugging.

Patsy watched as her sister jumped excited from the chair and ran to the couch to grab the remote. “Why is it always what she wants to see?” she asked, with a frown.

Thomas rubbed his temples. “Martha, what did I just tell you?”

“It’s not fair!” she complained. “It’s always what she wants. There are nights when I want to see something more than Disney Channel”

“Well, Patsy, if you don’t like it, then you can always go upstairs and watch the TV in your room. Ah, no, wait, you don’t have a TV because this is my house and you’ll see what I say” he told her, cackling in the end.

Patsy eyed him with fury while Polly sat at her left once again, zapping. She smiled. “Oh, yeah, Dad? Do you know what is even funnier?”

“Aside from your attempt of rebel phase?” he asked, rhetorically. Then, eyeing her with suspicion, he added. “What?”

Patsy got up from her chair and went directly to the stool where the newspaper was. She heard James still cursing in the meantime and threw a rapid glare to the counter, seeing half of the cannelloni – black from burnt – on it. She rolled her eyes, and then headed back to where her sister and father were sat. She threw the newspaper in front of Thomas, taking a seat beside him again.

“That” she simply said.

Thomas looked at her with a cocked eyebrow and then read what was in front of him. “The fat man from North Korea threating us to blow us all away is funny to you?” he asked, frowning at her.

“What?” she said, taking the paper in her own hands. “No, no, not the newspaper” she clarified. Then, she started to pass pages rapidly until something caught her attention. “Here it is” she said, smiling triumphally. She took the notice in her hands, unfolded it, and then threw it in front of her father. “This”

Thomas took the notice and took his glasses out of his pocket to read it at the same time James came
back with a tray of destroyed cannelloni. “Here’s dinner. I scraped all the burnt parts I could” he explained.

When he was about to put the tray on the table, Thomas hit it with his fist. “‘In danger of failing for absence issues’?!” he read out loud. He took off his glasses to look dagger at his daughter, who looked back with a mocking smile and arms crossed. “What absence issues are those, young lady?!”

James frowned and looked nastily at the oldest girl as well. “Patsy, what did I tell you?!”

“You knew about this?” he was asked by Thomas. “You knew my daughter was about to fail half of her classes in the first trimester and you helped her hide it from me instead of telling me?!” he shouted, getting up from his seat abruptly.

“I just wanted your food to settle” said James with a sad tone.

Thomas groaned and looked at the paper in front of him with fury. “Unbelievable, unbelievable!” He looked at Patsy, who was still smiling. “You only have one job, girl! Go to school, study and pass your fucking classes!”

“That’s three jobs, Dad…” said Patsy, finally erasing the smile from her face and rolling her eyes.

The act just infuriated her father more. “Is that your answer for everything, Martha? Eye-rolls, shrugs, sighs…” Patsy sighed. Voluntarily or not, it just made him angrier. “Can you please explain to me how do you have absence issues at high school? I drive you there all mornings! Where do you spend the day, then?”

“Around”

“Around?” Thomas could feel his cheeks burning and the beginning of a headache. “Around where? Not the classroom, for what I’m seeing! God… Do I… Do I need to take you to class holding your hand like when you were little, Martha?”

“No…”

“No? You’re proving me otherwise with your attitude!”

“Please, Thomas…” said James, with a tone of worry. “Lower your voice”

“Don’t ‘lower your voice’ me! This girl is going to be the end of me someday! And you’re helping her, for what it seems!”

“I just wanted to wait a bit before telling you” James defended himself.

Thomas put a hand, finally, on his forehead, groaning. “My God… You two are going to give me a stroke one of these days, I swear…”

“I was trying to find the right time!”

“Just like with the weed?”

“Oh, so, it was you?” asked Patsy, looking at James.

James hit the table with the tray, and Polly didn’t hesitate in start eating while watching the show in front of her. “And then you dare to say I am the one who throws things in the face!”

“Because you are” both Thomas and Patsy said at the same time.
“You’re going to end me!” shouted James, sitting on the chair by Polly’s left, defeated. “I don’t know what to do anymore, everything blows back in my face!” he added, choking.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “And now he cries… I’m always the villain in this house…” he said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“That’s because you nail that role” muttered Patsy, looking at the floor.

Her father looked daggers at her. “Listen to me, Martha, I want you to fix this before the year ends, did you hear me? A daughter of mine cannot flunk out!”

“It’s not my fault. I hate school” she said with tiny voice.

“Well, I hate my life, but I have to keep on doing it!” he shouted back, walking from side to side, in exasperation. “I have a rent to pay, I have two under-age daughters and a squatter to feed and I gotta go downtown all the fucking mornings to go to that goddamned office full of mad people!” He headed to the kitchen, a hand still on his forehead and tedium adorning his features.

Madison sniffed. “He doesn’t hesitate in calling me nuisance at every chance he gets…”

Polly patted his arm. “There, there…”

Patsy rolled her eyes once again. “Pf… Please, Dad, you’re just a secretary… What do you do? Photocopy and hand out important documents others have written?”

Thomas stopped abruptly in his tracks after hearing that, clenching his fists. Polly and James shared a worried look, and then looked at the oldest of the house, biting their bottom lips, fearful. After what they felt like an eternity, Thomas finally turned around, looking at Patsy infuriated.

“What the fuck did you just say to me?”

Patsy returned the hateful glare. “What you just fuck heard” she replied, getting up from her seat.

James and Polly shook their heads from side to side, not knowing to whom pay attention, especially when daughter and father began to walk directly to each other. James jumped from his seat, startling the littlest a bit for the sudden movement. He put himself between the two angry persons in the room.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” he said, stretching both arms to stop them in their tracks. “That’s enough, you two!” he said with a tone full of worry. “Please, let’s breathe and talk this like rational beings”

“I have nothing to talk with this ungrateful brat” spat Thomas, arms in akimbo.

“If you hate me that much, why don’t you let aunt Lucy take me?”

“Because I won’t let that witch have anything to do with any of you. The first thing she’d do would be sending you both to a boarding school far away from me”
“Then, be it. I never asked to live with you again” she declared, crossing her arms.

“Patsy…” tried to say James, putting a hand on her wrist.

Thomas narrowed his eyes at her. “Listen to me, you little snot, you’re grounded until further notice. Now, go to your room, I don’t want to see you anymore”

“You made that clear when you sent Polly and I away when she was barely four” she blurted out with venom.

“Stop talking back and have a bit of respect!” screamed Thomas, red in the face.

Patsy groaned in frustration. “I hate you! God took the wrong parent away from me!” she said before turning around and running upstairs.

Polly and James shared another glare of concern and cringed when they heard Patsy’s bedroom door slamming shut. Thomas sighed and threw the paper away; he made his way to his own bedroom while the sheet fell slowly on the floor. James looked at it with rage and then looked up again when he heard his friend’s door closing with just as much force as his daughter’s. James let out a sigh of defeat himself.

“I don’t know why we still have a TV when we’ve got them” commented Polly, finishing almost all the cannelloni.

James looked at her for a moment. He frowned. “Yes, we absolutely need some help…”

“Well, if it isn’t Henry Knox in flesh and bone!”

“Alexander!”

“Long time no see. I hope everything is turning out fine for you and your good old miss”

“If it weren’t for that damned house, everything’d fine!”

“No buyers yet?”

“Not a single one. In it wouldn’t you have any interest?”

“In buying the house next-door from mine? No”

“Think about it: you can rent it out to anyone you like. Choosing your neighbours is a golden opportunity”

“I’m sorry, Henry, but I’ve got to turn your ‘golden opportunity’ down”

“I can always lower the price. I don’t think Lucy would mind; she wants this house to disappear
from her life’

“It’s not about the price, it’s about logic’

“Think about it: you’ll have another place to sleep when your missus tells you to sleep on the couch”

“That’d be tempting for any other man not used to sleep on desks. Couches are wonders in comparison”

“Ah, so you’re still not taking a break?”

“Not thinking about getting familiar with the term yet”

“Come on. As far as I know, things are going pretty well for you in that new company Washington founded”

“And, to keep it that way, we have to keep on working”

“You’re a hard nut to crack, Alexander”

“Well, you need to be in order to become a lawyer”

“Any interesting cases lately?”

“Actually, I quitted a couple of years ago”

“Don’t say! And what do you do for a living, then?”

“Washington put me in head of the finances”

“Well, he made the right decision: I am still amazed at how well you flowed with the numbers back when you worked at the library. And you were just sixteen!”

“Numbers and I always got along, I guess”

“Even though, how comes you decided to quit working as a lawyer?”

“Mh... Maybe I just wanted to take a break?”

“Throwing my own advice against me. Nice”

“I learnt from the best”

“Aw”

“Thank Lucy on my part for teaching so well”

“Ouch”

“Haha”

“A Alex, she really misses you. She even wanted to come, but I had to convince her to stay; she’s got the flu”

“Eliza has also taken ill”

“I’m not surprised with the chill!”
“That’s why today I have to take the kids to nursery school… Ah, the sooner I named them… There they are!”

“Are those Philip and Angie? They grew so much!”

“I’m sorry, but we need to go. I’ve got no car and it’s about a twenty minutes’ walk”

“Does your missing car have anything to do with the deplorable state of the wall?”

“‘Deplorable’ is such a weak word to define it…”

“Mommy drunk too much to celebrate Daddy’s absence”

“Angelica!!”

“Haha! I really need to hear that story!”

“Maybe another day, we shall be too late”

“And why not today, White Rabbit? I can give you three a ride”

“We wouldn’t want to be nuisance”

“You or your family a nuisance? Alexander, you’re so lucky Lucy wasn’t here! You should’ve really earned a blow in the back of the neck just for thinking such a thing!”

“Alright, alright… But let me pay you the gasoline”

“Oh, don’t worry: you will pay me by telling me the story of the fall of the Harlem Wall”

__________________________________________________________

“Alex is in a meeting with Mr. Washington and a common friend”

James stopped his fist mid-way from knocking on Hamilton’s door and looked at Maria, who had her glare glued to the still blank paper in front of her and a pen inside her mouth, being chewed mercilessly.

“Oh…” he said, scowling slightly. He turned his head towards the end of the hallway, where their president’s door was.

“No, not in there” Maria told him, startling him for the second time that morning. She was looking at the paper when he turned his head to her. “They went to the pub”

“The pub?”

“It was more like a personal reunion among friends than a professional one, you know?”
James nodded slowly. “And how long do you think it will take?”

The receptionist shrugged. “Don’t know. Lee hasn’t phoned us yet to let us know where he would drop by; so, I wouldn’t blame them if they stayed there all day…”

“Me neither… Thank you, Maria”

“You’re welcome” She looked up for a brief moment and smiled at him.

“Good luck with… your writing” he said, pointing at the papers with uncertainty.

James turned around after Maria thanked him in a sigh and entered the break room, where he found Aaron looking at some papers with the same distressful expression the receptionist was having at the other side of the building.

“Good morning, Burr” he greeted while heading straight to the counter.

“Morning… Feeling better, Madison?”

“Yes, thank you” He looked at the papers his workmate was re-reading, surely, for the zillionth time. “Augustine’s custody?” he asked, cautiously. Aaron just nodded. “Hope everything turns out fine, Burr”

“Thank you” he said, finally looking up and giving him a tired smile. “Is Jefferson in his office? I need to give him some documents”

“He couldn’t come. Family matters” he answered, shrugging uncomfortable as he began to prepare some coffee. “I can keep and give them to him back at home, if that’s okay with you…”

Aaron gave him a sympathetic smile. “Yes. Tell him on my part I hope everything turns out fine for him as well”

“Thank you, Burr”

The lawyer eyed him for a moment before speaking. “Is the coffee Maria made this morning already gone?” He looked at his watch, knitting his brows. “It’s only eight forty”

“Ah, no, there’s still some, but I wanted to do one myself”

“Why?”

“Because I need it to bribe Hamilton with it”

Aaron blinked a few times, confused. “What?”

James sighed while filling the coffee pitcher with some water. “I need to ask him for a favour”

“Well, let me give some free advice for the sake of our friendship: if you need something from Alexander, you better tell him straight to the face. If he sees you trying to persuade him with things, he’ll go ballistic”

“That may work with someone as Laurens or Mulligan, or even you, but me and Thomas are
“different”
“Normal, what a month you three made us all suffer for that economic plan”
“You too?”
“We call it the Dark Summer”
“Of 2015. I’m sure he already let it go”
“… … You know what? Yes. Make him coffee, and you should give him some snack as well”
“Why the change of mind?”
“I just realised blood is very difficult to clean off”
“Don’t be a bird of ill omen”
“It’s an omen, nonetheless”

They didn’t talk again until Aaron had to stop re-reading the documents in front of him due to feeling his anxiety growing dangerously quickly around his chest and going up his throat. If Madison felt it, he didn’t say anything about it, simply giving him subjects of conversation when he found himself thinking about anything that could make them keep talking. Aaron didn’t know Madison was as glad as him that they couldn’t have caught up in the last few months, so now they seemed to have endless things to talk about as the minutes passed by faster.

Madison had decided to put the coffee he had made in a thermos to keep it hot when the voices of their boss and accountant sounded down the hallway. They heard Washington and Hamilton saying goodbye before a name they couldn’t understand for the meters separating the break room from the entrance, but distinguished Maria’s voice greeting them both. Madison waited until he saw Washington entering his own office and closing the door at his back to make a move.

“Have you written a letter to your family, telling them where you’d be?” asked Aaron, teasingly.
James rolled his eyes while heading to the door. “Don’t call for bad weather”

“Says the one who is calling for a hurricane to hit” Aaron lowered his gaze for a moment and then laughed. “I know how to type this on the group chat” he said, taking his phone out his pocket.
Madison only stopped looking daggers at him when he heard Alexander’s laugh from the entrance. “That’s a sign from the Universe” he said, running to the counter, where he put the thermos and a few biscuits on a tray, grabbed it and headed to the door. “Thank you for your support” he said sarcastically before exiting.

“That’s what friends are for!” was Aaron’s response.

James rolled his eyes once again. He made his way down the hallway, seeing Hamilton’s
door closed. He had heard him laugh sincerely and had not heard his door being closed. If that wasn’t the Universe talking to him, he’d be damned. He stopped in front of the financial manager’s door, looking down at his now occupied hands and bit his bottom lip. He felt, with his peripherical view, Maria inclining on the counter, holding something – her phone, for sure – on her hand. He heard a few steps coming from the stairs, slowly, as well. Screw it, he thought, shaking his head. He knocked on the door with his foot by the same time Peggy opened her own door widely, watching him straight. He tried to do his best to ignore her piercing eyes.

“Come in!” said Hamilton’s muffled voice from the other side of the wooden door.

James looked down at his hands once again, and tried to press down the knob with his elbow.

“Let me help you” said Peggy, doing the action for him and letting the door opened by a crack.

He looked at her, seeing her phone also in one of her hands. He half-closed his eyes. “Thank you”

“Could you let it ajar, please?” she asked, innocently.

James looked over his shoulder, seeing the rest of the team at the other side of the hall, all their mobiles in their hands and expectant expressions on their faces. Aaron had gotten up and was standing by the break room door, as well, more than prepared to imitate his workmates and record whatever may happen once he entered the lion’s den. Even Washington was there, standing in his own doorframe, waiting patiently. He sighed quietly and shrugged.

“Whatever…” he whispered, before pushing the door with his foot and getting in.

He was welcomed by the sight of Hamilton already working, his glasses on, a pen on his right hand, various papers spread all over his desk. He swallowed. He looked over his shoulder again, seeing his workmates and boss walking to the office. Peggy and Maria’s heads were sticking out the corner of the wooden frame. He closed the door with his foot in their faces, hearing their complaining. He missed them rubbing their noses.

“Aw, man, I hate recording things at the other side of a door” complained Laurens.

“I don’t like your tone, as if you have done that before…” commented Hercules, eyeing him suspiciously. His friend only gave a shrug.

They all glued their ears and phone mics against the wood when they heard Madison talking. Washington made way as well as he could through them.
“Come on, people, don’t be meddling” he told them, while, hypocritically, pressing his own ear against the door to try and hear the conversation better.

“Good morning, Hamilton” he greeted, trying to sound as casual and nice as possible. His workmate lifted his gaze and saw he was bringing him a tray with some food and a drink. “What are you doing?” he asked, when he saw Hamilton wasn’t going to do anything else than looking straight at him. “Working?”

“Yes, I am one of those strange specimens that work in their workplace” was Hamilton’s sharp response.

James watched him for a moment. “Jeez, I was only trying to start a conversation”

“How, exactly? In which part of your sentence did you give anything to work with? My only choices to answer you are saying nothing, being sarcastic or simply barking ‘yes’ like a trained pet. That’s not a conversation; it’s more like a verbal hostage”

“… Well, that wasn’t my intention” said James, shrugging.

Hamilton took off his glasses and pointed at the tray with his pen. “And what with that suspicious and sudden kindness? What do you want from me?”

“Man, what an evil-minded… Can’t a workmate bring another workmate something to eat and some coffee?”

“When that workmate is the same workmate who greets you all the mornings with a ‘Shit, he came today as well’, no, he can’t”

“Those are lil’ jokes, you never got me”

“Never did, never will want to. Now, get out, please, and take that with you” He finished his sentence pointing at the tray before putting his glasses on again.

“Come on, I made coffee just for you”

“You made me coffee?”

“Yes”

“Now, I really don’t want to know what the hell you want from me”

“Pig-headed, are we? I only wanted to have a detail. Thomas told me you defended me yesterday” James clapped himself in his mind for coming out with that and thanked the Heavens for the coincidences of life.

“Don’t take it personally, it’s just that I hate Adams the most around here. I’d have even done it for Jefferson. Besides, there are other ways to thank people. Like writing them a note, or simply saying
‘thank you’” He pointed at the thermos. “That coffee over there smells like Eden’s Apple from a mile, Madison. So, stop beating around the bush and tell me what you want. The sooner I can decline, the sooner I can get back to get this paperwork done”

James stared at him for a moment before he finally sighed. He put the tray on the table, only to be completely ignored by Hamilton, when he began to talk. “Thomas and I… Well, mostly I…” he corrected himself when he saw Hamilton’s glare hardening. He cleared his throat and re-corrected his phrasing for the second time when his workmate’s glare didn’t soften a bit. “Alright, only I was thinking – for a time, I must admit – that we… Well, he could use some help from you”

James didn’t want to go any further, especially knowing there were prying ears at the other side of the door. If Hamilton knew or even remembered they were at the workplace, sharing their space with eight nosy persons, James didn’t know, but could only hope he did, because he wouldn’t want to give a deeper explanation of the matter at hand in a no-private area.

Thank goodness, Hamilton didn’t ask what they needed his help for, and James sighed with a relief soon to be brief when he heard the actual words that left the manager’s mouth.

“You need my help?” he asked with the same slow speed a teacher would talk to a toddler.

James tried to erase any flashback that may want to invade his brain by nodding rapidly. “It would be very useful, indeed”

“Well, Madison, I’d gladly help you both out” began to say his workmate, and James felt the beginning of a smile forming onto his lips. “But, you see, I’m very busy”

“Oh, right, it doesn’t have to be now” said James, waving one hand nonchalantly, feeling already happy with finding an open door. “Just tell me when you’ll have a moment and I will tell you…”

“No, no, I’m not busy just now. I am in general” Hamilton clarified.

“… Doing what?” he asked, tilting his head to the side.

He felt shivers going down his spine when the manager gave him a mischievous smile. “Oh, well, of course ruining the company with my stupid ideas of an uneducated tramp, and the whole county with my non-grata presence of an immigrant invader. Don’t you remember?”

James felt the whole air inside the room thickening and becoming harder to breathe. How could he thought it was going to be easy? He heard some muffled laughs at his left, where the door was, and had to contain himself for looking infuriated in that direction, giving Hamilton, by that, more time to think about another cutting remark.

“Listen” he started, with a tired sigh. “I know we are not friends, but, could you at least consider it for a moment?” he asked.
Hamilton was quiet for a few more seconds, looking at him up and down, as if he were expecting for his lips to twist into a smile, for him telling him it was all a joke. When the financial manager was given any of that, he simply removed his glasses and rubbed his temples.

“Let me get this straight, because I’m having a feeling that I may kill some of you two – or both… – before the year ends”

Hamilton kept a hold on his glasses, gesticulating at the same time. James focused on the transparent object, in an attempt to avoid his workmate’s sharp and unreadable glare.

“You two spent almost two whole months making my life a living hell, giving me the runaround, laughing at me, teasing me, threatening me with asking for my removal because my ideas were, and I quote, ‘ridiculous and indecent’, making me to spend countless nights awake, trying to figure the fuck out how to make a deal with two persons who refused to talk to me at all and be a bit flexible, making me swallow my pride and accept all your requests, no matter if I agreed or not, making me fight with Eliza countless times because I couldn’t give her, or even my children, a fraction of my time, all that so you later thanked me by making a deal between the two about trying to bring every idea that get out of my mouth down, to argue everything I say, to insult me calling me lil’ pearls such as ‘fake royalty’, ‘immigrant who has come up by chance’, ‘disloyal’, ‘disgrace’, ‘amoral’, ‘rascal with dwarfism’, ‘orphan son of a whore’…”

“That last one was by Burr…” muttered James, feeling the walls looming over him.

“…And the most famous ones ‘chihuahua’ and ‘gremlin’…” Hamilton continued as if he hadn’t heard him at all, though James swore his glare was sharper than before his interruption. “And now, after two fucking years standing your disrespect and airs, now you come to my office, try to bribe me with food and drinks as if I were some kind of abandoned animal – though I’m very sure that is one of the many things you think about me, but haven’t found the opportunity to add it to the verbalised list – and ask me for a favour?”

James thought for a response for a moment, before he gave up and simply nodded. “Yes, that is actually a good summary of our relationship… So… Do you want me to come back later to explain the matter further or…?”

Hamilton stared straight for two seconds that felt way too long to stand. His lips twisted into a small smile. “Look, Madison, I’m having a good day, so I’ll do a thing I don’t do often:…” he said, making him smile hopeful for a brief second that was ripped away from him when he heard the rest of the sentence. “…I am going to repeat myself”

And so, James simply stood listening silently for the second time to the rain of past actions he and Thomas had done to Hamilton since his friend came back from France to work at Washington’s orders. He bit his bottom lip anxiously, trying to bear with the shower of flashbacks he tried so hard to push out of his mind as Hamilton talked, his tone getting darker and harsher as the speech went on.
“…and ask me for a favour?” Hamilton asked him once again, his brow more furrowed than before and his lips pressed tighter.

James waited a few more seconds than the first time to answer. “Yes… So… Now that we clear our current relationship up… Twice… Which day do you think you could drop in…?”

“Ah, so I’d have to go to his place?”

“Well, it would be easier as all the documents are in there… But, if you want, we can go to your place”

“Neither of you would ever put a foot in my property. That’d be like letting a vampire in” Hamilton spat.

“Then… our place?”

“… Look, Madison, get out of here, I’m very busy” he told him, waving his hand to dismiss him.

“It doesn’t have to mean a compromise if you come” he tried once again. “You know, you could just… drop by to have some dinner and then we’d discuss…”

Hamilton looked up from his papers fast enough to seal his lips immediately. “The last time I have dinner with you, the thing didn’t end well, especially for me. Don’t ever suggest a thing like that again”

“Alright, yes, sorry”

“And, please, leave. This conversation is over”

“But…”

“Over!”

James groaned under his breath. “Come on, Hamilton, we have no one else to turn!”

He tensed when he realised how he had phrased that statement and watched as Hamilton’s lips curled into a smile and how he snorted a laugh right after.

“I don’t mind if Laurens is going to rub this on my face for the rest of my days, I have to admit aloud that karma exists after all”

“Told you!” said Laurens at the other side of the door.

Hamilton’s smile fell, being replaced by a bitter expression. “You need to have some nerve, a lot of nerve, actually, to come to me and ask me for a favour. To betray my trust, to stop talking to me from one day to the next overnight, and then ask me for a favour”

James frowned slightly. “Alright, I admit we haven’t be the nicest to you, but you owe me, Hamilton. Don’t you remember that time I gave you half of a mandarin in one lunch break because you brought no food and you were starving?”

Hamilton wrinkled his features. “What the hell are you talking about, minion? How in hell I am
going to accept food from you when we have a whole cupboard back at the break room full of food and I have closer people around here that would have noticed my hunger and offered me a piece of their own meal first, and especially, when I don’t like mandarins?”

“You don’t?”

“No, their smell reminds me of the schoolyard…”

“Well, either way, you ate it. Repay me by doing a friend of mine a little favour”

“I don’t owe you a thing. I already paid any debt I may have with you with all the favours I’ve done to you during that time”

James folded his arms over his chest. “What? Tell me one single favour I have asked for you during that time!”

Hamilton looked at him for a moment. “Really? Are you serious about that?”

“Of course I am!”

“Absolutely serious?”

“Haven’t been more serious in my entire life before!”

“Alright, then”

James saw Hamilton rolling his chair out the desk and bending down to the final drawer, from where he got a thick folder out. He started to sweat coldly as he saw the man across him leafing through the stapled papers, not even putting his glasses on, as if he knew all that was there by heart. Knowing Hamilton, James supposed that was the case. He watched as Hamilton took a series of stapled sheets in his hands and closed the folder. Just then, he received the answer he had asked Hamilton for…

…And it went on for a while as it turned out Hamilton had written an actual list of all the favours he had done for James in their short kind-of friendship they once had. After what felt like an eternity – in fact, James would’ve sworn it had been more than five minutes since Hamilton had started reading – the financial manager finally said the words James had been waiting since all that begun.

“And, last but not least, that time you called me at four am, asking me for taking you to the hospital because you were convinced you had a fever and I had to stay there with you until eleven because you refused to believe the doctors when they told you you were fine”

“Like those quacks were going to tell me the truth! I know my body!”

“Look, Madison, get the hell outta here before I make you swallow this list”

“But…”

“Don’t worry, I have photocopies”
James bit his bottom lip, not wanting to give up yet. “If you don’t want this to be a favour, then we’ll pay you!” he suggested, desperate.

“Oh, yes? And with which money are you going to pay me? With the one you lost with that rip-off of a house they sold you and the reason why your parents turned off their tap; or maybe with the one Thomas no longer have because he has more debts than stupid ideas in his head?” he asked mockingly.

“… … You are mean” he said, knitting his brow.

“And I’m getting worse as I age” Hamilton nodded. He pointed at the door with his hand. “Now, out”

“Come on, don’t be like this. We can’t pay you with money, that’s true, but we can sort this out”

“You simply can’t understand that I don’t want to even think about this right?”

“You should. It’s always good to have people who owe you one”

“Yes, I know that’s the only way Jefferson or you work. In fact, I’m surprised you are still together when neither of you have a dime to your names… Maybe that’s the reason, actually. Something tells me you wouldn’t have stood by each other’s side if one of you were still rich”

James felt a pinch inside his chest after hearing that and was red in the face within seconds. “YOUR MALICE KNOWS NO LIMITS, GREMLIN! YOU’RE THE FUCKING INCARNATION OF EVILNESS”

“Here comes Dobby with his mood swings, always on time” he said, shaking his head, with a tiny smile. He got up and walked to him, to push him to the door, seeing he wasn’t going to leave willingly. “Come on, go ballistic out of here, I have so much work to do and no time to lose with your shameless nature”

James tried to glue his feet to the ground, starting a struggle with Hamilton he lost. When he heard the door being opened – and saw their workmates and boss taking a step backwards to not get in between – he turned around, only to be pushed in the chest with the same force. He looked daggers at Hamilton.

“Why do you forgive Aaron and not us?! We only insulted you, he shot you!” he accused.

“But I regretted it instantly!” Aaron defended himself from the hallway.

“Because Aaron is a poor devil with anger issues which he suppresses due to childhood traumas. You’re just assholes with no moral” answered Hamilton, in an oddly calm way.

“Hey!” complained Aaron.

Hamilton was able to push James out of his office. When he was about to close the door, James stopped him, pressing further from the other side. “Son of a fucking bitch! One of these days I am going to win over your heart and you will regret all the bad things you’ve done to me!” he shouted, enraged.
Hamilton frowned at that. “I’ve wronged you? What a nerve, Dobby, what a nerve!” he screamed, pushing the door harder, managing to close it in his angry workmate’s face.

He looked at the barrier in front of him and felt his cheeks burning even more than before and began to kick the door with fury, cursing under his breath. The people behind and around him looking at him with wide eyes. Angelica tried to contain her laughter while she recorded it all.

“This compensates the lack of screaming” she said, her voice shaking from giggles.

“Madison, please, stop mistreating the office furniture!” said Washington, not wanting to get any closer just in case.

Hamilton punched the door from the other side. “STOP WITH THE KICKING, DOBBY! I TOLD YOU TO BE A TODDLER FAR AWAY FROM ME, I’M WORKING!” Just when James was going to kick the door even with more force, this was opened, revealing Hamilton with the tray in one hand. He passed it to him. “And I also told you to take this shit with you” he said, stone-faced, before closing the door in his face once again.

James cursed a few more times under his breath, feeling now his ears burning along with his cheeks. His workmates made way for him to go to the break room, the tray trembling in his hands due to the rage and impotence he was feeling.

Suddenly, the door from Hamilton’s office swung open again.

“Hey, Madison” the manager called him.

James turned on his heels, feeling a brief hope being born in his chest. “Yes??”

Hamilton gave him a sided smile. “What are you doing? Heading straight to the break room in shame after a blow from the karma?” he asked him, clearly mocking him and his previous tone.

“SON OF A WHORE!” screamed the accountant, throwing him the thermos, which hit the door Hamilton was able to shut on time. The object cracking opened in the side and staining the floor with the contained liquid

“That is, get the office dirtier than it already is. That’s the way I like it…” said Washington sarcastically.

“Serves you right, for being an evil gnome” he heard Laurens telling him in a loud voice, clearly wanting from him to hear. “Serves you damn right! I hope you and your friend end up living poorly under a fucking bridge, feeding yourselves by licking a thrown wrapper of Kit-Kat in the middle of the street, remembering all the times you could’ve avoided that by being nice to people! It would be the least you’d deserve for stuck-up preppies!”

“Mon Dieu, Laurens!” said Lafayette, pushing him slightly on the arm.
Aaron shook his head. “Each of us is worse than the one before…” he commented. “Really, if Pennywise came here, he’d run away, totally terrified”
Doors that were previously closed (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

“Look, Eliza, this is not just because it’s them. You know pretty well that I stopped practising Law”
“And I know pretty well why you practised it in the first place and why you had to leave it” She had sat straighter to look at him. “As well as I know you still like it, and that is why you keep writing essays about whatever happens in that field” She pointed at the laptop. “You haven’t let it go”
“What a novelty…”

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Some would tell her they didn’t understand how a sweet, peaceful and caring soul as her could have married someone as aloof, energetic and always up to a fight as Alexander Hamilton. Not even in her wedding day she escaped their critics and comments. Especially, her father’s, who wouldn’t stop talking badly of her soon-to-be husband, not even after feeling his wife’s elbows. Eliza still remembered her mother’s eye-rolls and hisses, clearly wanting to shush her husband. Though Catherine wasn’t very fond of the boy either, she respected her choice in the surface, and that was enough for Eliza.

Thank goodness, she could always count with her two sisters and their unconditional support. When she told them Alexander had asked their father for her hand, they laughed hysterically, hugged and congratulated her. She still blushed at the memory of his father’s dumbfounded face when Alexander did such an act, as if they were in one of the romantic novels she loved to read, set on the 18th century. Though he didn’t win her father’s trust with that, he surely ended up winning Eliza’s heart completely.

That was how she decided to marry at the age of 23, something that would have scandalised any other normal parent, but hers were immune to such a thing, as Angelica, their oldest daughter, married when she was 21. And, not even then, they made a total fuss about it; Angelica was not only the oldest, but also the smartest and more mature out of the three of them, and their parents educated her as a lady since she was still very little. Eliza always thought if it hadn’t been for their money, they would’ve had a normal childhood, being able to stain their clothes without a reprimand of 2 hours
long because the dress was too expensive, or to go play rough games with the guys. She still remembered how hard Peggy fought with her father when she wanted to get in the football team back in Primary. Needless to say, Peggy won. More because of their father being pressured by their mother, tired of hearing Peggy complaining and coming to her with a new list of benefits and good things about football – and sports, in general – and the smallest Schuyler sister spent that last year of Elementary school happier than a clam.

To be honest, and now that she was in her bed, alone at home, facing the ceiling and with her body too aching to even think of moving or doing anything that would busy and distance her mind from the memories, Eliza realised that it was thanks to her sisters that she had made it this far. She wasn’t as witted as Angelica or as prone as Peggy to speak her mind, no matter how hard she was tried to be silenced. She was the one who resigned and sacrificed for the well-being of everybody. She was the shy girl that stood by the side, the observant kid that never talks about what she had seen or what she thought about it. So, she couldn’t be angry with the friends and relatives that were surprised when they met Alexander and saw he was a motormouth, always wanting to speak his mind even about the littlest details. She couldn’t be angry when she saw the scepticism in their glares when she announced the wedding, when she married him, when she looked around and saw them all muttering under their breaths, criticising her life choice. She couldn’t, though she was.

They had proved them wrong, nonetheless. They had been married for seven years. Seven difficult years, true, but they managed to cope and to make amends after every fight and disagreement, they had made it that far by talking and going, hand in hand, towards the same goal: be there for the other when it were needed. And, it was true Eliza was known for be that part of the relationship, and it was that the reason her marriage was still brutally criticised, even though it had already passed seven years. She was a natural carer, she was used to show her emotions, she was an open book. Unlike Alexander. And, to her, it was even funny how she, the shy girl, was the open book when Alexander, the man who never stopped talking, was the mystery never fully solved. Alexander could spend six hours talking about politics, trials – especially when he still practised – and any other actual subject that would arise, but when it came to personal matters, he closed up, he lowered his head and try to go unnoticed by all the people that may be with him at that time.

It was hell to talk to him when he decided to be like that. But Eliza was another thing Alexander wasn’t: very, very, very patient. And so, she waited. Any time Alexander had a flashback, a regression, she simply changed the subject or stayed quiet if she was answered only by nods and monosyllables. Any time Alexander had a panic attack during a storm and – not pun intended – stormed out of the room they were at to be left alone and got out only when the worse had already passed, she didn’t say anything and acted as if nothing happened. And she be damned if that what shone in Alexander’s violet eyes wasn’t gratitude and affection.

It wasn’t after four years of marriage when Alexander opened up to her, let his walls break down. She was pregnant with Angie at the time, Philip had only turned two a couple of months ago and he had fallen ill. Very ill. Not a big deal, but he had had a lot of fever in the first days. Eliza was worried as any normal mother would have been, but she was always sure her child would be fine. She pampered him, took care of him, slept with him, kissed him, made him his favourite food… She did everything it was expected from her. What she wasn’t expecting was to see Alexander actually
missing days of work just to stay with their son.

Eliza had only asked him if something bad happened at work, knowing how her husband loved to work even in his free days, but she was only answered with a shake of head, and she let it go. Alexander wasn’t going to talk, and she let him be. It wasn’t until late at night when she woke up to the sound of a distressful Alexander, crying and hyperventilating in the living room. She had hugged him, sat him on the couch, reassured him she was there with him and wasn’t going anywhere. And he broke. And he confessed. And he shared the story of his life – of which he had always being so suspiciously secretive about – with her. And she listened, and took his hands in hers, and nodded and smiled and even cried with him when he reached the part where his dear mother left him unwillingly, and everything was clearer for her. And they bonded more in one night than in five years of relationship. And Eliza knew she had chosen right.

And so, she wasn’t surprised when her husband treated her like a Queen, and even refused to stay at the office until half past five – as he was supposed to – and asked Washington if he could leave at quarter to one so he could have time to pick up the children and spend the rest of the day with her. Working yes, but by her side, taking care of her and making sure she had everything she needed. And any person who dared to say Alexander was heartless or selfish could go to Hell and rot there, anyone who dared to say she was a fool and had thrown away her youth and life to marry a rock who didn’t deserve her and all the things she did for him, could accompany them as well. She could guide them the way and saw them burn in there because she knew who she married, and knew she did the right choice and was happy with her life. She was happy to hear the front door being opened, her children greeting and hugging her and Alexander kissing her, not even thinking about he could get sick and lose days of work for such an act and hearing him asking her multiple times if she was feeling any better or if she needed something.

She had to laugh. “Alexander, you haven’t even changed your clothes. Come on, you must be uncomfortable with such formal clothes. Change”

Her husband knitted his brows and put a hand on her forehead, ignoring her advice. “You have still a bit of fever. When was the last time you take your medicine?”

“Mmh… At six, I think… Maybe half past six? A bit before you had to wake the children up” she answered, shrugging.

“Shit, you still can’t take it until two at least… Do you want anything else? Are you hungry, or thirsty?”

She laughed once again, feeling her cheeks warmer, but not from the fever. “Alex, I’m okay, really. It was just a little cold. Now, come on, change your clothes so you’re comfier and sit by my side. I’ve been all day missing your typing”

He had to laugh at that and peeked her on the cheek before turning to their closet and took out more informal clothes to spend the rest of the day at home. He still went to the kitchen and brought her a couple of toasts with jelly and a glass of water. She accepted it, especially when she heard her stomach growling at the sight, and ate in silence while she heard her husband typing non-
“So” she said when she had finished with the first toast. She took the glass from the nightstand. “How was your day?” she asked, taking a sip.

Alexander shrugged. “Lee hasn’t come yet’

“That man is procrastinating, I’m telling you” she commented, biting the other toast with more hunger than the first one.

“No, seriously?” asked Alexander, playful and sarcastically. “To be honest, I’d do it as well if I were him”

“What happened at that cabin?”

“Eliza…”

“Okay, okay… But you have to tell me someday”

“Someday”

“Good” She took another sip of water. “Anything else?”

“No”

“Sure?”

“… Angelica sent you the vids and audios, right?”

“Yep”

“Then, why do you ask?”

“Because I love messing with you” she answered, blinking innocently. “Now, care to explain how on Earth did Madison end up kicking your door?”

“It’s a long story” he tried to dissuade her.

“We’ve got time” she pressured, not willing to give up. She looped her arm with his own and rested her head on his chest, having a clear view now of the laptop screen. “Come on?” she asked, rolling her eyes up.

And how could Alexander say no to that? After a defeated sigh, he began to narrate all that happened, clarifying some parts of the conversation Eliza had already heard from her sisters’ messages that were too distorted to understand, and typing a few words from time to time, an act that didn’t interfere in his narration at all. She made a mental note about asking him how he could do that. By the time the story was over, Eliza didn’t say anything, actually mulling it over. She could only stop thinking when a discussion from their children made Alexander woke up and went directly to the room across theirs.
She heard Alexander reprimanding them, ironically in a louder voice than theirs, though Eliza suspected he wasn’t even realising it. She looked at the crib beside their bed, where John was still sleeping. She thanked the Heavens before going to sleep and after waking up every day for sending her a quiet child that actually liked to sleep more than crying or playing, and hoped than, when he were old enough, he’d give his siblings some of his calmness. The voices of Angelica and Philip complaining and defending themselves whilst pinning the blame on the other could be heard right after Alexander’s scolding. Her husband didn’t hesitate in hushing them. She could even imagine him with a hand on his forehead. Sure, those two had inherited his natural loud voice. God forbid whomever that dared to contradict them when they were older.

“Philip, Angelica, that’s enough, stop you two!” shouted Alexander. “Either you learn to share, or I am going to keep those toys to myself until you learn to be good to one another!”

Eliza bit her bottom lip, trying to supress her laugh. Maybe Alexander didn’t spend too much time with the children due to his job, but both Philip and Angie knew that when their father talked about a punishment, he was going to fulfil it, no matter how impossible it may have sounded. They still hadn’t gotten over that week when Philip woke up with dirty dishes and glasses surrounding him because he refused to help her set the table.

Alexander came back in, threw a glare to the baby and then sat next to her, where the laptop and her head were on the top of him once again.

“Angie didn’t want to give Philip the last blue building block” he explained.

“Mh…” she replied as her brain was processing again the story she was told before the whole incident. “I know you have made up your mind already, but…”

“What?” he asked, confused.

“Ah, yes, sorry, I was still thinking about that favour you were asked…”

“Don’t worry over that” he said rapidly, resuming his typing. “I am not going to do anything, I’m enough busy as I am”

“Actually, I was thinking you should do it”

Eliza moved uncomfortably, holding her husband closer by the waist when she saw him stopping his writing abruptly. Alexander raised one hand to remove his glasses.

“What?”
“I was thinking you should do it” she repeated.

“No, I heard you. It was a ‘what’ of surprise” said Alexander, and she knew he had wrinkled his features without the need to turn her head to see it for herself. “Eliza…”

“I know you don’t like them” she started, closing her eyes. She really needed the medicine now, what time it was? “But the children are not to blame for who their fathers are. I thought you’d know that”

“And I do. And Madison has no children…”

“But Jefferson does. As long as I know, he has two girls, one of which is only ten…”

“Eliza, don’t go that way…”

“I’m not trying to make you feel guilty”

“Thank goodness…”

“But I really think you should, at least, go and see what they need. Maybe you can help them solve the thing out by themselves”

“I don’t want to have anything to do with whatever the hell is happening to them”

“Alex…”

“Eliza”

“Wouldn’t you like to be helped if you needed it?”

“Yes. In fact, I did need it, and they refused to even listen to me. Have you forgotten what a summer we had?”

“No, I haven’t but…”

“Eliza, it’s no use. I have already made up my mind with this”

“Have you ever heard that it’s wise to rectify?”

“Were you reading inspirational quotes again?”

“Yes, but that has nothing to do with this conversation”

“Look, Eliza, this is not just because it’s them. You know pretty well that I stopped practising Law”

“And I know pretty well why you practised it in the first place and why you had to leave it” She had sat straighter to look at him. “As well as I know you still like it, and that is why you keep writing essays about whatever happens in that field” She pointed at the laptop. “You haven’t let it go”

“What a novelty…”

“Alex, doing this doesn’t mean go back to cases”

“I know”

“And you’re not signing anything, remember it would be a favour and you can get advantage of it as well. You know, to see if you’re prepared to go back”
“…And if I can’t?”

She smiled warmly. “Whatever it turns out to be, you’ll have me, suffocating you with support” she promised, peeking him on the cheek.

He smiled at her. “I’ll just go to know what they need, if it doesn’t convince me, I won’t do it”

Eliza’s smile grew and held him once again. “That would be enough”

“I am doing this for you, not for them”

“Never doubted it”

Alexander shook his head and caressed her hair. “You have a heart as big as the world, Eliza” She giggled. “That’s the only think I may want to change about you”

“If it makes you feel better, just think that if you go back to trials, you’ll make a lot more of money… And I have my eyes on a pair of boots”

“Yes, it does make me feel a lot better”

“Oh, my gosh! Is that what I think it is??” Maria asked him, totally excited, as soon as he entered in the building.

“Mmh…” he nodded.

“But I thought Mr. Washington told us he wasn’t going to buy any of that this year!”

“And he kept his word. This is all my doing” he explained, finally letting the heavy box on the ground.

“You bought us the Christmas tree??”

“Yeah”

“Why? Well, I don’t care, I only care that we have one!” she said, as thrilled as a child. She took her phone and started typing. “I’m telling everybody”

“Yes, go ahead… Could you get the decorations from my car?”

“Decorations as well?”

“I wasn’t going to bring a tree to have it naked there for a month…”

“Alex, you’re the Grinch that saved Christmas!” cheered Laurens once he was out the break room.

“I don’t think that’s the way you say it” said Hercules with a laugh.

Maria jumped out the counter, falling on her heels with a thump. “John, help get the decorations!” she asked him, taking the keys Alexander was handing her.
“Yes, yes!” he said, running out the building.

Hercules shook his head. “He’s like a little child”

“At least he made you avoid all the trouble that you’d have to face to adopt an actual one” Alexander commented, opening the box.

Lafayette rolled his eyes. “I am too young to be a father”

“Honey, you’re 30” said Hercules.

“Rude”

“Come on you two” said Alex, taking off his coat. “Take this out before Maria and John come back or they will try to decorate the box”

They laughed at his comment while he opened his office, where he threw his coat on his chair and put his briefcase on the table. When he got out, he looked inside the break room, finding it empty. He turned around and walked towards his friends.

“Hey, have Jefferson or Madison arrived yet?”

“Yes, they’re in the office, I think” answered Lafayette automatically. Then, after a thought, he asked. “Why do you ask?”

“Too much happy vibes for you?” asked Hercules, with a laugh.

“Ha ha, what a funny couple you are”

“That is what makes us the best couple in the office” answered Lafayette, shrugging.

“Says who?”

“The list I wrote”

Alexander rolled his eyes at the same time Hercules frowned with worry. “Burr, are you feeling alright?”

Their eyes fell on the lawyer, mid-way to the stairs. Though Aaron was known for being hard to read, now it was clear that he was having a hard time standing by himself with his pale face trying to match the white from the walls. Alexander went to him in a matter of seconds.

“I am alright, just a bit dizzy” he answered, avoiding eye contact with the manager.

“That’s a drop in blood sugar” commented Lafayette, shrugging.

“Said the licensed in Medicine” mocked Hercules.

His partner gave him an offended look. “Sssh, if I didn’t finish my studies there was because I didn’t
want to, not because I couldn’t’”

“Whatever you say…”

Alexander helped Aaron get to the stairs by supporting him. “Aaron, if you need…”

“I am okay. Maybe Lafayette is right, and I only need to eat something” he dismissed, walking upstairs one step at a time.

Alexander gave him a sceptical look. “Alright, but if you need anything…”

“I know…”

“Good”

Laurens and Maria were already there helping Hercules and Lafayette, and chatting enthusiastically, when he turned around. John held a bag up, looking in his direction.

“Alex, you didn’t tell us you also bought candy!”

“Ah, yes, I forgot… Put the ring-shaped cake in the fridge for a moment” he advised, seeing Maria trying to open the box.

“Yes, right” she said, heading to the break room.

Peggy’s door was opened seconds after the receptionist passed in front of her office. “Am I smelling cake?” she said, licking her lips.

Maria stopped at the break room door. “Alex bought food and decorations!”

Peggy looked at her right, seeing now Lafayette and Hercules putting the tree on the corner behind Maria’s counter. “A tree! Yes!” she ran to her brother-in-law and hugged him with all her might. “Thank you, Alex, of all the partners Eliza’s had, you were always my favourite for some reason!” she told him.

He patted her back. “Yes… How many partners are we talking about?” he asked, with a cocked eyebrow.

Peggy didn’t mind his words, simply turning on her heels and kneeling on the floor with Laurens, helping him opening the box where the ornaments were. Angelica came through the door in that moment, clearly in a hurry and gasping for having run all the way from the pub to the building.

“Oh, God, you did it! Eliza told me she would try to convince you, but I thought she wouldn’t be able to!” she confessed, going directly to where Laurens was, taking out the lights. “Give me this”

“Look, Angie, a crèche!” said Peggy, taking out the little figures.

“Alexander, I am warning you that this year Santa is going to be very generous with you” said
Angelica, her face lighting up at the things her sister was showing her.

“Where are we going to put that, anyway?” asked Lafayette, fixing the tree with his partner in the corner.

Maria got out from the break room. “Use my table” she said.

“And what about you?” asked Hercules.

“Bah, I’ll use Adams’ desk. He isn’t going to come till after the holidays, especially after the roast Alexander dedicated him the other day” she said, taking a look inside the box.

“True, true” they all said in unison.

The door at Alexander’s right opened, revealing a sneezing Madison. He stopped for a moment, looking at his workmates discussing how to decorate the office and where they should put certain ornaments or shouldn’t. He finally shrugged and turned around, heading straight to the break room. Alexander eyed him for a moment before following him.

“Madison” he called, making sure the rest of the team was too busy chattering to pay them any attention.

“Good morning, Hamilton” said accountant for the sake of good manners, looking inside the cupboard where they kept the medicines.

“I’ll do it” he simply said.

Madison stopped his arm mid-way to put the aspirin box on the counter. “What?” he asked, finally looking at him.

Hamilton chewed the inside of his cheek. For Eliza’s sake, he thought. “I am willing to do the favour you asked me for yesterday” he clarified.

His workmate looked at him for a long moment. Finally, he knitted his brows. “Is this a joke? Because I’ve had enough…”

“No, I’m serious”

“Why?”

Alexander looked down for a moment, then shook his head. “Unimportant. Just tell me about what time I’ll have to be there, and I’ll go”

“Alright?”

“This is not me saying I will do it” he explained, squinting his eyes. “It’s just to see what the problem is”

“That’s a lot already” said Madison, shrugging. “Why did you change your…”?

“Madison” he interrupted. “Just take what I’m offering you without questioning it. If I think it too much, I’ll probably decline again in less than a second”
“Alright”

“Good… See you later, then”

He turned around, ignoring the look he was being given at his back. He was easily distracted when he saw Aaron going downstairs, paler than before and breathing through clenched teeth.

“You were okay” he commented, wrinkling his nose. “Were you sick?” A nod from the man in front of him. Alexander rolled his eyes and reached him his hand. “Come on, let me take you to your office” he offered.

Aaron gave a sigh of defeat, and that was all Alexander needed to understand what was troubling his workmate. Maybe he and Aaron weren’t the closest of friends – or friends at all, sometimes – but they had reached that point in any close relationship when one part knew what was wrong with the other by simply acts or just a few words that for the rest of the world would have had a different meaning.

Jefferson had come to that point as well with Madison, a long time ago. And so, what would have been seen as a kind gesture, for Thomas it made him see red flags that warned him to be cautious.

“Hi, Thomas” He looked up immediately when he heard the kind tone in his friend’s voice, and arched an eyebrow at the tray he had come back with. “I brought you some coffee and a piece of cake that I found on the fridge”

Thomas looked at his friend as he put the tray on the table, cautious enough to not stain any of the papers he had all over the desk. “What with the sudden kindness? What have you done?”

“Nothing”

“What has my daughter done this time?”

“Nothing, nobody has done anything” said James, sitting on the chair across his. “Here, drink before it cools down” he hurried him, pointing at the mug with the chin.

“Did Lucy call?”

“How would I know?”

“I don’t know, but somehow you always know everything before I do… What do you want from me, then?”

“You too? Can’t a man bring a friend some food and coffee?”

“When that man is the same man who keeps a diary just to remember all the favours he has done to people to use them on his advantage when he needs a favour, no, he can’t”
“That’s just because I like to be organized”

“Whatever… Tell me what you want, you know you’re fooling no one with this” he said, pointing at the tray with the pen before resuming his writing.

“Yesterday, I asked Hamilton for his help” He saw Thomas stopping his writing abruptly. Still he didn’t look up to meet his gaze. “I didn’t tell him exactly what he was supposed to do, so don’t worry over the others knowing about…”

“Didn’t I tell you I didn’t want him to have anything to do with this?” his friend asked him, finally looking up and removing his glasses. “Why do you always have to disrespect my opinion? Not only back at home but outdoors as well?”

“I don’t disrespect your opinion” James defended himself.

“The hell you don’t… Now I understand the message Burr sent through the group chat yesterday” he put his glasses back on and went to resume with his writing. “Thank goodness that man would never accept…”

“Actually, he did”

“Excuse me?”

“He did. He’s coming home this afternoon”

“But who the hell do you think you are to invite people over my place without telling me first?”

“I am one of the two friends who stayed by your side when the worse arrived, why can’t you trust me?”

“I trust you, but I don’t trust him!”

“Well, bad news, because he is still the only fucking good lawyer we can afford!”

“That’s other thing: with which money are we going to pay him?!?”

“With none, it’s a favour!”

“Not even you believe that shit! That man, once this hell is over, will ask us to cover his fees!”

“Aha, so you’re admitting he could get us out from this!”

“But at what cost!”

“At none! I told you!”

“You better go there and tell him he doesn’t need to come!”

“I won’t!”

“James!”

“Thomas!”

“Either you go, or I’ll do it!”

“Your pride is bigger than the Universe, man! Admit you need help!”
“Not his help! That man’s got in for me!”

“At least, try it out! You owe me that much!”

“That I owe you?!”

“Yes! Don’t you remember that day I gave you half of a mandarin at lunch break because you have brought no food and you were starving?!”

“What’s wrong with that mandarin you’re always bringing up whenever I don’t want to do something, but I don’t remember?”

“Well, it happened, and you ate it!”

“What you’re asking for me is worth more than a mandarin! Besides, how comes I ate it? If I hate them!”

“You do?”

“Yes, their smell reminds me of the schoolyard!”

“Well, then do it for the sake of our friendship!”

“In that case, you owe me more than I!”

“What are you saying?! Tell me one time I asked you for a favour!”

And that went on for a while because, it turned out, Thomas had also written a list of all the things he had done for him in all those past years.

“And, last but not least” read Thomas. “That time you were convinced you were having appendicitis and refused to believe the doctors when they told you it was just an indigestion and I had to spend all night in the hospital just in case”

“Like those quacks were going to actually tell me if something was wrong with me! I know my body!”

“You won’t know it that well if you forgot you already had appendicitis when you were ten”

Thomas kept the list on his last drawer once again. “In summary: I should be the one asking you for favours, not you. My alleged eaten mandarin is settled”

James hit the desk with his two hands and got up from the chair in one jump, red in the face. “But all the things I’ve done for you and you deliberately decided to not include in that fucking list are not! I am the first one to wake up and the last one to go to bed, I am the one who cooks, who cleans, who helps the girls with their homework and buys them the things they need to do their projects! I am the one who does the accounts and I can’t make it all add up! I tried but I just can’t make it all add up, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t!” he ended up raising his voice, grabbing the tray and throwing the things that were on it in the air, making the mug fall and crash against the floor, while he hit the desk with the tray, screaming. “I AM CHOCK-FULL, MY BRAIN HAS FUCKING CONKED OUT, IT FUCKING CONKED OOOUUUUUUUUUUT!”
Thomas nodded as he followed the tray movements with the glare and, eventually, leaned back on his chair when James threw it to the floor to emphasize his last sentence. He felt the silence that reigned in the office then. He looked to the door with the corner of his eye, seeing Burr and Hamilton in the first one’s office across from his. After a quizzical look, Hamilton simply closed the door slowly. Thomas sighed.

“Alright, alright, let him come…” he gave in.

James breathed out and his face had his natural colour back. “Thank you!” he said, taking a seat on the chair again. “Was it that hard to admit I am right? Jeez…”

Thomas looked daggers at him at the same moment their boss walked in front of their door, throwing them a rapid glare from the corner of his eye. Without stopping, he said:

“Clean your shit, sub-animals!”

Madison got up from his seat then. “Well, I’ll go help with the decorations” he informed, heading to the door.

“Help me clean this first”

“No, that’s your doing. You made me do that, be responsible of your actions” he said, walking out.

Thomas looked at opened door before passing a hand through his face. “What a mess…”

As that day everybody was busy decorating the building to celebrate the upcoming Christmas and Washington was starting to stop waiting for Lee to actually show up, he didn’t find faults in letting them go earlier than usual without asking further questions. That was why, once he had finished up cleaning the office, Thomas leaved the building with James after Lafayette told them Alexander had left a few minutes prior with Aaron to take him home because he was feeling bad.

By the time they were prepared to leave, they heard Peggy and Angelica starting an argument about how to put the little figures for the crèche, and they hurried up before the real fight began. By the time they left through the door, Maria was telling the two sisters off, telling them that was still her desk and she had the decisive voice. By the time the reached the car and Thomas drove out the parking lot, they could hear the screams of their workmates and saw Washington walking straight to the pub, not giving a look over his shoulder.

James had sent a message to Alexander to know which time he’d be home and offered to drive him. To his surprise, Hamilton accepted whatever time he said and the ride. When James left the house, Thomas was about to ask his daughters to help clean the house. James literally ran out the
house, not before warning him to not kick up a fuss. When he arrived at Hamilton place, he had to wait a few minutes, hesitating in sending a reminder message or not. Finally, the financial manager got out the house, and he could hear him from inside the car telling his children to wait and be nice until Peggy could come to babysit them.

The ride was silent.

And not the kind of comfortable silence he had heard about. James always doubted it existed at all.

He had thrown a few glares towards the co-pilot all the way, seeing Hamilton paying more attention to his mobile than to the actual world surrounding him. He had typed a few responses and only put the mobile inside his pocket after he had let out a sigh of relief.

“You could’ve come any other day” James said suddenly, after thinking about it since his workmate had entered the vehicle.

Hamilton shook his head. “The sooner the better”

“It’s just that if your wife wasn’t home today and you haven’t had enough time to find a babysitter for your children…”

“Eliza is in home” he corrected him. “It’s just that she’s a bit ill and I didn’t want to leave her alone with three children”

“Ah… Still, if you want to do this another day…”

“Peggy is already there, she sent me a message”

“Alright… How old are they?”

“Madison, you don’t need to chatter, especially of things you don’t care”

“We’re in a good mood, huh?” said the accountant with sarcasm.

“Yes, we are, so let’s keep it that way”

The worst part was that Hamilton was talking totally serious. So, he decided to simply let silence stretch between them until they reached Thomas’ house. James parked the car outside at the same he began to talk again.

“Listen, I know you and Thomas don’t like each other, but let’s try to be professional and civil”

“Tell that to him; I’m already making a great effort by coming” retorted Hamilton, getting out the car
and closing the door with a thump. “Just remember I told you I only want to know what’s going on, I’m not signing up for anything”

“I know, I know” James closed his door and locked the car, then proceeding to go to the door with Hamilton by his side. He began to look for the keys in his pockets. “I’d have told you the main problem, but you know how noisy they are all back in the office, and I also think it’s Thomas’ position to tell you what’s happening”

“How laudable” commented Hamilton dryly.

“I’m serious” he stopped his search to look at him in the eyes. “I told Thomas before leaving, and I’m telling you now, whatever problem you have with each other, let it go when you’re talking this afternoon. I’m not asking you to be friends, just to be mature”

“Whatever you say, Madison. Please, I’d like to start as soon as possible so I can leave before nightfall”

“Alright” James took out the key and unlocked the door. “Take the best for a bad situation, as my mother used to say. Maybe you can finally sort your differences out”

“Dreaming is free”

“I know Thomas can be difficult, but give him a chance” Hamilton rolled his eyes. “Deep down, he’s a very charming and understanding man”

James opened the door just as he finished his sentence, and both could clearly hear Thomas screaming from one of the rooms upstairs: “THE ONLY THING YOU HAVE TO DO IS SHUTTING THE HECK UP AND DO AS I SAY, GIRL!”

Hamilton looked at his colleague. “Yes, charming and understanding indeed”

James shut the door with a thump. “Gosh, and I told him to not make a fuss!” he complained under his breath.

Hamilton saw him running upstairs and entering through door that was facing the staircase. He spent a few moments to look at the living room furnished with a TV under the window that faced the front garden and the street, a coffee table and a wine-red couch in front of it and an armchair of same colour at their right. A few meters behind them there was a fine white dining table with six chairs, facing a French window that ended just when a bookshelf started, full of different books and little figures of animals or persons. Hamilton turned his head to the left, finding an open pal kitchen in greyscale. He walked pass the kitchen island with three stools lined up at each side of it and went directly to the counter. He opened a few cupboards, finding them almost empty. He took out a notebook and a pen from his briefcase and wrote something down. Then, he took a look at the fridge, on the left corner of the room, and decided to not look inside, thinking he would find the same result. He walked out the kitchen and headed to the stairs, feeling one of the steps loose. He wrote down another note before resuming his walking.

Once he was upstairs, he found a red dark carpet covering the floor of the hall. At his right there was a wooden door closed, a couple of steps from it there was another one – this one white as the rest that adorned the view of upstairs and from which the screams were still emerging. He saw the only opened door was the one that stood just when the handrail ended. In that exact moment, a
girl with curly and short hair of around ten years old stuck her head out, looking at the door he had in front of him. The little girl and he shared a glare for a few seconds before she waved her hand with a little smile, a gesture he imitated, trying to ignore the knot in his stomach.

The girl was about to talk to him but was interrupted when the door from across him was opened with vehemence. Hamilton was rapid enough to take a few steps to the side, giving free way to the teenager that emerged from the room. Dressed in a short strapless neckline black dress and with her wavy and light brown hair fluttering in the air at her backs from the speed she went downstairs with, hitting the wood beneath her with more force than necessary with her heels. When she was downstairs, Alexander saw Jefferson standing at the edge of the beginning of the staircase, Madison at his side, arguing with him about something he didn’t understand as they were talking over the other. Alexander felt his right sleeve being slightly pulled and looked down, facing the ten-year-old girl.

“Sir, you give me good vibes” she told him, straight to the point as if she knew him since forever.

“Thank you, I guess?” Alexander shrugged.

Before he could ask her her name, the girl pointed at the door, not ungluing her glare from him.

“You see that door?”

“Yes?”

“Run out of here now that you still have time”

“Excuse me?”

Now, she pointed at her sister and father, screaming at each other in the background. “See that? They are behaving because uncle Jemmy told them so. Please, get out of here before our true colours arises”

“Girl, where did you learn to talk like that?”

“Now I’m going to a public Elementary School, this is the nicest I can talk to people now”

“… Go back to draw”

She shrugged. “Don’t come to me later to tell me I didn’t warn you” she said, looking at her father now. Alexander dedicated her a curious look before turning his total attention to the fight.

“You are not going out today and that’s final, young lady!” screamed Thomas, one hand on the briefcase and the other gesticulating exaggeratedly. “Don’t you remember you’re grounded?”

“Unfairly!” retorted Martha, with a frown that matched her father’s, while she put on a coat.

“Unfairly? I think I was very fair. When I was your age, if I came home with a notice like the one you brought me, I’d never see the light again until I passed with all A’s! And if I dared to hide them from my mother, not even with that I’d have seen the light of summer!”

Martha rolled her eyes. “Dad, I’ll be grounded for two months in a row if you stop starting all your sentences by ‘when I was your age’ and let me go out today”
“No! And don’t talk to me like that!”

She hit the floor with one foot. “Why not?! I agreed to meet my friends at the boulevard in ten minutes! I can’t dump them!”

“Would you rather disappoint your father than your friends?”

“Yes, at least they are not criticising every move I make!”

“That’s because they don’t give a shit about you!”

“Just because your preppy friends left you in the lurch means that everybody is the same!”

Thomas’ face was red in a second. “Look, snot, if you weren’t going out before, you are absolutely not going out until I see your marks from second trimester!”

“Excuse me???”

“Excuse you, excuse you. Now, go to your room”

“No”

“Martha”

“No”

“Martha…”

“No”

“Go to your room”

“No”

“Go”

“No”

“Go”

“No”

“Come on”

“No”

“What are you? Four?”

“No”

James passed a hand through his flushed face. “Please, let’s sit down and talk this like rational beings”

“No” both Martha and Thomas said.

“God, give me patience…” muttered James, lowering his glare and closing his eyes.
“Martha, I am not going to repeat myself. Go to your room, study and stay there until it’s dinnertime”

“No”

“… … …” He looked at her up and down. “What do you think, gal? That you can overpower me?”

“Yes”

Alex and Polly put a hand over their lips, trying to contain their laughter. Even James had to pretend to cough in his handkerchief to conceal his giggle. Thomas’ eyes squinted, and he pinched the bridge of his nose. He took a deep breath.

“Please, Martha, go to your room. You are grounded, and you know it. Don’t do it worse”

“Nope”

Thomas’ calmness disappeared in a minute. “Why the hell not?”

‘Cause I already agreed to meet before you grounded me”

“Well, in that case, you should’ve used your phone, that seems like another limb from your body, to message your dear friends and tell them you couldn’t go because you’re a liar and a brat”

“I am not!”

“The heck you’re not. You won’t admit that you’re acting like a spoiled snot either, right?” He sighed. “Can’t you admit it when you do something wrong or have a bit of humility?”

“It’s one of the many loads of sharing your genes” Alexander had to literally bit his bottom lip to stop his laughing that time.

Thomas didn’t seem to share his happy mood. “Can you talk to me with some respect? The only thing I am asking for you, day after day, is you to finally respect me!”

“Respect has to be earned, Dad”

“Oh? And what happens, that I haven’t earned it?”

“No”

“No??”

“No. You can’t simply send your daughters to a boarding school when they were both about to turn six and then demand them respect”

“We are not discussing that again, young lady! You think you have me by the short hairs with that subject? I did it as well as I could”

“Yes, giving us to some strangers to raise us for a reasonable price” she mocked.

“You know? You criticise your aunt a lot, but you’re just like her. You’re as spiteful as her”

Martha gave him a nasty look. “And you’re just like gramma. As soon as you saw the opportunity to
send us away, your pulse didn’t falter”

James looked worriedly over Jefferson, who only inspired slowly and exhaled while passing a hand through his hair. “Martha, go to your room” he repeated, exhaustingly.

“Dad, I’m late”

“Don’t worry, it’s never too late to respect a parent. Now, go to your room”

“I won’t go to my room”

“Please”

“No”

“Look, take off your coat…”

“No” she interrupted.

 “… Take off your coat” Jefferson proceeded with a face of boredom. “Go to your room, open whatever text book you have there and pretend to read it. I am not asking you to study anymore, but at least pretend. Make me happy”

“No, I don’t want to”

“Martha, are you going to go to college with that attitude?” he asked, arms in akimbo.

“I don’t know if I want to go to college” she answered, shrugging.

“You don’t know…?” repeated Jefferson, blinking dumbfounded. “What do you want to do, then?”

“Don’t know. Traveling, knowing the world, other cultures… Finding myself…” she answered, switching her weight from one foot to the other while she played with the hem of the coat.

Her father smiled mockingly. “Of course, honey, where do you want to go first? To Paris with your D in French or London, better, so you can show off your average of C’s in English?” he asked, exaggerating a thrilled tone. “Or maybe the miss wants to go on a cruise to put into practice her F in Biology?”

Martha looked daggers at him. “Wherever you like, Dad, except from Germany, I am too fed up with hard headed people thanks to you” she answered, imitating his tone. Again, Alex had to bite his bottom lip to prevent a laugh to escape. The little girl did the same.

Thomas hit the handrail. “Look, gal, what do you think? That life is a non-ending party? Well, it’s not. If you don’t want to study, then you’ll have to work! Or one thing or the other, but I won’t let you spend the rest of your life mooching around! Be independent!”

“It’s not my fault I never had good examples of such a thing”

“Excuse me?”

“You’ve been living off your family’s money all your life and now you want to act all dignified”

“Mother of God with the girl…” muttered Alexander, in awe.

“I didn’t see you complain about my inherited and, of course, not self-earned money when I bought
you the 101 percent of things you now owned”

“I never asked for them. You gave them to me, so you could feel better about ignoring me and Polly”

“Please, Martha…” begged James.

“That is enough, Martha! I am not going to put up with you anymore! If you want to go, go!”

“Good”

“But don’t come too late because you are going to get up early tomorrow”

“Why?”

“Because you’re going to accompany me to the supermarket”

“The supermarket?”

“They need checkers over there”

“What??”

“If you don’t want to study, I won’t make you, because you’re impossible and I am not going to spend one more penny in unnecessary things. But you won’t be living here for free”

“Why? He does!” she said, pointing at Madison.

James shook his head. “Your daughter doesn’t respect me, and I don’t know why” he said, in a sad tone.

“He, at least, has a job and is independent. You are not”

“Buf, man…”

“I’ve been telling you what life is about for a long time, and you, nothing: ignoring me, ignoring me… Well, ignore me all you want, but behind a counter and with a badge with your name while you wait for an old lady to pay by cents, because she had a lot of loose change”

“Sweet Lord…” muttered James.

“I don’t fucking want to!” said Martha, raising her voice. “Go you and work there!”

“I don’t have to, I already have my job! And do not swear or raise your voice!”

“Please, I told you I didn’t want any fights while we were having a guest!” pleaded James, pointing at Hamilton with the hand.

“Look, Dad, if you’re bitter because you’re broke, and everybody left you except this homeless and now you have to swallow your big pride and ask the chibi version of Jack Sparrow for help after all the shit you’ve done to him, it’s nobody’s fault but yours, alright?”

“I am very happy! It’s you the one who is always bugging me around!”

“No, it’s you the one who doesn’t leave me alone! Forget about me already!”

“That’s the way I like it: you listening to me…” complained James.
“Forget about you?” Thomas clenches his teeth for pure rage. “Look, brat, give me your keys” he demanded, going downstairs. He tripped over the broken step and almost fell on his nose, but managed to grab the handrail in time and got closer to his daughter as if nothing happened, though Polly was giggling softly, and, eventually, Hamilton was infected by her. “Give me your keys, you’re going nowhere!” he repeated, trying to grab his daughter’s clutch.

“No!” she said, getting it away from her father’s reach.

They struggled like that for a moment before, all of a sudden, Martha decided to start running to the other side of the room, being followed immediately by Thomas. James buried his face in his hands, totally embarrassed, while Polly laughed uncontrollably. Hamilton looked at her with a smile and had to giggle a few times from the scene and the little one’s enjoyment. Eventually, Martha’s back was facing bookshelf while her father was at the other side of the table.

“Give me the keys” Thomas asked for again.

“No”

They stayed like that for a couple of seconds, looking straight into each other’s eyes. Finally, Martha switched to the right to rapidly go running to the left, heading to the door. Her father caught her by the coat’s belt, waving behind her. Martha felt the pull and raised both arms upon her head. She spun until the belt fell off from her coat and she was free to run to the door.

“Thank the ballet classes you forced me to go to for this, Dad!” she told him, before slamming the door shut, with a smile of superiority.

Thomas looked at the belt in his hand and then threw it on the couch, furious. He went to the door, took out his own key and locked the door. He turned around and looked fiercely at James.

“Don’t you dare to open the door to her once she’s back” he warned him.

“For the love of God, Thomas!” complained James, kicking the floor. “You can’t lock your daughter out!”

“Want to see how I can?” Thomas kept the key in the keyhole and turned around. “She won’t get in until she apologizes sincerely”

“Bf, she won’t enter this house ever again” commented Polly.

“She will tattle to Lucy” James said, frowning.

“Let her, let her, then. Let. Her. She thinks her aunt is an angel and I’m a demon. So, let her see reality with her own eyes”
“Jeez…”

“This is your fault, so don’t you try to tell me off”

“My fault?” repeated James, indignant.

Polly pulled Hamilton’s sleeve once again, and the man bended down to hear her clearly. “Here comes the second part” she informed, and he cocked an eyebrow.

“How in hell is this my fault? I was trying to calm you down and you ignored me!”

“None of this would’ve happened if you hadn’t discredited me”

“If she agreed to meet, she agreed!”

“But in this house, what I say goes! You just can’t come here and lift the punishment”

“She is sixteen! What am I going to do? Lock her up in the house 24/7?”

“If she doesn’t earn the right to go out, yes”

“She wasn’t the one who decided to hide that notice from you, it was me! I was waiting for your food to settle!”

“This is not for the notice, James, it’s for all the things she said!”

“You said awful things as well!”

“I can say them!”

“Why you can, and she can’t?!”

“Because I am her father!”

“That doesn’t give you the right to treat her like a six-year-old for the rest of her life!”

“I am sick of you always defending her blindly! It’s because of your attitude that she doesn’t respect me or anything I say, you’re always painting me as the villain in this house!”

“If I don’t defend her, who will? You are always pressuring her! Everything is always her fault! It’s always Patsy, it’s never Polly!” He looked at the little one. “Sorry, Polly”

“Don’t worry” said the girl, shrugging.

“I am not saying everything is her fault, I’m just asking for her to be responsible with her actions and to look for her future!”

“Maybe she would want to do more things if her father supported her more!”

“But who the heck do you think you are to criticise my parenting skills? You have no children!”

“And yet, I am still more empathic than you!” screamed James, now red in the face. “I am sick of you screaming at the slightest thing instead of talking to her!”

“She doesn’t want to talk to me, didn’t you see it?”

“Because you went ballistic in less than a second, I wouldn’t talk to you either!”
“You don’t even talk to me when I’m calmed”

“You haven’t been calmed in years, man! You’re like a powder keg about to explode, everything angers you!”

“And what reasons do I have to be happy? Having to meet with her tutor to talk about that missing days I wasn’t aware of until the day before yesterday, her disobeying me, you spoiling her, Lucy and her damn habit of not telling when she would drop by, the bills I can’t pay or the house falling to pieces? Choose one and run a party to celebrate the great life we have!”

“Didn’t you say you were very happy a few minutes ago?” asked Polly, confused.

Alexander nodded. “That. That is me in every meeting I have with him”

Thomas frowned at him. “You shut up, you haven’t done anything but pester since you arrive”

“In which part of me watching the show you just made with your daughter did I pester, exactly?” he asked, miffed.

“That is nothing in comparison of what I’ve seen in this house” commented Madison, shaking his head.

“I told you to stop with the victimhood” said Thomas, with tedium.

“He is stuck with the thought that I like to victimize myself, and he can’t be taken out from there”

“I am not obsessed, I am fed up with your drama” He looked at Alexander. “You come here, and see him crying and me screaming and so you will think that I am torturing him psychologically, but it’s not true”

“No, no, I don’t think anything…” said Alex, shrugging slightly.

“When in fact” kept saying Thomas, pointing at Madison. "it’s him the one who is always driving me crazy”

“Me driving you crazy? Shame on you!” he turned to Alexander.

“Wait, now he’s going to talk his ear right off…” said Thomas.

“He is the one who is going to drive me nuts one day if he hasn’t already. Do you know how difficult it is to live day after day with a man by your side who seems to be painted? I spend my whole day coaxing him, because he doesn’t talk to me, he is an emotional constipated” James complained.

“But don’t stop there, tell him why I don’t talk. Every fucking sentence is going to be used against me. He doesn’t say it in the moment, but records it inside his brain to throw it in your face when best suits him”

“I don’t throw things”

“The fuck you don’t. This morning, without going further, you told me to work with the gremlin because you gave me a mandarin a long time ago”

“You give mandarins to people, so you can ask them for favours later or what?” asked Hamilton, looking at the accountant up and down.
“You like to twist my words so much. Here, the one who can’t talk is me”

“Don’t say? If you spend twenty hours out of the twenty-four the day has talking. How would you be if you really could talk?”

“I talk because is the only way to not have a mental breakdown!”

“I am sick of you and your bad habit of thinking you are some kind of victim of society. Nobody has nothing against you. Etch it in your memory already”

“I’ll stop acting as a victim the day you are able to admit you’re wrong!”

“I’d love to be wrong when it comes to this family, James, I really would, but past experiences are on my side! What do you bet that this girl is going to come in the wee hours?”

“And why do you care, if tomorrow is Saturday?”

“It’s not about the day, it’s about that she was grounded for a series of reasons and you decided to let her go out. You don’t have any say in those things”

James turned to Hamilton again. “Always diminishing me. Honestly, for me, keeping living in this house is humiliating”

“Leave, then” said the CFO, shrugging dismissively.

“No, no, it’s alright. I forgive him because I have a huge heart”

“He has heart but no house, that’s the real reason” said Thomas.

“See? That’s my daily bread. Attacks, attacks, attacks… One way or the other, he finds a way to attack me, and I spend the whole day dodging the curve balls. My life has become a dodgeball field because of him” he sniffed in a sigh.

“Here we go with the crying again…” muttered Thomas, exhausted.

“I just can’t anymore, I swear I can’t. I give, I give, I give, and I only receive objections. I don’t know what I’m doing here…”

“I don’t know either”

“… I don’t know where this relationship is going…”

“To suicide”

James looked at him for a moment and then turned his attention back to Hamilton. “It’s just that you are told that kind of things at first thing in the morning and how are you supposed to react? I’m feeling very alone, and there’s no worse solitude than the one you live while in a couple”

“What couple? There’s no romance, sex or anything. You’re only giving me the bad part of a relationship, at most…”

He looked at Thomas enraged. “Bert and Ernie were a couple. And Thelma and Louise, and Lewis and Clark, and the third and fourth president of our country. I learned back in school that they were very close. And none of them intimated…” He thought for a moment and then turned back to Hamilton. “Or maybe they did. Each house is a world in itself…”
“This house feels more like an underworld…” Thomas muttered once again, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Why are you telling that to the gremlin, you damned fishwife? Always blabbering”

“Another insult, that’s the only thing I am given in this house” James spun his finger to imitate an endless cycle. Thomas sighed and turned around, going directly to the door, where he put on his coat. “Where do you think you’re going?” asked James, arms in akimbo.

“If I’m lucky, away from you”

He sighed and changed his tired expression for one of pure rage. “Until I am bedridden crying my eyes out for the rest of the afternoon, sinking into the most absolute depression, this man won’t stop”

Thomas gave a tired sigh, burying his face in his hands. “Gosh, what a horrible endless nightmare…”

James pointed at him, red in the face, before heading to the end of the hallway. “He will not stop! And then, he’d come to me to tell me ‘Jemmy, I’m sorry’, but that will be too late because Jemmy has already thrown himself out of the FUCKING WINDOW!” he screamed before entering the last door at Alexander’s left.

“Then, make sure you throw yourself on the side of the sidewalk, hope you’re not going to fall on the bushes and, instead of dead, you end up dumb and I’ll have to take care of you for the rest of my fucking life!” shouted Thomas, unlocking the door and opening it.

James got out of his room. “As if you were going to do something like that, you fucking SELFISH!” screamed James before re-entering the room and closing his door at his backs with a thump.

“If he doesn’t have the final say, he explodes!” complained Thomas getting out of the house and slamming the front door with so much force as his friend.

Hamilton looked at both directions with tedium. He shrugged. “How am I not surprised that they ignored me and left me here?” He sighed. “I tried, Eliza” he said to himself, turning to the stairs. A little pull from his right sleeve called his attention for the third time that day.

“You’re leaving?” asked the little girl, tilting her head.

“There’s not much I can do now with your father and squatter gone” he shrugged.

“Do you want to see my drawings before leaving?” she asked, innocently and pointing at her room.

*Damned children with their big innocent eyes*, he cursed in his mind. He looked at his watch. It was only six fifteen pm. “Sure, sweetie” he said, smiling sheepishly.

“Yay!” celebrated the child, guiding him to her door. “What’s your name?”

“Alexander Hamilton” he answered.

“Oh, you’re the Mr. Hamilton Daddy and uncle Jemmy talk about?” she asked.

“If they really said ‘Mr’ instead of a nickname, I doubt it” he chuckled.

Polly giggled. “Patsy reads some of your work”

“Your sister?”

The girl nodded. “She likes you”
“Must be the only Jefferson to feel that way towards me” he joked again.

“I like you too, Mr. Hamilton” commented the girl, frowning.

“The two only Jefferson, then” he rectified, gaining a smile from the child. “Anyway, you can call me Alex” he informed.

“Nice. My name’s Mary, but everybody calls me Polly” she introduced herself once she sat on her red swivel chair. She took out an orange notebook and gave it to him. “These are the last ones”

Alexander nodded. “Do you like to draw?” he asked, turning the pages when he had seen every corner of the draws he had in front of his eyes.

Polly nodded. “Dad says I inherited it from Mom” she commented.

“She liked to draw as well?”

“She used to draw with me” explained the girl.

“They are quite good for someone so little. How old are you?” he asked, passing the notebook back to her.

“I turned ten in August” she answered, taking one green pencil from the desk and resuming the drawing she had left unfinished.

Alexander nodded once again and took his own little notebook out from one of his pockets and wrote something down. “And your sister was sixteen?” he asked, glaring up a bit to see the little one nodding. He wrote again on the white paper.

“Do you draw?”

“I’m more of a writer”

“And what do you write?”

“Everything, anything…” he answered, shrugging.

“Like Daddy”

“I guess” he said, for the sake of politeness.

“And Patsy. She loves writing and reading”

“I assume by that that you don’t?”

Polly shrugged. “Words are not my thing” she confessed. “Though Patsy is always complaining about how much I talk”

Alexander laughed. “I can relate to that”

“But I got a bit better at writing this year. My English teacher, Loki, is the best I had so far”

“That’s good”

“He’s nice, but when the end of the week gets closer he tends to go a bit crazy. I can’t blame him if the stories I hear from his class are true. Patsy is friends with the sister of one of Loki’s class’ student
and she tells Patsy what her brother tells her. And Violet never lies”

“That’s a teacher is hard”

“That’s why I never wanted to be one, unlike all my old friends”

“And what do you want to be once you’re older?”

She shrugged once again. “Don’t know, something that allows me to help people I guess”

“That’s very honourable, Polly”

“You always wanted to be a lawyer?”

“To be honest, when I was asked what I wanted to be, I answered the same thing as you. It wasn’t until I was a bit older that I picked this career”

“Is it funny to be a lawyer?”

“That depends on your definition of funny” he laughed.

“Aunt Lucy always says is one of the best careers to study because you earn a lot of money”

“That’s quite true… But whatever career you want to study, remember to study it because you feel it”

“That’s what Daddy says”

Alexander squinted his eyes. “And what happens between your aunt and your father?”

“Ah, they don’t get along, but I don’t know why. Daddy never tells me, and I don’t like talking to Lucy”

“And your sister?”

“Sometimes, when she’s in a good mood she’s nice to talk to”

Alexander laughed a bit. “No, I meant that if she liked your aunt”

“Oh, no, they don’t get along either. We lived with her for a few months, and things escalated quickly over nothing”

“Like what?”

Polly shrugged, she seemed to do that a lot. “The way Patsy dresses or talks… Stupid things in my opinion. It’s just that aunt Lucy and Patsy have different opinions about everything”

“Just like with your father?”

“Yes, but Dad is different. As long as we follow certain rules, he lets us do whatever we want”

“What rules?” asked Alexander, while writing more notes.

“Do our homework, keep the house clean, come back home before nine… The typical, you know?”

“It doesn’t sound unreasonable” Alex agreed.
“No. Unreasonable is not wearing shorts in June because it provokes the boys at high school”

“I can agree on that… So, what’s the problem, then?”

“It’s not because Patsy thinks the rules are stupid, it’s just that she’s been quite down and angry since Mom and Elizabeth” Polly explained in a low voice that didn’t match her seemingly joyful personality, and setting her forehead closer to the desk as she bit her bottom lip.

“Who is Elizabeth, sweetie?” he asked gently, noticing the change of mood.

“Our baby sister. She… Well, she fell ill…”

“I’m sorry” Alexander interrupted rapidly.

To his surprise, the girl looked him in the eyes, very calm. “Don’t be. Mommy’s with her and they are still with us as long as we don’t forget them”

Alex gave her a sheepishly and sympathetic smile. “You’re right” he nodded.

“More like aunt Sally, she was the one who told me that” And before Alexander could ask for the new named family member, Polly inclined in her chair. “Do you have any siblings?”

“Two brothers” he answered quickly, not giving them too much thought. “But we couldn’t know each other very much. It was a complicated family” he shrugged.

It was Polly’s time to nod. “Yeah. And do you have children?”

At that, Alexander genuinely smiled. “Three. Two boys and one girl”

“If you stick around, will you let me meet them?”

“Don’t see why not, they’re a bit younger than you but very clever”

“Cool. You know, of all lawyers Daddy has hired, you’re my favourite”

Alexander laughed. “Well, he hasn’t hired me, I’m just seeing what’s happening”

“Oh… Well, I hope you can stay. You’re the first one to not talk to me like if I were stupid. I’m not stupid”

“No, definitely you’re not. You’re very mature and intelligent, especially for your age”

Polly smiled, clearly loving being flattered. “Thank you! People think that just because you’re a child, you’re an idiot”

“I know what that feels” he commented, rolling his eyes. “For me, kids are intelligent in their own way”

Polly smiled wider. “I knew you gave me the good vibes for something!”

Alex laughed once again. “Good to know”

“If you hadn’t, then I would’ve not trusted you”

“Thank you, then”

“Don’t get offended, but most of the lawyers give me the creeps, they give me vibes of bad people”
“More than getting offended, I’d vouch for that: I worked with most of them”

And they both laughed until Polly’s stomach growl, making the girl blush.

“Sorry” she said, giggling nervous.

Alex looked at his watch. “You know, I had to go grocery shopping. Do you want to come with me and pick anything you’d like?” he suggested, keeping his notebook inside his briefcase along with his pen.

Polly tilted her head, thoughtful. “Anything?”

“Anything”

She shrugged. “Sure” she got up from her chair.

“Grab a jacket, it’s getting cold” he told her, and talked again when the girl finally decided to pick one black jacket to match with her pants. “Zip your jacket, it’s cold” Alexander insisted.

Polly rolled her eyes but did as she was told. “I don’t fall sick easily” she muttered.

“Better safe than sorry. Come on”

“Are you going to kidnap me?”

Alexander looked at her with eyes half-closed. “Girl, I’ve told you I already have three little monsters back at home, I don’t want one more”

After letting a note on the counter for Madison or Jefferson to read, they headed straight to the nearest supermarket, where Alexander let Polly choose everything she wanted, that being things of her personal liking or necessary for the rest of her family. She talked meanwhile, and kept talking in the walk back home, not stopping even when they entered the house and found the note at the same spot, untouched and so, unread. Alexander rolled his eyes and Polly then proceeded to talk about how this happened each time her father and James fought about something, a habit that Patsy seemed to do as well when she couldn’t get her way out of the house. The little one reassured him James would be out when it was dinnertime and Thomas would follow example by coming through the door.

Alexander nodded, to let her see he was listening and looked at his watch, seeing it was almost eight pm. If what the girl told him was true, which he didn’t doubt, he would be heading home in a few more minutes. His kids loved their aunts and that love was reciprocal by both Peggy and Angelica, so he knew Peggy wouldn’t mind staying a bit longer if his workmates had finally cooled down and were going to tell him more about the story Polly had shared with him; but he
would mind. He had already fulfilled the promise he made to Eliza about trying, it wasn’t his fault that both men decided to fight and disappeared from sight instead of telling him why they needed his help. In fact, he had done more than just fulfilled his promise, he had bought whatever they may need for the following month without the intention of a repayment of any sort. He even bought a turkey while Polly remembered funny memories of her family dinners at Christmas. If that wasn’t enough, he’d be damned. Though he could admit Eliza was right about him trying taking cases again to see how things would turn out, he definitely didn’t want to start with the same two persons who almost made his position lowered – or worse, got him fired. They would explode within the first week of working together. Well, ‘working’ used very vaguely. He wasn’t going to be paid. In any other situation, he wouldn’t have thought of that, but for standing what he saw today – or more, judging by what Madison told him – he would need some money for compensation.

“Will you have dinner with us, Alex?” asked Polly suddenly, when he was finally done with refilling the fridge.

There it was. It was enough for him to relax and drift his mind to home for the final blow to arrive. His wall had been successful all day, making him not giving in when Polly showed him her drawings or talked about happy memories, or trusted him, or even told him she hoped for him to be his father’s new lawyer, but those times he had been with his guard up, focusing on the details, writing them down just in case. Not taking care of the problem himself meant that he could forget about it and not try to look for a well-trusted colleague. Whoever but him. But now, when the question was so direct, and the innocent tone was so clear, and the joy was so hard to ignore with those big eyes the girl in front of him possessed, Alexander was for once speechless. How to decline politely to a ten-year-old?

Whatever the answer was, he wasn’t going to find out today. For some kind of miracle, the door was opened slowly, changing Polly’s attention to her sister, who got in the house and closed the door very peacefully as if the fight she was involved in before had never happened. She stopped in her tracks when she saw her little sister with him, and cocked an eyebrow when her glare fell on the now full cupboards.

“Luck is on your side, sis” Polly told her. “Dad was going to lock you out”

“He doesn’t dare”

“He even locked the door, but left the house after he and uncle Jemmy fought”

“So, the normal in this house” she commented, shrugging. She looked at Alexander. “Are you still here?” she asked, curious.

“Alex is coming for dinner”

Alexander rapidly shook his head. “No, no, I can’t…”

“Why not?” asked Polly, frowning.

“Because he’s new and he needs to rest for our insanity” answered Patsy, hanging the coat on the
clothes rack by the door.

“Ah, true” nodded Polly.

“It’s not for that…” said Alexander, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t need to lie, we’re not offended” Patsy sat on the stool across him and her sister.

“If you think this house is crazy, never go to the office” Alexander half-joked, half-advised.

“Alright” Patsy laughed. Then, she sighed. “Really, if I were you, I’d leave… I just saw Lucy’s car on the road, driving to our house”

“Ah, that’s why you’re here before three am?” asked Polly, teasingly.

“That was one time, and it wasn’t my fault” retorted Patsy, annoyed. “It’s just that my friend’s car ran out of gas…” she explained looking at Alexander.

He held his hands up. “Not judging”

“I liked you for some reason” she said, with a tiny smile.

“Told you” said Polly, looking in his direction.

“Really, Mr. Hamilton, what are you doing here? In general, I mean”

He shrugged. “I just… made a promise to someone”

“That someone was aware of what kind of family they were sending you to?”

“She knows your father and James, if that’s what you mean”

“Mhm. Well, if you’re as intelligent as I think you are, you will leave now. Really, you don’t want to meet my aunt”

“What’s with the famous Lucy?” he asked while turning to the fridge and taking out two cans of beer that he put on the counter. “Your sister told me you don’t get along with her, why standing her?”

“Because we live in her house”

Alexander was taken aback. “Ah, is this her house?” he asked, eyeing his surroundings.

“One of them”

“She lets us stay for a reasonable rent” added the little, while Alexander opened one can of beer and tossed it to Patsy.

Patsy huffed. “Yeah, ‘reasonable’ in her world of witches. She is always increasing the rent for the stupidest things” The girl eyed Alexander suspiciously. “Wasn’t the ‘first beer’ thing a child-parent thing?” she asked.

“The real question would be: is this your actual first beer?” he asked her, opening the second one and taking one sip.

Polly giggled. “He saw through you”

Patsy rolled her eyes but accepted the can. “Let me guess, you’ve got children?” she asked, and
smiled when Polly nodded.

Alexander laughed. “That and something better: I’m still a rebel teenager at heart” That made both laugh. “So, she increases the rent?” he asked, gaining a nod from the two girls. “For stupid reasons you say?”

“How would you call increase the rent because the immersion heater broke, and she added what it cost her to the rent of that month and never subtracted it? Because I wouldn’t define it as fair…”

“And it’s broken again” commented Polly. “Daddy called to fix it the other day, but couldn’t afford a good one and it broke the following day”

“I’m going to get a cold if I keep showering in cold water in the mornings…” complained Patsy, shaking her head.

“You father paid it?” asked Alexander, squinting his eyes.

“He pays it all, what other thing he’d do?” asked Patsy.

“Call your landlady, aka, your aunt, and ask her to fix it. Along with that step” he added, pointing at the stairs. “I saw your father almost fell before”

Patsy laughed. “We’re always stumbling because of it”

“The other day I fell” said Polly.

“We still don’t understand how she didn’t break her wrist”

“Oh, and we also have to call for the heating, aunt Lucy didn’t want to know anything about it”

“If she’s going to add it to the rent, she better doesn’t remember” Patsy gave a tired sigh. “Gosh, I hope she is not coming for dinner”

“Me neither”

“Your sister told me the relationship is not good enough” commented Alexander, after writing some more notes in the notebook he had taken out while the girls were talking.

“Try ‘horrible bad’” said Patsy with a sarcastic laugh. “I can’t wait to finally be able to leave this house, so I don’t have to stand her unexpected visits”

“Ah, she comes uninvited as well?” asked Alexander, cocking an eyebrow.

“It’s her house” said Polly.

“Yes, but Dad is the one who is keeping it clean and fixed” blurted out Patsy, angry. “And with his money, while she and her husband are filthy rich”

“They are?”

“Yes, yes, they bought this shitty house when Dad lost the one he had and rented is to us”

“Rich indeed”

“She could have helped Dad pay the house” commented Patsy, more to Polly than to him. “She could have, but refused to. I’m sure she had it all planned in her head. She didn’t even let us keep the
“piano” she complained, bitterly.

“What piano?” asked Alexander, gently.

“Mum’s” answered Polly.

Patsy sighed, burying her face in her hands. “I understand that she’s doing us a favour, but does she need to act that full of herself all the time? I think when you do a favour, you do it because you want to help not to receive something in return. Jeez, she’s still rubbing in Dad’s face what happened with Elizabeth” she said, her voice breaking a bit at the end. “And about the boarding school and all that shit, when she’d have done the same to us if Dad hadn’t taken us with him right after”

Before Alexander could ask anything, Polly talked. “You talk about the boarding school all day!”

Patsy looked dagger at her sister, finally glaring up from the can, and Alexander saw her eyes were red and shining with contained tears. “That’s because he puts me on my nerves and because it hurts, but she has no right. She wasn’t there when we needed her the most, she only came because Dad called her. Damnit, even Sally keeps the touch with us from time to time; and she came to visit and took care of us while Mom was ill, even though she didn’t have to after all grandpa put her through” she sniffed a bit and bit her bottom lip when she realised she was raising her voice.

“I know…” said Polly, lowering the glare.

“It’s not fair” said Patsy. “Dad wasn’t there for us, but at least he’s trying now. She only wants our custody because she has in for Dad, she doesn’t give a shit for us” she added, taking a sigh.

“I know” the youngest repeated.

“So” spoke Alexander, after having given the girl some time to calm herself down. “I assume it is needless to ask that if you had to choose over living with your father or with your aunt…”

“Dad” they both said automatically.

Not a second later, the door was heard being closed and they looked in its direction, seeing Thomas taking off his coat and hanging it up beside Patsy’s one. Alexander took the can of beer away from Patsy and he passed her a mint candy, which she accepted mouthing ‘thank you’ before eating it. Jefferson turned around, looking at Hamilton with a quizzical look.

“What are you doing? Badmouthing me at my backs?” he asked.

“No, we were talking about Lucy, whose car I saw on the road before running back” informed Patsy after swallowing the candy, a mocking smile on her lips.

“And here comes the bitchy façade again” complained Polly, under her breath.

Thomas groaned. “Perfect timing, as always” he muttered.

In that moment, James appeared in the staircase. “You are the one whit excellent timing” he commented, bitterly. “Always coming back for dinner”

“Don’t start, James, Lucy is coming, and I don’t want her to see us fighting so her ego can grow a bit more”
“Like that is possible” commented Patsy under her breath.

“Is she?” asked James, with a frown. “But is she going to dine with us?”

“I don’t know when she would come, I’m going to know what she’d do”

“I don’t have anything good to cook” explained James, annoyed. “I was going to do sandwiches”

“Fancy” commented Patsy sarcastically.

Thomas frowned at her. “Martha, please, shut up now, you’ve done enough for one day”

“Don’t take it out on me…”

“And please, go change”

“Why?” she challenged.

“You know pretty damned well why, now go”

Martha rolled her eyes and looked at Hamilton. “See what I’ve told you?” she said, before heading upstairs.

Thomas looked at him angrily. “And what did she tell you?”

Hamilton shrugged and kept the notebook in his pocket once again. “Both told me the necessary” he answered.

“Does that mean you’re going to…?”

“No” he interrupted James. “But I can always ask for a colleague”

“God only knows what kind of attorney you’re going to saddle us with” commented Thomas.

Alexander looked at him up and down. “At that is why I didn’t want to rectify: I did the right choice” he said, looking at James with a tiny smile. “Look, Madison, Jefferson, you have the cupboards full of food as well as the fridge” he informed, heading to the door.

“Excuse me?” asked James, sharing a confused look with Thomas.

“Alec and I went shopping” answered Polly.

“I even bought you a turkey for Christmas” added Alexander. He fixated his glare to the smaller man out of the two. “So, whatever mandarin you claimed I’ve eaten, it’s settled”

“I’d have to start bringing fruit to the office again…” James muttered, and Thomas rolled his eyes.

“Good luck in your search for a good, cheap or free lawyer. Which is the same as non-existent lawyer” he said with a mocking smile. He stopped before opening the door. “Oh, I almost forgot my briefcase in Polly’s room” he said, heading upstairs.

Thomas looked dagger as he passed him by. “Let’s see if you trip over and fall, gremlin”

“For what I’ve heard, you are no longer that lucky” Alexander mocked one more time.

James followed him. “But, please, let’s talk this out!”
Whatever response he was given, Thomas didn’t hear it, as the doorbell rang, making his blood run cold. He looked at his daughter.

“Polly, please, go upstairs with your sister” he told her, receiving a nod.

He waited until her daughter was out of view, and followed James and Hamilton discussing all the way upstairs until he decided he couldn’t wait too much to open the door. He inhaled, feeling the beating of the beginning of a migraine in his forehead. The doorbell rang once again, and he swung open the door, not thinking too much. He could only pray she didn’t notice how the heat wasn’t on or asked about the immersion heater. Because her sister was like that: always finding out everything.

“Good Lord, what was taking so long?”

“Goodnight to you too, Lucy” We’re starting nice, as usual, he thought while closing the door.

His sister was nine years younger than him, but, somehow, she managed to look older. Thomas always suspected it was due to her lack of smiling and constant habit of frowning. The only thing they ever had in common was the curly and dark hair, which she always had longer, shoulder length, and tied in a high ponytail. Smaller than him even when she wore heels, like tonight, and as slim as their mother had once been, but she managed to seem bigger to everybody for her harsh and cold hazel eyes. She passed him by, barely reaching his chin.

“And those cans?” she asked with her eyes fixated on the kitchen island, where the two beer cans still stood.

Thomas rolled his eyes, wanting to kill his daughter for always finding a way to mess things and his sister for noticing the littlest details when it came to bother him. “To celebrate your visit” he answered sarcastically.

“I have better ways to celebrate it, like getting paid”

“I’ve got your check” he said, rolling his eyes and rummaging the pockets of his coat.

“And what happened with that loose step?” she asked, pointing at the stairs.

“We’re going to fix it” he promised, handing her the check.

“That’s what you told me last month”

“We’ve been busy. Working. Ever heard of that?” he asked, annoyed, taking the two cans and putting them back on the fridge.

Lucy rolled her eyes. “How could I not, if you never stop saying it?” she said with pretended kindness.
Thomas didn’t hesitate in imitate her tone. “Well, let’s see if you take the hint”

“There’s 90 dollars missing in here” she said, frowning, as she looked at the check before showing it to him.

He sighed deeply. “Lucy, please, I had to fix the immersion heater”

“I already fixed it last summer”

“You and I know it is a miracle that man knew what an immersion heater is” he retorted. “I had to call him the other day”

“Well, he wasn’t that bad if you called him again”

“You know very well why I didn’t call anyone better” he rubbed his temples and took another deep breath. “Please, you’ve been charging me those 90 dollars since August and I always gave them to you without question it. Waive them this month, as I already had to give them to your friend”

“Look, I don’t care about your expenses. There is a figure you have to give me every month”

Thomas frowned at that. “Yes, a figure you’ve been increasing non-stop”

“I’m not obligating you to stay. If you don’t like it, leave”

None of them noticed James and Hamilton were going downstairs then, the first one trying to convince the CFO about coming another day and promising him a proper talk. Hamilton refusing at each attempt, not even looking him in the eyes. They had to stop in their tracks abruptly when Thomas hit the kitchen island with his two hands, raising his voice and ending their conversation.

“That’d be your dream come true, wouldn’t it?”

“Thomas…” said James, hesitating about getting any closer.

Lucy, who hadn’t been startled by her brother’s sudden act of rage, did jump a little on her seat when she heard his voice. She turned around and was even more surprised when her eyes fell on Alexander. “What is this? Another Pokémon? Are you going to catch them all?” she asked, smiling slightly.

Hamilton simply rolled his eyes. He had almost reached the door. It wasn’t worth it. “I was already leaving” he said, addressing Thomas more than the woman. “Goodnight”

“Hamilton…” tried to say James.

“You have no money to pay me, but you do have it to hire a male maid” she commented, with a mocking snort while she watched Hamilton up and down. “I’ll talk to my lawyer”

“Tell her on my part that she can rot in hell” muttered Thomas, unable to stop himself.

Before Lucy could respond, Alex had turned on his heels and was dedicating her a frown. “Also, that I am not a housekeeper” he said, emphasizing the last word slowly, as if he was talking to a little kid. “I am a lawyer”
Lucy titled her head. “Oh, I’m sorry. It’s just that I heard your accent and thought you weren’t from here!” she clarified.

Alexander squeezed the knob. “That’s because I am not native from here” he answered, biting his tongue to not start a rambling how those comments on a country that was formed by immigrants were everything but coherent. It wasn’t worth it. You’re almost out of the house. Leave now and don’t look back.

Lucy rolled her eyes, landing them on Thomas. “Really, Thomas? Just when I think you can’t get any lower I see you hiring an immigrant to read your papers for you… Seriously, since your wife and daughter died on you, you haven’t stopped taking stabs in the dark” she commented.

Alexander tried hard to not turn his head. Open the door and leave, it’s not your problem, he told himself. Meanwhile, Thomas had flinched at that, and James had given her a nasty look. “Lucy, that’s not…” tried to say the taller man.

She interrupted him, not caring. “I know Jay was an incompetent, but he at least didn’t get his diploma thanks to a scholarship”

Alex squeezed the knob harder, especially because, damn, I did get to college thanks to a scholarship. “Excuse me, miss, but I got both my scholarship and diploma because I’ve worked hard” he explained, trying to control his tone of voice. “Harder than everybody else, to be exact” he added, bitterly. Now, go. Eliza must be waiting for you, your children must be missing you, Peggy must have fallen asleep on the couch while watching Tangled for the zillionth time. Go home, Alexander. “Now, if you excuse me…” he said, finally turning around.

He wasn’t fast enough, because he could hear Lucy’s giggle at his back. “Of course you have, it’s what happens when you don’t belong someplace”

Thomas and James gasped and shared a worried look, feeling their blood running cold when they saw Alexander stopped opening the door, leaving it barely ajar. Even from that distance, they could see his shoulders more rigid and going up as he inhaled deeply.

“Gosh, here comes the hullabaloo” said James under his breath, shirking over himself to try and go unnoticed.

Both were waiting for the screams and the rant. They had experienced that already the first week of work with the immigrant, and Thomas could only pray to any gods that may exist for Lucy to be too perplexed or even scared to take out on him her ire for whatever Alexander had prepared for her. Which, surely, wasn’t going to be nice. Instead of what they were imagining that was about to happen, they were surprised by how gentle Alexander closed the door and turned on his heels, dedicating Lucy a sheepishly smile.

“Excuse me, miss, you were the owner of this house, weren’t you?” he asked politely.

“I am, yes” she nodded.
“In that case, I assume you are aware of the fact that the immersion heater is broken. I tried to wash
my hands earlier with hot water, but it was no use”

“He didn’t go to the bathroom” commented James under his breath, and Thomas frowned at the man.
Of course, Hamilton was insulted by his sister and he was going to pay for it. He wasn’t even
surprised.

“And, I also noticed that that step is loose, and that the heater is broken. I asked Po… Your niece
Mary to turn it on for me, and she told me so” kept saying Alexander.

Lucy turned to Thomas with a hard glare. “The heater as well?” she asked, sharply.

Thomas swallowed. “Yes… We…”

He was cut off by Hamilton, which only made him look more daggers at him. “I assume, as well,
that you know you must fix them”

Lucy looked at him up and down, more disgusted than before. “Yes, I am. I will make sure they are
fixed before the year ends” she said, her bitterness covered with a sweetness that managed to choke
both men at her backs.

“Good” said Hamilton, still smiling calmly. “But make sure to not charge it on your tenant’s rent. For
what I’ve heard, I freely assume that you are not aware that those expenses are not his responsibility”

“Excuse me?” asked Lucy, leaning on the stool; her eyes dangerously squinted.

“No, it’s just that I’ve had a talk with your nieces – great girls, by the way; their father is really doing
a good job raising them – and it turns out that you’ve been asking Jefferson to pay from his pocket all
the things that you fixed”

“Well, of course, he’s the one using them” she spoke after a cold and dry laugh.

“Though that much is true, I must inform you that in the lease a tenant and landlady agree to sign it is
included the responsibility of good maintenance of the house. Despite that you’re not the one using
the house, there is no room for a discussion that there are human beings inhabiting your dwelling,
and, as the landlady, you are obligated by New York state law to provide a safe and liveable
environment for your tenants”

Hamilton raised a hand once he saw Lucy opening her mouth to complain.

“Now, I understand that adjectives as ‘safe’ and ‘liveable’ can be very abstract and, thus, tricky. I
also understand that for people like… you” he spat, imitating her prior disgusted look. “maybe
liveable and comfortable mean having a Rubens or a Van Gogh hanging on the walls, but for the rest
of us, the normal persons, who wake up even before the sun is up to go to work and earn their own
money for their own merits and efforts without the need of having a famous surname, ‘liveable and
safe environment’ mean to have the chance to choose to shower with hot water or to turn on the
heater, especially in the upcoming winter and in a city like New York, which average temperature in
winter is a maximum of 38 °F. If logic is not enough for you, allow me to inform you that, by law,
New Yorkers landlords are absolutely required to provide heat to their tenants between October 1st
and May 31st” He turned his gaze towards Jefferson. “Since when did the immersion heater has been
“It broke around middle July?” he answered, unsure. “Then, again at the last week of September…”

Hamilton turned his attention to the lady in the room. “So, you’ve been avoiding your obligation and responsibility for almost three months. Awesome. Wow” he commented, sarcastically.

“They didn’t inform me” Lucy simply said. “I got it fixed the first time, if they didn’t warn me about it, what am I supposed to do?”

“Well, miss, I don’t want to be rude, but if my landlord added up what it costs to fix it to my rent, I’d be quiet too. Which reminds me…” he looked at Jefferson again. “Is it true that she adds the money it cost to fix the immersion heater to your rent, Jefferson?”

“Well…” he doubted, eyeing his sister with uncertainty.

“She hasn’t asked, it was me” said Hamilton, harshly. “Don’t worry, she can’t kick you out for telling me the truth. In fact, I must inform you as well that a landlord cannot kick a tenant out out of the blue; unless the tenant has violated the lease or withheld the rent from you. Which I assume is not the case, right?” Jefferson gave him a shake of his head. “Then, answer fearlessly: did she add it up? What it cost to fix the immersion heater?”

“Yes”

“How much it was?”

“Ninety dollars”

Hamilton looked over Lucy with a sided smile. “Well, it’s beyond clear miss Scrooge doesn’t use this shower or lives here, because she didn’t look for a good repairer”

Lucy clicked her tongue at the nickname. “Cold water is good for the circulation” she said, smiling bitterly.

“I’ll make sure to google that later. Either is truth or not, your obligations are very clear. When June arrives, you can keep giving them the runaround, but until then, that heater and immersion heater must be fixed”

“Checked” she spat.

“Good. Oh, and by the way… I was told as well that you have a bit of a habit of increasing the rent depending on if you got out of bed with the wrong foot or not. How much truth is there in that statement?”

“You are told a lot, it seems” commented Lucy, passive-aggressive.

“Yes, it’s what happens when you stop talking about yourself, thinking you’re the navel of the world, and start listening to what people have to say” retorted Alexander. “Especially to children, they are really interesting to listen to. Instead of telling what to do with their lives, you should start listening to them. You may be educated”

James dared to take a step forwards when he saw Lucy’s face turning bright red and talked without a second thought. “She once increases the rent to 100 dollars more, and then she never stopped” he informed, receiving an elbow from his friend. “No, Thomas, he’s on fire, leverage it!” he told him.
“When did that happen?” asked Alexander, folding his arms.

“Back in May of last year”

“When is your lease up?”

“We renovated it every year…”

“So, from January to January?”

“More like, February, because we moved here…”

“Unimportant” Alexander cut him off. “What matters is that that happened in May, when the lease wasn’t up yet, and did you pay her what she asked you for?”

“Yes”

“Until now?”

“Yes, along with the other times she increased it, not only that…”

He turned his attention to Jefferson again. “Jefferson, when February of 2017 arrived, did your sister change the amount of money you would have to give to her in this year, or the lease was the same?”

Thomas hesitated for a moment. “Well…”

“Did you read it?”

“Yes”

“Was the rent changed?”

“I… Maybe” he said, unconvinced.

“No, it wasn’t” said James, frowning at his friend. “In the contract it’s written we must pay her 1 500 per month”

Hamilton looked at the woman again, who was turning too red to be healthy or taken slightly. Alexander, being the way he was, of course gave it little care. “Well, Miss Jefferson, I understand you wouldn’t lose your precious time of shopping unnecessary and expensive things in doing such stupid things as changing the lease of your own house, but at least you could’ve used some of that money to pay someone else to do it? I knew rich people tended to be lazy when it comes to work, but I never suspected they could reach this level of stupidity” Lucy inhaled through her nostrils while she clenched her fists. Alexander smiled slightly and turned to Madison once again. “Well, it seems that you’re the only one who is going to be sincere around here, who would have thought… Care to show me the lease? Do you know where it is?”

“Yes, yes” said Madison, running upstairs and entering the office on the right hand-side.

“By the way, Miss Jefferson, I am aware as well of your habit of coming to this house uninvited” he commented, staring straight into her cold glare without flinching. And Thomas didn’t know who he feared the most at that scene. “Don’t do it” said Alexander, after a pause.

“Well, I am forbidden to visit my family in my house whenever I want to too?” she asked, faking innocence. Thomas, knowing her as well as he did, knew she wanted to hit Hamilton with her purse until leave him unconscious.
Alexander imitated her fake smile. “Allow me to doubt your visits are always for family reasons, miss Jefferson. Either way, it’s always nice to call your relatives before showing up at their houses. Now, as a landlady, you can only enter this property uninvited when it’s strictly necessary. And, no, collecting the rent is not included in that list of ‘strictly necessary moments’. Do you have a favourite number?”

Lucy moved her tongue inside her mouth before answering. Her indifferent façade breaking slowly. “I always liked the number one”

Alex nodded, curving his lips. “Of course, the number of egotists” he commented, gaining a dirty look from the woman across him. Madison came back, and handed him a paper. “Let’s see this…”

He put his glasses on and smiled sarcastically at one point.

“Here it’s written that Jefferson must pay you 1 500 dollars, Miss. And, also, that it must be at the beginning of each month, so I think day one will do” he said, handing the paper back to Madison. “I don’t understand what you’re doing here, when it’s 15th. That’s consider mid-month. Weren’t you taught that at school?” Lucy’s lack of response made the pressure in the room grow heavier. “You didn’t need to pay attention, right? You passed the classes because Mommy and Daddy paid the teachers a huge amount of money and you didn’t even care, right?” he sighed, faking deception. “My, it’s sad to study thanks to a scholarship, but sadder it is to ignore your studies when you paid for them. At the end of the day, it’s this…” he tapped two fingers in his forehead, to clarify he was talking about the brain. “…what matters and what can make you succeed fairly in this world. You know? Maybe after Christmas, I am going to take a look at the payments your brother has given to you, because something tells me he’s been paying you way lot more than…”

“In total, it has been 5 890 dollars more in all this time” said Madison.

“James!” Thomas said through clenched teeth.

“Look at Dobby, what a brain. Did you do that calculation now?” He was given a nod by his workmate. Hamilton turned back to Lucy. “See? Brains overpowers money. 1 500 a month it was, right?” he asked, looking at Madison.

“Yes”

“Well, that means that…” Hamilton thought for a moment. He then walked to Lucy and took the check away from her hands, ignoring her glare of hatred. He handed the check to Thomas. “There you go. This is yours”

“That…” tried to say Lucy.

Hamilton raised one hand again, silencing her. Thomas felt envious and wondered if someday he’d be able to shut her up with such an ease. “Miss Lucy, please, let’s do this on good terms, for you’re still family. You’re going to forgive your brother four months, starting by this one. I know four months are 6 000 dollars, according to what he must pays you, but I like even numbers, so let’s leave it in four months, alright? I know that, by doing this, your lease will be up on February, and March is included” he put a fake-comforting hand on her forearm, and Lucy looked at it with disgust for a moment before glaring up slowly. “Because you at least learned the months orders in your expensive and exclusive school, right?”
“Yes, I did” she answered sharply.

“Oh, good, I was fearing that as you, rich people, don’t know about time because you have no timetable in your carefree lives, you weren’t taught such a thing. Good to know, good to know”. He patted her arm, and she inhaled dangerously through her nostrils. “When February arrives, you will be able to increase the rent, because that’s the way it’s done. The legal way. The way we humans must work, at least in New York. But that’s another story. For now, the only thing you have to do is not coming here uninvited, not asking for the rent until February arrives and we can sort this out, and get the heater and immersion heater fixed as soon as possible. Will you be able to remember three things all by yourself?”

“I can try” responded Lucy, now with a raspy voice and a forced smile.

“Good, that’s the spirit. Do you have an agenda? You can write it down there, between your three hours nap and your break for buying shoes that you won’t even remember are occupying your room/closet. Or make someone else write it down for you, wouldn’t want to spoil your manicure” he added mockingly.

“Well, I think we’ve come to terms, haven’t we?” commented Lucy, getting up from her seat slowly, a serene yet disturbing smile plastered on her face. She threw a cold glare to her brother. “Tell my girls aunt Lucy said ‘hi’, Thomas” she said, heading to the door.

“Will do” he said, looking anxiously at her.

“Goodbye, James, hope you can solve your… problems soon” she said, looking at the shorter man with the corner of her eye while opening the door.

“Remember” said Alexander, pretending a nice tone. “if you want to come for Christmas, call before. It’s called politeness”

Lucy gave a nod before slamming the door shut at her backs. The silence didn’t have time to spread across the room, as the two sisters upstairs began to laugh, smiling from ear to ear.

“What an epic ‘turn down for what’, Alex!” Patsy laughed.

Thomas looked at them with a frown. “Girls, don’t eavesdrop!”

“Madison” Hamilton’s serious voice sounded in juxtaposition with the joy of the girls upstairs. It called easily the attention of the two adults in the room. “Would you still give me a ride?” he asked, stern-faced.

“Hm… Yes, of course” he agreed, shrugging insecure.

“Good. Goodbye, girls” said Hamilton, waving goodbye to the sisters.

“Bye, Alex!” they both said, still laughing and went to their room, commenting the event.

Thomas looked at the check in his hands, not believing what just happened. He didn’t notice the lack of farewell from Hamilton’s part as he exited the place without a look back. He just returned
“Here, I already dialled 911. If I don’t come back in an hour at much, press ‘call’” said James, very serious, before heading straight to the coat stand.

Thomas raised an eyebrow. “An hour? Does he live that far away?” he asked.

“No, it’s a few blocks down here” James informed while putting on his coat and scarf. “But if instead of dead, I ended up bathed with nasty comments, I’d need a moment of solitude to cry and eat chocolate in the car…”

Thomas had rolled his eyes at James’ comment about calling the 911 if it took too long for him to come back home, but, half an hour later, he was starting to worry. His daughters were allowed to eat at their bedroom, finally getting along after what seemed like an eternity, and he wanted to take advantage of it for as long as it lasted. He looked at his friend’s phone, still on the counter, and frowned. He was about to pick it up and press the green button when he heard the car being parked in the garage at the back garden. He sighed, relieved, and cocked an eyebrow when he saw James entering the living room with a glare that revealed his mind was miles away from the present world.

“James” he called, getting to take him back. “What happened? What took so long?”

“He wants to take your case” James said, straight to the point.

“What?” asked Thomas, blinking dumbfounded.

“He told me he wants to take your case” he repeated, taking a seat on the stool across him. “Oh, and he also wants to see the accounts to help us out with that” he added, fixating his glare to the granite of the kitchen island.

Thomas gave a puff. “So, he is going to be lawyer and accountant just like that, without asking me first?” he asked, taking a step closer to where his friend was sat.

“It’s a historic deed” James reminded him.

He shook his head. “I knew it felt so off for him to jump in and defend me and giving me money. Does he want the 6 000 dollars he was talking about before?”

“I hope you haven’t accepted, less on my name. I told you, I’d rather owe money to my sister than to him…”

“Thomas, he doesn’t want us to pay him”
“… What?”

James finally met his gaze. “On the contrary: he told me that if we pay him, he’ll quit. Just like that”

“You must be kidding” James shook his head. “What does he want, then?” Thomas asked once again, not buying it.

“He only wants you to let him see your expenses, also to know how the girls are doing from time to time… What you did with Jay, but this time done right” he explained. Then, added. “And free, which is a plus”

Thomas shook his head once again. “I don’t like it. He is planning something” he said, brow frowned, and headed to the stairs.

James rolled his eyes. “What evil-minded you two are, seriously!” he commented.

“He’s going to be my final blow, remember my words”

“Drama queen…”

“George, good morning!”

“Angelica”

“Finally weekend”

“We only have to survive seven hours more before being completely free”

She laughed. “Hey, maybe today we’re going to have a quiet day”

“Hm? Well, quieter than a Monday for sure, if that’s what you mean. We are all exhausted on Saturdays”

“No, no. Eliza texted me last night…”

“Oh, it’s true, the poor woman’s been ill all week. Is she better?”

“Yes, she is. Thank you, sir”

“No need to. She’s a good woman. So, what did she text you about?”

“Oh, right. She told me she could convince Alexander to work on a case with Thomas”

“Jefferson? Was she delirious?”

“I asked her the same! According to her, she saw it as a good opportunity for Alex to go back to cases after… Well, after what happened to him, I’ve told you before you hired him”

Washington nodded. “And did Alex accept it?”
“Unwillingly at first. But he eventually accepted it”

“Well, those things make me believe in miracles again”

“Tell me about it! And, think about this, maybe now that they are actually working together on something, they’d learn to behave and tolerate each other. Can you imagine? A meeting without screaming and flying chairs?”

“I’ve been dreaming of that for the last couple of years, actually…”

“Well, dreams do come true! We cannot lose hope!”

Washington nodded as his vice president as both of them finally reached the entrance of the building. Once the doors were opened, they were welcomed by the screams they were (not gladly) used to. They stopped at the doorframe, seeing Mulligan laughing in the background while recording it all while Burr and Lafayette watched from a prudent distance, sharing worried glares from time to time. Peggy was out of her office, sat on her chair and with a cup of tea in her hands, seeing the show in first line. Madison was in the middle of Jefferson and Hamilton, screaming at each other. Maria, on their left, was writing like crazy.

“Yes, yes, yes, perfect way to start my book and end the week” she muttered, smiling happily as she wrote down what she heard in the background.

“What were you saying about peaceful meetings…?” Washington asked Angelica, who looked in bewilderment at the scene in front of them. “And the day has just started…”

“Ooh, maaan” Laurens complained, entering the building. They looked at him with questioning looks. “I’ve missed the beginning, I like to see fights from the start” he explained.

Before any of the two could reprimand him, a thump was heard at their backs. Turning around, they saw pieces of what once was a mug on the floor, along with hot coffee spreading on it while Jefferson screamed to Hamilton to stop throwing things at him.

“Oh, well, it seems I’m still on time to see good stuff!” Laurens commented, happily.

Angelica rolled her eyes. “Laurens, please…”

“Another cup broken… The floor stained again…” Washington said, sadly. “Gosh…” he sighed. “And Lee hasn’t come yet…”

“Lee is never coming, George…” Angelica commented.

“Clever man. I’d go as well to never return” he admitted. After another sigh of pure defeat, he began to walk straight to his office at the end of the hallway. “I’m needing Lucille” he said, more to himself than to excuse himself.
Angelica and Laurens looked at their president go, being completely ignored by the two arguing workers and watched carefully by the rest of the witnesses of the fight. Washington ignored them all and entered his office without dedicating a glare or a word to anyone. Angelica and Laurens shared, then, a confused look.

“He named his rocking chair like a woman…” commented the freckled man.

“That man is going to end up like Charles Lee, coming to work with a gun and firing to the ceiling to silence us in the meetings” commented Maria, finally stopping her writing.

“Or to what’s not the ceiling…” added Angelica, darkly.

Maria smiled. “Oh, Gosh, that’s another idea to write!” she said, happier than before, and resumed her writing.

“Do you want me to help you?” said Laurens, approaching her counter. Or Adams’ desk, actually, as her counter was at the corner at her backs, with the crèche half done. “I have nothing to do, anyways…”

Angelica looked at him, speechless after that statement. She then turned her glare to the still going on fight. Then, looked at her watch.

“Eight six” she read. She shrugged. “Perfect time to take a break and go to the pub”

And she excited the place, trying to forget his brother-in-law’s screaming, her co-workers’ incompetence and cursing Eliza under her breath for making her have hopes for a good change in her workplace.

“This year, Santa will bring her coal”

Chapter End Notes

I think it needless to say I don't agree with anything Lucy has said or will ever say. She's just a mix of all the narrow-minded people any of us can meet one day in the real world.

Where I live is common to say the idiom "hard headed as a German". Don't know if it's a cliché in English speaking countries or not. Needless to say, as well, I have nothing against Germany or its people xD

After a lot of thinking, I decided to include a love relationship between Lafayette and Hercules, no for hate to others ships in the fandom or because I favourite it, but because it was the only one that flowed better with the story, and I think it wouldn't harm to have
various kind of relationships. Love is love.

Don't know if there's a word in English that is equivalent to what I tried to do with the 'housekeeper'/male maid' thing. In Spanish, we have 'chacha', to refer to profesional cleaners in a derogatory manner. Not always, it depends on in which context and tone you say it, as all words. Though the word is usually femenine, we can change it easily by 'chacho'. As English, sometimes, has not these kind of problems with genre in the words, it was quite difficult to write it. Hope it had the effect I intended.

This story took me a lot more than I firstly thought. As I'm not American, I researched about NYC laws about landlords and tenants. If something is wrong, I'm sorry, I tried to do it as well as I could.

Also, because I suck in Maths, especially with imaginary figures XD!
Merry December 21st

Chapter Summary

“Today is my last day of work!”

“Tomorrow we’re going to have that party!”

George stopped his mug mid-way and arched one eyebrow. “What party?”

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda

There was a moment of the year George Washington loved the most, especially for the past three years.

He had woken up before his alarm tuned off that morning and had not spent a few more moments on the mattress, trying to summon enough mental strengths to face whatever might be waiting for him at the office.

No, not today.

Alexander had ripped off another phone? Good. Adams was being late again with his paperwork? Nice. Peggy had fallen asleep in her office? Sweet. Laurens, Mulligan and Lafayette spent the whole day playing cards and discussing anime in the break room? Awesome. Angelica hadn’t put a foot in the office because she had been all day at the pub across the street? Marvellous. Maria had been busy again trying to write her book instead of doing something productive, like, for example, her work? Wonderful. Madison and Jefferson had been talking until five pm instead of reading the documents they were supposed to read? Cool. Burr hadn’t put a glass on that hole on his wall yet? Amazing. Charles Lee hadn’t appeared yet? Perfectly perfect.

Today the whole building could knock down for all he cared. He had gone crazy countless times throughout the whole year; he had bordered literal madness and had thought infinite ways of getting ride of one employee or two each Wednesday night for a whole year, and now he deserved a break from it all. A long break. A good long break. Not two days trapped in a cabin with those
immature beasts, no: a true good long break, with his wife, alone, watching movies, chattering, dining peacefully…

Yes, this was the moment of the year George Washington loved the most.

“Good morning, my honeybun” he greeted his wife as soon as he saw her in the kitchen, preparing him some toasts and coffee. He approached Martha and peeked her on the cheek. “What a wonderful day” he commented, taking a seat at the kitchen table.

Martha arched an eyebrow, handing him the plate of food and the mug. “My husband calling a Wednesday ‘wonderful day’?” She put a hand on his forehead. “Are you ill, honey?”

George laughed. “No. Just happy”

Martha smiled playfully. “Now, who are you and what did you do with the real George?” she laughed and took a seat beside him. “Did something happen?” she asked, interested.

“I looked at the calendar before going to sleep yesterday”

Martha’s face lighted up at that. “Oh, Georgie! It’s right!”

He nodded, not erasing the smile from his face. He and Martha opened their mouths and said at the same time:

“Today is my last day of work!”

“Tomorrow we’re going to have that party!”

George stopped his mug mid-way and arched one eyebrow. “What party? I thought the children weren’t going to come this Christmas”

“And that is why I suggested you to invite over your employees and respective families for the day, on the 21st”

“… And I accepted?”

“Of course you did, silly! Why would I bring this up if you haven’t?”

“… … When did that conversation happen, exactly?”

“The same night my son called me to inform me they couldn’t come for Christmas. Don’t you remember we talked about it right after?”

“Talked about it?” he repeated, his smile now completely gone. “Since when a conversation that goes ‘George, the children are not coming this year’, ‘Oh, okay’, can be defined as ‘talking about it’? As much, I just acknowledged what you said before falling asleep”

“But I asked you later if we could do the party, and you agreed”
“I was asleep by then, I don’t remember anything like that!”

“But you snored ‘yes’!”

“How can a man snore a ‘yes’?!”

“George, we’ve been married for twenty-eight years. The average woman learns to translate her husband’s snores into words within the first two years of living together”

“What are you talking about…?” he asked, puzzled. “Well, no, you know what? I don’t want to know… I was asleep, and my answer doesn’t count”

Martha frowned. “Georgie, please, I’ve been waiting for this day all month!”

“And you didn’t mention it in all this time because you were just that excited” he said, sarcastically. “The only party I want, Martha, consists in you and me together watching TV peacefully”

“That is a crappy party, George. Where is the party-loving man I married?”

“Daniel? He’s on a cruise in the Bahamas, you told me the other day”

“No, not my ex, I was referring to you!” she said, giving him a little push of annoyance.

“Ah, as you said ‘party-loving man’…” he said, going back to eat his toast.

“George, please, don’t you remember what day is tomorrow?” she insisted.

“The first day of a two weeks break”

“No, it’s the third anniversary of your company!” she reminded him, smiling.

George looked at her, serious. “Three years already?” he asked. His wife nodded. “Life passes by so slowly when it’s a shit…”

Martha slapped him in the arm. “Don’t talk like that! You have your own company, you have loyal employees who love and respect you!”

George laughed, almost choking with the toast. He took a swig from the coffee to clear his throat. “Martha, one day in that hellhole and you’d stop saying those ridiculous things, I promise” he told her.

“Phew, what a man!” she complained. “Why are you like that? Don’t you want to celebrate it?” she asked, eyes shining with excitement. “Come on! Let’s have a Christmas dinner all togeeeetheeer!” she half-sang.

George imitated her in a mocking manner. “Noooo, because we’ll kill each otheeeeer”

“You can’t know thaaaat”

“Yes, I caaaan ‘cause I lived iiiiit”

Martha stopped, smiling sheepishly at him. “Uh, Georgie, what a nice voice you have!” she flattered. “You should’ve been a singer or something like that!”

George half-smiled. “Well, I shouldn’t say this, but I think the same” He sighed and began to talk with a melancholic tone. “In fact, there was that time, back in college, when one of my classmates
suggested me to join him in one project he was working in… I think it was a rap-musical-thing about
the Founding Fa… Whoa, whoa, hold on a minute!” he stopped himself, frowning at his wife. “No,
Martha! Flattering me is not going to work! We are not throwing a party!” he told her, sternly.

Martha pouted and cursed at her failed attempt. “But why not? It’d be fun!”

“Why would I be celebrating, anyways, Martha?” he asked, shaking his head. “That, as you pointed
out, it has been three years and I still only have eleven persons working for me, and only six of them
are actual lawyers? Wrong: five. Alex quitted”

“Rome wasn’t built in one day, George” she told him, with the same tone she used to use with her
children when they couldn’t be patient about something.

“I’m sure it was built in three years. Or a big part of it, at least” he commented, taking a sip of coffee.

“You could celebrate the fact that you have such a great team. The people working for you are one
of the best staff a boss could ask for, whatever you say. Wouldn’t you feel bad for turning down this
chance to celebrate Christmastime with them? You are not going to see one another until the holidays
end!”

“That’s the point, Martha” he told her, and raised one hand when she was about to talk again.
“Besides, why should I feel bad? Because I am not going to spend more time that the strictly
necessary hearing them fighting? Because I am not going to stand them destroying my house for not
cleaning it the next day? Because I am not going to share my great 30 years old whiskey with Burr?
That man mixes it up with 7-UP, Martha. That should be considered a crime!”

“But, Georgie…”

“When I say ‘no’, it’s ‘no’, Martha. And that’s final” he declared, finishing his breakfast and getting
up.

She hit the table with her two hands, making the remaining plates and cups to shake. “Oh, so now
you’re a tough guy! You can’t control those useless kids locked up in fortyish bodies, and you have
to take it out on me, huh?! You only can grow a pair to wreck your wife’s dreams, right??”

“What are you saying? For the love of God, Martha, it’s just a party! We can have one on your
birthday if you want it that much!” he promised her, startled by her reaction.

“No!!! My birthday is not the same day as the anniversary of when you finally had your own
company!”

“But…” he tried to say.

“I want a party, I want a party, I want a party!” she repeated, shaking her head like a little child
having a tantrum.

“Alright, alright!” he gave in, feeling enraged. “We’ll have the goddamn party!” he agreed through
clenched teeth.

Martha changed her red angry face for her natural colour and gentle expression. “You’re the most
understanding man in the world” she said, getting up and peeking him on the cheek. “Good you
finally came to your senses. I’ve already invited King, and it’d have been hell to try to make him
forget about it…”

George’s eyes opened as much as they could. “You invited the salamander???” he asked.
She started to cackle. “Hahahaha! It was a joke, man! How am I going to invite him? Are you nuts? Hahahahaha!” she kept laughing while she put the dishes on the sink. “Oh, my gosh, I wish you could’ve seen your face! Hahahahaha!” she leaned on the counter, crying from laughing.

George frowned bitterly. “It’s not funny, Martha, you almost gave me a heart attack”

“That’s how I know it was a good joke” she said, between giggles. She waved one hand. “Come on, leave now or you’ll be late”

“For all I care!” he complained, putting his coat on brusquely. “With the good day I was having! Dammit!” He cursed all his way from his house until he entered the car. “A hell of a way to live!” he complained, shutting the door with a thump. He felt his phone buzzing and frowned even deeper than before when he read the message in front of his eyes.

From Martha:

* but i did invite your mother. no discussion. you 2 get your shit together. *

* tell your workmates or i’ll steal your phone and invite them myself. oh, they can also bring their kids if they want. *

* love u <3 *

George frowned his lips now as well, disgusted. “What a fucking hell of a way to live” he complained once again, tossing the mobile on the co-pilot seat and starting the car.

Angelica had gathered everyone for the weekly meeting when she saw Washington hadn’t arrived yet, and had taken charge of it, which, in her workplace, meant standing as well as she could the screaming at both sides of the table and try to not get hit by some pen or stapler that had flown misled.

She, of course, had called Eliza as soon as her workmates began fighting. In all honesty, talking to Eliza made Angelica stand her workmates’ stupidity for a longer time than her boss could. At least, she wasn’t feeling her head about to explode yet, though the voices of her co-workers had reached a level when they couldn’t be distinguished from one to another.

“But am I to blame if Charles Lee hasn’t come yet? If that man is missing in action it’s not my fault!”

“I’m only saying that if Adams is not here, his desk can be mine until after Christmas break, when we’d take the crèche off!”
“Burr, for the sake of all that’s holy, put a goddamned glass in your office already or cover that wall! I’m sick of having to close my door because of the wind that’s coming from your joke of a window!”

“Is it so difficult to understand a colour calendar? Even if the photocopies are in black and white, the names are still very clear! I am not going to keep cleaning the office all by myself! If you want me to be the cleaner, pay me another salary!”

“And what’s going to happen with the Christmas bonuses?! I did my job right, where is my reward?!”

“I think it is very serious that our boss is not going to give it to us because he spent it in a fucking rocking chair!”

“I am going to repeat this for the last time, assholes, when any of you open the fridge and see a yogurt with a little note that reads ‘Peggy’, it means that only Peggy can eat it!”

“Well, and our vice president has nothing to say?!”

Alexander’s voice sounded clear in her ears without the need to scream, and Angelica raised her glare, seeing everybody had shut up after his sentence, and were looking at her with inquisitive and pressuring glares. She straightened up in her – Washington’s – seat and kept her phone inside her pocket. Not pressing ‘end call’, obviously.

“Yes, of course, pardon me for my bad manners” she said, nodding in agreement. Her workmates imitated the gest. “Merry Christmas and happy new year, everybody!” she said, as mockingly as cheerfully, with arms wide open and a big smile on her face. She could hear Eliza’s muffled laugh emerging from her pocket.

Thomas hit the table with one fist. “The hell ‘merry Christmas and happy new year’! What do you have to say about all the things we were discussing?”

Angelica’s smile fell along with her arms. She shrugged. “If I were capable of hearing clearly what people say while they talk all at once, I could give you an answer”

“That’s true” said Hercules, leaning in his seat. “Come on, people, it’s our last day until January. Can’t we be nice to each other, only for today?”

Lafayette leaned closer to him, nodding in agreement. “It’s Christmastime after all…”

They looked at each other, thoughtful. Finally, they looked at the couple and answered at the same time.

“No”

And the talking over one another started once again.
Hercules frowned and crossed his arms, offended. “Alright, then, let’s be kindergartens…”

Lafayette patted him in the head. “There, there…”

Laurens’ voice was heard among the screaming. “And where is Washington?!” he asked, managing to call the attention of everybody in the room and silencing them. “If he’s not here, complaining is useless!”

“Not that he does much, anyways…” commented Thomas.

Maria gave him a look. “Here comes Lemongrab, bitterness the atmosphere”

Thomas frowned at her when he saw Hamilton, Burr, the Schuyler sisters and even James trying to contain their laughter.

“What did you call me?” he asked, suspicious.

Maria smiled widely. “Lemongrab. Here” she passed him her phone. “It’s this adorable character from a cartoon my daughter watches” she explained.

Alexander couldn’t take it any longer and began to laugh aloud. “Lemongrab. You outdid yourself, Mari” he commented.

“That’s what you deserve for nicknaming me Pikachu” said Laurens.

“Hashtag for the week: #mariabadassgenius” said Hercules, red from his fit of laughter.

“I must admit it was my daughter’s thing” she explained, taking the phone away from Thomas. “We were watching the show yesterday and she told me ‘Mommy, isn’t that man that works with you just as bitter as Lemongrab?’ Hahaha, I swear I spent at least ten minutes laughing. I was afraid my jaw was going to literally drop. It hurt, but I couldn’t stop” she said while laughing.

They started to laugh as well, while Thomas blushed and moved his tongue inside his mouth, trying to contain himself.

“Pity it didn’t happen, Betty Boop…”

Maria gave him a look, still laughing a bit. “Just for that, I’m gonna still call you that even when you start to be happy”

“That’s not gonna happen” chimed in Madison, wiping one tear and coughing a bit. “He has something internal that prevents him from being happy”

Thomas looked daggers at him. “Actually, it’s something external. And it’s called James”

“Another attack” He looked at Hamilton. “See what I’ve told you? He’s non-stop”
Alexander shrugged. “Is he *that* jealous that he has to steal me my nickname?” he asked, teasingly.

“Because you have too many” said Angelica, giggling. “Maybe now that he has his own, he’d give it back”

“You too, Angelica?” asked Thomas, annoyed.

The woman laughed louder when she looked at him. “Gosh, it’s just that I’ve watched the show with my son so many times… How didn’t I realise?” she burst out laughing again.

Thomas frowned deeper. “Thank goodness is our last day, I wouldn’t be able to stand anyone from here one more minute before my New Year’s drunkenness”

Maria laughed harder. “See how bitter you are?” she asked, holding herself on Angelica’s chair’s armrest. “You’re making my point!”

The whole room started to laugh hysterically once again. Thomas simply got up this time, grabbing his stuff.

“I see we’re not going to do anything productive today…”

He rolled his eyes and headed straight to the door. He stopped in his tracks and took a few steps backwards when he almost bumped into George Washington, looking at his employees crying tears of laughter. He frowned.

“As if they did anything productive any day…” he commented looking at Jefferson, who sat down again, swallowing worried at the serious expression of his boss. George cleared his throat before talking. “Having a good time?” he asked aloud. The whole room fell silent slowly. “It seems that it only takes me being missing so you can have a good time in the meeting room” he commented.

“No, sir, it’s just that…” tried to explain Angelica, now as worried as the secretary once she realised how serious Washington was acting and talking.

George raised one hand, managing to silence her. He addressed the whole team once again. “You can go home for today” he informed.

“Wait, really??” asked Laurens, prepared to storm out of the room as soon as he was told.

Washington nodded. “Because you weren’t going to do any work, right?” he asked.

“We were planning on finishing the crèche and the tree” explained Peggy.

“You haven’t finished that already?” asked Washington, bored. “You can’t even finish things you supposedly wanted to do… That’s the level of laziness I’ve got here” he complained, pinching the bridge of his nose. He sighed and looked at them again. “I don’t mind. You can leave whenever you want to, but, please, the last one, lock the office”

“Yes, yes, of course, yes” they all said in unison, pulling out their chairs and clearly ready to run out
of the room once he was gone.

George contained an eye-roll. “Not so fast, sub-animals, before I’m gone, I’ve got to tell you one thing: my wife is throwing a party tomorrow, that’s the only reason I’m letting you go or do whatever you want”

“What?” they asked, collapsing on their chairs.

“Tomorrow is December 21st, the third anniversary of when I made the greatest mistake of my life: founding this individual company when I only had eleven years left to retire”

They shared confused looks while Washington looked at the ground, feeling like a fool. He shook his head.

“Well, what’s done is done. This thing is after noon, so whenever you want, drop by my house. You can bring your family, including the children” He turned around, prepared to close the door. He dedicated them a last glare. “I’d say merry Christmas, but we all know it’d be a lie. So, I’m just going to close the door, and you wait here until I reach the pub across the street to leave or destroy the building. I don’t mind until January 2nd.”

With that, Washington closed the door, and they heard his footsteps becoming distant. They looked at each other, in bewilderment.

“My God…” commented Angelica.

“Yeah, he needs some help” said Aaron, sharing a worried glare with Alexander.

“No, I mean… It’s only been three years? I thought it’s been like… Don’t know… Seven or more…”

“Life passes by so slowly when you’ve got a gremlin in it” said Jefferson, smirking mockingly at Hamilton.

“Go to hell, Lemongrab” said Alexander, throwing him the closest stapler. The secretary dodged it by a hair’s breadth.

“We’ll see each other there tomorrow” commented Angelica.

“Agreed…” the rest of the team said.

As Alexander didn’t trust anybody with the key Washington had given to him soon after
hiring him, he had to spend all day in the office, bearing the constant fights that arose at the other side of his door, about how to decorate the office. Angelica had spent the great part of the time with him, alleging she didn’t want to be involved in another fight with Peggy or Maria as she had to save energy for tomorrow.

“It had to be the same day John and Pip are busy with school and work” she complained, looking boringly at him while he wrote without pause.

“Another business trip to England?” asked Alexander, not needing to raise his head to know he would receive a nod. “And what about your son?”

“He has a field trip with the school”

“On his last day?”

Angelica shrugged. “It’s better than spending the day acting or singing carols”

“You’re still stung for that?”

Angelica frowned and put one hand on his papers, finally making him look up. “Six years, I auditioned for being Mary for six years in a row, and the only role that jealous bitch of Mrs. Clarkson ever gave me was…”

“Was the role of shepherdess number 2, I know” Alexander said at the same time, getting the paper away from under her hand. “You tell that story all Christmas after your fifth gin tonic, Angelica. If you start retelling it sober, I’m gonna scream”

His sister-in-law made a face. “I was the one who wanted to scream when she gave me that role for the sixth and last time”

“Oh, Jesus, have mercy” muttered Alexander, going back to his work.

“I spent a lot of time convincing myself that it was her fault, not mine” kept saying Angelica. “Do you know how hard it is for a six-year-old to learn what rejection is like that? And to endure that rejection until she turns twelve? I’m sure that jealous mummy is one of the main reasons of why I am a handful of insecurity”

Alexander stopped his writing again, this time looking at the woman across him with a cocked eyebrow. “A handful of insecurity, you?” he asked.

“Can’t you see me? I am always a shaking jelly”

“… Gosh, I wouldn’t want to see you being secure of yourself, then…” he commented under his breath.

“What?”

“Nothing, nothing…” he said, quickly. “Hey, if you’re going to be alone tomorrow, do you want Eliza and me to pick you up?” he offered.

She smiled. “Yeah, that’d be good” She raised her phone. “I’ve been talking to her, and she’s very excited”

“Did she tell the kids yet?”
“She’s still thinking about if taking them or not”

Alex raised one eyebrow again. “And where are they going to go?”

“With their grandparents”

He groaned. “Tell her on my part to not do that. We’ve already let the kids enough times with them this year. And the last time we left them for one weekend, things went out of control. And that your parents dislike me enough without apparent reason, and I don’t want to give them ammunition so…”

“Late” Angelica interrupted him. “She’s already made up her mind”

Alexander groaned louder. “That is, listen to me, as usual”

“You just talk too much. Summarize your rants and maybe we’d listen to you more often”

“… Get out of my office, Angelica, now I am the one who needs to recharge my batteries before tomorrow to put up with all of you”

“Since when do you need to do that? You’re our little Duracell battery” she commented, ruffling his hair with affection.

“I’m still saying this is a bad idea. We still have time to turn around and drive directly to Washington’s house”

“Alex, you told me you’d stop complaining if I agreed to just let John with my parents”

The discussion went on the whole trip. Philip and Angie watched in amusement while their aunt, sat in the backseat with them, taught them how to record with a phone under the promise that they’d do as the were taught when their parents fought over something back at home. As payment, they retold her all the arguments they could remember. It was a fair deal.

“He’s four months old, Eliza” kept insisting Alexander. “Leaving your parents with him is like asking for them to hate me”

His wife waved one hand. “Bah, they hate you already”

“But now they’ll have a reason!”

“They already have one” said Eliza, shrugging, as if it wasn’t a big deal.

“They do? And what is it?” he asked, curious.

“They think you’re a materialistic pig who married me for my money”

“… But how can you say those things like that?”
“I already got used to it. I give it no mind, and you should do the same”

“Used to…? Used to it? Since when do you know that?”

“Since our wedding day”

“Excuse me?”

“They told me when they saw I didn’t sign anything before marrying”

“And you’re telling me now?” asked Alexander, enraged.

Eliza rolled her eyes. “When do you want me to tell you, hm?” she retorted. “In our honeymoon? ‘Oh, oh, Alex, yes, keep going, yes… Oh, by the way, my parents hate you for not asking me for separation of ownership…’”

Alex frowned at her. “Well, no, but what about all those times I asked you? You could’ve told me then…”

“Look at the road” she said, turning his head back to the windshield. “I couldn’t tell you a thing like that. I had to lie to protect you”

“From what?”

“From the truth. That’s the definition of lying: not telling the truth to protect others from it”

“What are you saying? That last part is made up”

“No, it’s not” She tapped her forehead. “Not in my mental dictionary”

“Buy a real dictionary, stirrer…” he huffed. “And why are you telling me now? Why not keep ‘protecting me from the truth’?” he asked, mocking her tone.

Eliza gave him a hard look. “Because it’s Christmas, I can’t lie in Christmas. What example I’d be giving to our children?”

“Better than the one you are giving them by inventing definitions on your favour, that’s for sure” He shook his head and then hit the steering wheel. “Unbelievable! And the worst part is that I did discuss a separation of ownership, and you kicked me up a fuss because of it!”

“Who the heck talks about that while deciding the flower arrangement for the wedding?” she complained, matching his furious expression. “Well, sorry, it’s right: the same romantic man who thinks a separation of ownership is a good idea”

“It is a good idea!” argued Alexander.

“It is not romantic!” she argued back.

“Tell that to your parents!”

“I don’t want them to talk my ear off with their lectures… Pull in, we’re here” she hurried, while taking her seatbelt off. “Wait here, it’ll be a minute”

“I wasn’t planning of getting out of here” said Alexander dryly.

“Man, what a Christmas you are going to give me!” complained Eliza before jumping out of the car.
“It’s not Christmas, it’s December 21st!” retorted Alexander.

“If he doesn’t have the final say, he explodes!” screamed Eliza, while walking straight to the front door of the house.

“Takes one to know one” he muttered, childishly, making his children to laugh.

Philip arched one eyebrow when he saw his aunt was still laughing and recording through her window, which faced Eliza knocking on his grandparents’ door. He elbowed his sister, who gave the woman a curious look.

“What are you doing, auntie?” she asked, calling the attention of her father, who turned his head in their direction.

Angelica shushed them. “Hush now, kids. You’ll see” she said in a whisper. She bit her bottom lip, in an attempt to contain her laughter. “Gosh, this is going to be one of the best family videos ever” she said to herself.

Alexander shared a look of confusion with his children. The three proceeded to imitate Angelica, and looked attentively at their rights. Eliza let John’s necessary things on the step and talked a few things with the baby, kissing him in the forehead afterwards. She knocked on the door loudly enough for them to hear at the other side of the sidewalk and then turned on her heels, running to the car without looking back, leaving John behind, in his buggy.

“Start the car, start the car!” she screamed in the distance.

“What??” asked Alexander. “What are you…?”

“START THE CAAAR!”

The scream was enough for Alexander to do as he was told. Eliza jumped back on the co-pilot seat, and closed the door with a thump, gasping for air.

“Drive, drive!” she said, while putting her seatbelt back on.

Angelica laughed loudly at their backs. “You’re crazy, sis!”

“Eliza, what on Earth…?” tried to ask Alexander.

“Dammit, Alexander! You just decided to be a cautious driver today or what?!?” she screamed. “Drive, drive!!!” she hurried once again.
Alexander pressed the gas pedal, seeing Eliza leaning back on her seat and giving a sigh of relief while hearing Angelica still laughing. He didn’t understand how he could hear his daughter above her noisy laughter.

“Grandpa is chasing after us”

“No, wait, he already stopped” said Philip. He soon added: “What a race, and then he doesn’t want to play tag with us…”

Alexander turned his head for a moment, seeing his two children sat on their knees to see through the back glass. Philip was the first one to seat properly again, a face of clear annoyance in his face.

“He just let me down…”

“Not that you ever had him in high regards, anyway…” commented his sister.

Alexander passed a hand through his hair. “My gosh…” he narrowed his eyes at Angelica. “You knew it?”

“She planned it” answered Eliza.

Alexander shook his head once again. “Fucking family of lunatics!”

Eliza hit him in the arm. “No swearing in front of the children!”

“You have lost your right to tell me off today with that action, young lady!” he told her.

Eliza puffed. “Huh, not even you believe that bullshit…”

“But why not?”

“Because I say so”

“‘I say so’ is not an answer with grounds!”

“Are you going to talk about grounds? Really?”

James and Polly shared a look through the rear-view mirror, both rolling their eyes at the same time before he fixed his glare on the road again and she resumed her drawing. Thomas and Patsy had been fighting since the man had woken his daughter up. Last night Patsy didn’t say anything about the whole party-thing, and James truly believed they were going to have a peaceful and good time. Reality seemed to never get tired of proving him wrong.
“Monse’s home is just a few blocks away from your boss’; I’d be there for only an hour, I promise” kept insisting Patsy.

“Monse could be living next door to Washington, and not even like that, I’d let you go” said Thomas, half-bored, half-tired. He looked in the rear-view mirror to look at the oldest girl. “And what kind of name is Monse? Is that even real?”

Patsy rolled her eyes. “Yes, Dad, it is”

“People don’t know how to call their children these days…”

“Tell me why I can’t go. Everybody is going”

“And if everybody jumped off a bridge, would you do it as well?”

“If, by that, I stop hearing you, yes, I would”

“Patsy” warned James, frowning slightly.

“Tell me why” insisted the girl.

“Because I said no, and that’s final” repeated Thomas.

“Why not?”

“Patsy, are you becoming deaf? Do you want me to call the ENT specialist?” he asked, smiling mockingly.

Patsy gave him a scowl. “No, I want to go to the party”

“Pity, that’s one of the few things I can’t do for you” he kept teasing.

“But why not?” she asked once again.

“Because going to a party where there are gonna be crazy teenagers with more hormones than neurons and no parents or adult’s supervision is one of the easiest way for a teenage girl, like you, to wake up in a bathtub the following morning with a kidney missing” Thomas blurted out, turning his head to add: “Are you satisfied with the answer, now?”

“Geez, Thomas…” said James.

Patsy rolled her eyes once again: “Yes, Dad, because that’s the kind of people I hang out with: illegal sellers of stolen organs…”

“The first step is to admit it, honey”

“Monse has an average mark of 8.7, Dad”

“I’ll make sure to write a letter of recommendation to Harvard or Columbia. It seems that’d be the only way to have anything to do with those kind of colleges…”

“Chill, Dad, it’s a holiday…” she complained.

“Your whole life is a holiday”
“In that case, why can’t I go to the party?” she asked, annoyed.

“We have discussed that already. Are you having short term memory loss?”

“No…”

“This is how Marlin must feel whenever he talks to Dory” he commented, with a tiny smile on his lips. Polly laughed.

“Dad…”

“Yes, Dory?”

“Dad, it’s not funny. Let’s come to a deal”

“We already came to one: you are not going to that party and you’re gonna to behave while in the Washington’s”

“But that’s not a deal! Only you win there!” she complained.

“Honey, have you seen my life? I haven’t been winning since 2013”

“That’s not my fault…” she muttered.

“Having you around all day along with my workmates can’t be count as a victory…”

“If you’re going to suffer, why don’t you let me go?”

“No”

“But…”

“No”

“Dad…”

“No”

“Please?”

“Well, but if you knew the ‘P’ word!” he exclaimed, faking surprise. “You learn something new every day, huh?”

Polly laughed again, and this time, James had to bite his smiling lip to prevent his own laughter.

“Dad, please, I promise I’ll be back before dinner”

“Before dinner? Gal, it’s only 3 pm and you’re already thinking about hanging out with friends till 7?”

“And what am I supposed to do all day? I am sixteen, I have to live life”
“Live life while babysitting your sister”

“I don’t want to look after her!”

“I don’t want her to look after me!” complained Polly at the same time. “I am ten, I can take care of myself!”

“Polly, honey. you once put the eiderdown in the oven just to see what would happen”

Patsy laughed at her sister at that reminder.

“You always tell us to be curious” said Polly, leaning back in her seat.

“You don’t have to set the house on fire to be curious”

“Besides, Patsy was looking after me that day” she said, pointing at her sister with an accusatory finger. “Why trust her again?”

“Yes, Dad, listen to your favourite daughter” nodded Patsy.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Polly, believe me: if I could afford for a better babysitter, I would. But we have to settle for the useless of your sister” he told her.

“Okay…” she gave in, disappointed.

Patsy looked at both of them with a frown. “Takes one useless to know another one” she spat without second thinking.

“And that’s why you are not even my favourite person to be around” commented Thomas, looking out of his window, calmly.

“Please, don’t start” said James after seeing Patsy opening her mouth through the rear-view mirror. “Let’s behave, even if it’s only for today. We’re going to spend the day in somebody else’s house”

A cruel smirk made its way onto Patsy’s lips. “Like we always do” she commented.

Thomas squinted his eyes. “Seriously, gal, if you only knew how much you disgust me, you wouldn’t talk to me” he said in a sharp tone.

Patsy imitated his expression and tone. “And if you only knew how much you disgust me, you’d finally die”

James kicked the matt. “Stop it you two! You are family!” he said, horrified.

“Who knows” said Patsy, shrugging. “I pray every night before going to sleep for being adopted”

“Keep dreaming, gal: you are my daughter and you are gonna have my southern motherfucking republican genes until you die” Thomas blurted out, annoyed.

Patsy kicked the floor with her two feet. “I hate you!”

Thomas hit the door with the palm of his hand. “I hate you more!”
James slammed on the brakes, red in the face. “Shut up! Everybody shut up! I swear to God that if you keep fighting, I’ll turn around and drive straight back at home”

“You’d be doing us a favour” said Thomas and Patsy at the same time.

“No! We are going to do fucking Christmas right and that’s final!” he screamed, looking at his three companions, of which only Polly was looking at him.

“It’s not Christmas, it’s December 21st” said Thomas, looking at him with the corner of his eye.

“I don’t care! You’re not going to embarrass me today! I had enough with Hamilton the other day!”

“True, the gremlin. Gosh, I still have to talk to him…” complained Thomas, pinching the bridge of his nose. “You really messed things up, James”

“Whatever you say, Dad” Patsy defended James. “Lucy-fer hasn’t called you or even appeared in the past days, and that’s a fact”

The four of them jumped in their seats when a horn sounded from behind. Just a second later, a car passed by their side at full speed. The voice of the driver could be heard, though.

“Get off the way, scatterbrain!”

James stuck his head out of the window instantly. “Fuck you!” he screamed, flipping the driver off.

“James, get back in and don’t make those lunatics mad! You can’t know how crazy a person truly is nowadays!” said Thomas.

James followed the vehicle with the glare and huffed when he saw it passing another car a few kilometres away by while hearing their horn again, in the distance.

“Seems like he has another victim” he said. “Really, the road looks like an episode of ‘Wacky Races’ these days…” James shook his head and resumed his driving, sighing. “Sometimes, I feel so alone, being the seemingly only polite and calm driver out there…”

Thomas gave him a look before passing a hand through his face. “Gosh, let’s this day pass by quick…” he muttered.

“THE FUCK IS YOUR PROBLEM, ASSHOLE!?”
“THEO, don’t swear in front of the kid!”
“Shit, Aaron, have you seen that?! That lunatic passed you by and honked at you! In what is the road
turning into!?”

“It’s not a big deal… And stop honking while I’m the one driving”

“If you honked from time to time, I wouldn’t have to do it for you”

Theo Jr. looked up from her book for a moment and then sighed. Her parents had been quite jumpy and nervous for the past days. Each time she asked them, she was answered by a forced smile and a not-reassuring: ‘It’s nothing, dear’. She had given up asking at the twelfth try. At least, she was going to see Philip and his sister today, they always knew how to cheer her up.

“I’m sorry if I’m not honking at everyone at the littlest chance I get” complained Aaron.
Theodosia rolled her eyes. “Gosh… It’s not only the honk, Aaron. Look, you’re driving under the speed limit”

“No, I’m alright”

“The police are gonna stop us”

“No, because I am driving just fine…”

“Yes, fine for a grandpa with cataracts”

Aaron gave her a nasty look. “You too?”

“I say what I see” she answered, crossing her arms childishly.

“Mommy, if you don’t like how Daddy drive, why don’t you ever drive when we go out?” asked Theo.

She knew she wasn’t supposed to get in the middle of a conversation of adults, especially when those adults were her parents, but she’d have done anything to have a bit of peace while reading her book. She looked up for a brief moment and saw her mother curving her lips in a mocking smile.

“I don’t know, my dear. Maybe because he’s a shitty sexist”

Theo knew that was the tone and the curved lips her mother wore when she was making use of her well-known dark humour and sharp sarcasm. Her father knew as well – it was one of the things they had in common, even! – but, for some reason, this time Aaron didn’t get it and threw daggers to his wife with the glare.

All of a sudden, Aaron slammed the brakes and took his seatbelt off. The two Theos looked
at him, in confusion. Aaron ignored them, getting out of the car while muttering curses. He circled the vehicle and stopped in front of Theodosia’s door.

“Aaron, what are you doing?” she asked, while her husband opened the door.

“Get out” he simply said, supporting his weight by putting one arm on the roof of the car.

Theodosia rolled her eyes. “Aaron, don’t be a child. Come on, we’re going to disturb the other drivers”

“Get out, you’re driving”

“Aaron, please, get back to your seat and keep driving. There are cars coming” she told him, scowling while looking over her shoulder.

“You don’t call me ‘sexist’ and go scot-free. Less in front of our daughter” he said, not moving one inch. “Drive”

Theo looked at her parents, having a glare fight. Finally, her mother lost, taking her eyes away from her husband. Groaning, Theodosia went out of the car and ran rapidly to the other side. Aaron and she sat back, switching places, at the same time.

“You’re gonna pay for this” Theodosia swore, putting the seatbelt on and driving forwards.

“Being married to you is enough punishment” retorted Aaron, looking out his window.

Theo sighed, going back to her reading. How much she needed to talk to Philip…

“I need to pee”

“Are you fucking kidding me, John?”

“I never make jokes involving bladders, Herc, they are not funny”

Lafayette was used to Hercules’ bad mood in the mornings (or whatever time he woke up, to be exact). They had been dating since college, and he had had enough time to learn to live with it and know he only needed a few hours to wake up completely to be his usual cheerful self.
But he also knew Laurens’ habit of being completely clueless and off of it in the mornings (or whatever time it was by the time he decided to get out of bed, as well). He had been living with them since Hamilton and Laurens broke up eight years ago and knew how to cope with it, as well – his great patience doing a big part of the job. But when you mix John’s morning clueless with Herc’s morning bad mood… Well, let’s say not even all the patience in the world would be enough to put up with their nonsense for too long.

And Lafayette was starting to lose it.

And it was only 3 pm.

“Why didn’t you go to the toilet before we left?” asked Hercules, rubbing his temples.

“Because I didn’t realise I wanted to go back then…” said the freckled man, as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

“So, you just wake up and don’t go to pee, like everybody else? What kind of idiocy are you trying to make me buy?”

“This is the way I am, respect me”

“Respect you…? Look…”

“I can pull in in some café, it’s alright” proposed Lafayette as soon as he saw his partner turning around to look at their roommate.

“No, it’s not alright” said Hercules, and did turn around to face Laurens. “John, you’re 30 years-fucking-old, man”

“And what does my age have to do with my pee necessities?”

“Because when you’re thirty, you must know certain things; like if you’re going on a long ride to your boss’ house, you should pee before leaving” He looked at Lafayette. “You’re not parking in any café”

“Herc…” tried to say the Frenchman.

“No! If we let him use their toilet, we’ll have to buy something”

“We’ll buy a snack, it’s no problem”

“Why do I have to spend money because a thirty-year-old man can’t control his bladder?”

Laurens frowned darkly. “You’re so annoying with my fucking age. Do I pester you with yours?”

“I am as old as you are!” said Hercules.

Laurens folded his arms. “Well, you sound more like a grumpy fifty-year-old”

“Please, don’t fight…” said Lafayette with a sigh.
“Look, if you don’t like the way I am, there’s an easy solution…” began to say Hercules with a tiny smile.

“Herc, please, I’m begging you” said Lafayette, now scowling.

Hercules ignored him. “The only thing you have to do is make your bags and leave to anywhere else”

“Putain…” complained Laf.

“I think it’s about fucking time”

“Oh, so that is what this is about, huh?” Laurens hit the backseat, furious. “Look, if I’m bothering you, don’t beat around the bush, just tell me in the face!”

Hercules turned around and looked him in the eye. “John, you’re a bother”

“Hercules!” hissed Laf.

“I don’t have to put up with this disrespect” said Laurens, hitting the backseat several times with the fist. “Laf, park the car, I’ll go by feet”

“Laurens, s’il te plait!”

Hercules laughed mockingly. “How far are you planning to go by feet and with a full bladder? Come on, don’t talk bullshit!”

Laurens threw daggers at him. “Don’t worry over my bladder, I’ll pee on a bush, like a fucking stray dog!”

“Non, nobody is going to pee on bushes…” said Lafayette, feeling a headache being born in his forehead.

“It took you long enough to become an overdramatic queen” said Hercules.

“Hercules, please!” said Lafayette, increasing the volume of his voice.

Laurens hit the backseat for the third time. “Well, it didn’t take you that long to remind me I am a leech” he talked back, with a broken voice.

“He said it, not me” said Hercules, as a defence.

“You’re not a leech, Laurens” said Lafayette. “Hercules, stop attacking him, he’s very sensitive”

“A smart ass is what he is” retorted Hercules. “Stop sticking up for him! You’re spoiling him!”

“I am supporting a friend in need!” Lafayette defended himself. “Something you should do more often”

“Tell him, tell him” said Laurens, sniffing.

Hercules frowned at them both. “I’ve been supporting him. I’ll always support him. But, for the love of God, Laf, do we need to keep supporting him in our house?”

“He has nowhere else to go!”
“I believe that crap for the first couple of years, but now? Didn’t he have time in six years of finding a house on his own?”

“They’re very expensive!” complained Laurens.

“And what do you think?” said Hercules, turning back to him. “That our house is free? We have to pay bills, you know? Do you know what a bill is?” he asked, sarcastically.

Lafayette inhaled through his nostrils. “Hercules, I told you, I am not going to ask for money to a friend that’s having a bad time”

“He hasn’t had time to recover from a broken heart in eight years?” he asked, crossing his arms.

“Those things need time to heal!”

“Bullshit. This man is better emotionally than me or you”

Lafayette clicked his tongue. “Look, I don’t want to fight. It’s Christmas”

“It’s December 21st”

“What did I just say?”

Hercules shook his head. “Fucking Alexander, he really dropped the ball with us…”

“To be fair, Alex is not to blame. The one who messed up was Laurens” commented Lafayette.

Laurens let out a sniff. “I thought you were defending me!” he complained.

“I can’t defend the indefensible, John” he said, shrugging.

“I am the punching ball of this family” cried Laurens.

“What a road he’s going to make us go through” complained Hercules, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Now, I can’t show my emotions with you or what?!” complained the freckled man, crying louder. “And I still have to go!”

“You should’ve leveraged the fucking hour it took Lafayette to pack all that food!” Hercules turned at his boyfriend then. “Which I don’t understand. Why did you pack food?”

“You have to bring something when you’re invited somewhere” said the Frenchman.

“Says who?”

“Politeness”

“Well, then, when Politeness invites us over, I’ll let you put thousands and thousands of Tupperware in the truck. That part of the car must be stinking”

Lafayette wrinkled his nose. “Just for that, you’ll have double ration of cauliflower”

Hercules gave a disgusted look. “Fucking cauliflower again?” he punched the door, enraged. “Fucking shit…”
Laurens sobbed for the brief moment of silence before talking again:

“I still have to go to the loo…”

Hercules was red in the face within seconds. “FUCKING HELL!!” he screamed, turning around and tried to launch himself at Laurens.

Lafayette gave them his full attention, now with only one hand on the wheel. “Herc, stop it! You’re going to strangle yourself with the seatbelt!”

Laurens lay down on the backseat, trying to get away. “He’s crazy!” he told Lafayette. His eyes grew wide when he looked through the windshield. “LAF, LOOK OUT!”

The Frenchman turned his head quickly and slammed on the brakes in an instant: “Mon Dieu!!”

“I am not going to go to your parents’ house for Christmas, Eliza, especially after what you’ve done!” informed Alexander.

Eliza turned to him. “Oh, you have all that planned, right?!” she accused.

“Really? After the trap I’ve lived today, do you really think you’re in any position to…?”

Philip screamed, interrupted their arguing. “Dad, look out!” he warned, pointing at the windshield.

“Holy crap!” he exclaimed, slamming on the breaks.

“I swear to God that if you spoil Christmas, we’re going to have it” swore James.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Like we’re not always having it over the stupidest things…”

Patsy cut off whatever response Madison was going to give to her father by screaming and pointing at the windscreen. “James, look at the road!”

“Holy molly!” he screamed, slamming on the breaks without losing time.
“I had a lot of wooers, Aaron! Men used to kneel at my feet!” said Theodosia, looking at her husband, infuriated.

Aaron puffed. “Yeah, that was almost ten years ago, Theodosia, you are no longer that young” he commented, gaining an offended gasp from the woman at his side. “Now, the only man who kneels at your feet is the podiatrist” he added, with a mocking smirk.

“Oh, you damned piece of…”

“Mommy, watch out!” screamed Theo, pressing the book against her chest.

Theodosia’s eyes were back on the road after hearing her daughter, growing wide. “Oh, my goodness!” she screamed, slamming on the brakes.

Aaron grabbed the handle and closed his eyes. “My God, not again!”

One could get to the Washington’s home by four different ways, that connected in front of the house. The four vehicles, that had gotten there by picking one of those four ways, were able to stop in time, a few inches from one another. Their occupants took a moment to breath and make sure their respective children were alright, and then, the drivers got out.

“Are you all alright?” asked Alexander.

He heard Eliza opening her own door and saw her looking around them. She nodded with a wee smile at Theodosia, at her right, and the woman imitated the gest, clearly embarrassed for the almost accident. By the Burr’s vehicle’s side, the emerging figures of Madison and Jefferson got out from their car, and the smallest man nodded at her husband, as an affirmative response to Alexander’s previous answer. Finally, in front of them were Lafayette, Hercules and John, who looked at them all cautiously. Hercules and Laf shared a worried glare, and when they saw they were fine, they nodded as well to Alex.

Eliza sighed along with her husband, feeling relieved at the sight of everybody’s well-being. She turned around, seeing her sister and children getting out of the car. Eliza smiled when she saw Philip holding Angie’s hand. The little girl was still a bit startled by vehicles for that almost accident Alex and Aaron had the other day. She held her in her arms, hugging her.

John’s voice, full of resent, broke the uncomfortable silence that had stretched among them.

“No, my feelings are not” he said, answering to Alex while he looked daggers at his two roommates.
Hercules groaned. “You’ll see what a day he’ll give us” he complained to his boyfriend.

Thomas rolled his eyes and closed his door. “We haven’t gotten in yet, and we almost killed each other already” he commented.

“Negative prick…” Madison insulted under his breath.

Theodosia sighed. “Well, merry Christmas everybody…” she said, sarcastically.

“Merry December 21st, you’ll say” retorted Aaron, walking to the front door.

Theodosia gave him a hard glare. “There he goes again!” she complained, re-entering the car and slamming the door shut.

Eliza and Alex shared a confused look. Then, shrugged and headed to the front door right after locking their car.

Martha was humming some old tune while cooking the stew she would give her guests for dinner that night when she heard the screeches of a few wheels outside. She waited for a moment, looking in the direction where the front door was, and smiled widely when she heard muffled voices arguing from the other side. She tapped the top and cleaned her hands on the apron as a habit.

“Georgie! Our guests have arrived!” she informed, walking to the front door, getting there in time right after the doorbell sounded.

“Weee” she heard George’s not-excited voice from the bedrooms.

She rolled her eyes. “Come on! Let go of that coke can refilled with vodka that fools no one and come here to greet them!”

“I am not… How did you…? Coming…!” he said, groaning frustrated, making her giggle.

Martha opened the door, smiling widely at the sight of the three best friends of her husband’s most trustworthy employee.

“Herc, Laf, Johnny!” she said, hugging the three of them as well as she could. “So glad to see you, boys!”

“Happy holidays, Mrs. Washington” said Hercules, tapping her back with affection.

She let go, laughing. “Mrs Washington is my bitchy mother-in-law, honey. You know you can call
“me Martha” she told them. “Come in, it’s cold outside!” she hurried them.

“Mrs… I mean, Martha, can I use the toilet, please?” asked John, biting his bottom lip anxiously.

“Of course, honey” she nodded. “It’s the third door down the hallway” she indicated.

John ran in the direction in a blink of an eye. “Thank you!” he said from the distance.

“Happy holidays, Miss Martha!” said Madison once he entered the house, stretching one hand.

Martha ignored it and hugged him as well. “James, how are you doing? Hope you’re not having a cold”

“Just recovered from one” he laughed, flushing.

“Oh, and who are these young ladies?” she said, when her eyes fell upon Jefferson’s daughters. “You grew so much since the last time I saw you!” she said, giving them another hug.

“Hi, Martha!” greeted Polly, cheerfully, hugging her by the waist.

“My, you’re almost a woman!” commented Martha before turning her glare to the oldest sister. “My dear namesake, how are you?”

Patsy shrugged. “Dad doesn’t let me go to a party a few blocks down here” she accused.

Jefferson rolled his eyes, standing behind her. “It didn’t take you long…” he complained.

Martha looked at the girl sympathetically. “Oh, that’s a pity, honey. But, we must obey our parents” she said, nodding at Jefferson. The man imitated the gesture as a ‘thank you’. “Do you want to help me cook?” she asked the two girls.

Polly jumped excitedly. “Yes, yes, yes!” she said, running to the kitchen.

Patsy shrugged once again. “I’ve gotta look after her anyways…”

“Hope they don’t bother you that much, Martha” said Jefferson, heading to the living room with James.

“Nonsense! They’re little angels!” she said, waving one hand.

“Try to live with them”

“Ha ha, very funny, Dad” said Patsy, rolling her eyes.

Martha looped one arm with hers. “Come here, I’ll teach you one thing or two” she told the girl. When she saw Jefferson talking with Madison, she lowered her voice and talked in Patsy’s ear. “Like the best spots to get out and in the house without anyone noticing”

Patsy smiled. “I liked you for something” she said.

“Go to the kitchen” laughed the older woman. “I’ll be there in a minute” she promised, turning again towards the door. She smiled widely once again. “Alex, my dearest child!” she said, running to hug him with all her might. “Long time no see!”

The man laughed while returning the embrace. “Good to see you, Martha. How are you?”
“Thrilled for today” she answered sincerely. She smiled at Eliza and Angelica. “Where is the third Schuyler?” she asked, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Peggy sent me a text telling me she’d carpool with Maria” answered Angelica.

“Oh, hope it doesn’t take them long”

“Auntie Martha!” said Angie and Philip at the same time, excited.

“My kids, come here!” she said, laughing happily.

Eliza smiled fondly at the sight of Angie trying to throw herself from her arms to Martha’s. She passed her daughter to the old woman, who hugged the little girl and kissed her in the forehead.

“Auntie, me too!” said Philip, scowling slightly.

Alex laughed softly, picking up his son. “There you go” he said, helping Martha to hold both children so they could hug her by the neck.

“They really love you, Martha” commented Eliza. “Philip isn’t usually this extroverted or willing to show affection”

“Except with Theo” teased Alex, elbowing his wife playfully and both laughed.

Philip blushed. “Daad!” he complained.

“Talking about the little angel…” said Alex, looking over his shoulder.

Theo entered the house, smiling brightly at the female owner. Her father was right behind, keeping her book inside her backpack. Martha let go of Philip and Angie, who greeted their friend.

“Well, hello there, little Theo” said Martha, kneeling down to be on her same level. “Glad to finally meet you!” she said.

“Same, Mrs Washington!” said Theo, taking a small bow.

The woman laughed. “You can call me Martha, sweetheart. Why so formal? Come here!” she said, hugging her as well.

“Martha loves hugs” Angie told her.

“I’m feeling it” commented Theo under her breath.

Once the embrace was over and the kids were told to go to the living room to wait for them to come, Martha approached Aaron, giving him a small nudge on one arm, well aware of how Aaron was not a fan of physical affection. Especially in public.
“Aaron, honey, how are you?” asked Martha, smiling sympathetically. “George’s told me what’s going on with you and Theodosia”

Aaron shrugged, feeling a bit exposed. “It’s going… as fine as it can go I guess?” he half-lied, trying to give the woman a sincere smile.

Martha’s frown told him she didn’t buy it, but, thankfully, let it go. “Well, patience has always been your virtue, Aaron. I’m sure everything will turn out fine in the end” she told him.

“Thank you, Martha”

“Where is your wife? Could she come?”

“She’s parking properly outside. Oh, she’s more fan of hugs than me”

“Good” said Martha, smiling mischievously and rubbing her hands like a cartoon villain.

The four guests laughed at the image and went to the living room while she waited at the door for Theodosia to arrive and be another victim of Martha’s hugs. Alexander put one hand on Aaron’s forearm, making the man stop in his tracks, and made sure Eliza and her sister were too focus on their own conversation to pay them any mind.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

Aaron moved uncomfortably in his spot. “Better. At least, I haven’t felt a lump in my throat since yesterday” he explained.

Alex frowned. “Aaron, if you need me to help you…”

“It’s alright, Alex” he cut him off, with a gentle smile. “I know you don’t work on cases anymore, I couldn’t ask you for…”

“Honestly” this time, Alexander interrupted him. “I’ve kinda gone back to it?” he explained, making the sentence sound more like a question than a proper piece of information.

“Oh, so you’re working with Jefferson and Madison?” asked Aaron, not impressed in one bit.

Alexander half-closed his eyes. “Really? How do you all always find out about everything?”

Aaron shrugged. “The power of gossip, I guess?”

The immigrant sighed. “Whatever… Back to the important matter…” he said, walking to sit with him on the couch, where Angelica and Eliza had made themselves comfortable. “Whenever you need anything, just ask me, even if it’s not a legal matter. It’s the least I can do; you were really helpful when it happened that thing with Reynolds” he explained, twisting his lips in disgust at the memory.

Aaron gave him a sympathetic smile. “It wasn’t a big deal” he told him, waving one hand, nonchalantly.

“Yes, it was” contradicted Alexander, shaking his head. “So, no matter how things turn out with
Jefferson and Madison, if you ever need help, ask me”

Aaron smiled warmly at him. “Thank you, Alex. I’ll remember”

“Seems like Martha has another victim in her embrace” commented Angelica, with a tiny smile on her lips.

Eliza laughed. “Poor Theodosia. She’s a novice”

Angelica clapped her hands as she got up. “I think we are needing something to drink” she declared, heading to the kitchen.

“Ange, it’s only three thirty in the afternoon!” said Eliza, cocking one eyebrow.

“It’s always wee hours somewhere!” her sister replied, already in the kitchen.

Eliza rolled her eyes and looked at the two men sitting by her right. “If she tells that story of the drama club again, I’m going to need a lot of drinking as well”

Alex tapped her arm, gently. “Betsey, honey, it doesn’t wash. You’re not going drink one drop of alcohol tonight”

Eliza frowned and removed her arm from his reach. “Party pooper” she insulted under her breath.

Theodosia joined them on the couch, sitting by Eliza’s left while stretching out. “Uh, Martha does know how to hug!” she commented, laughing with a blush. “I wasn’t expecting that”

“I could’ve warned you, but where would the joke be?” said Aaron, smiling apologetically at her.

Theodosia laughed, imitating the gesture. And, just like that, they were fine again. It was common in their relationship to be like that, and they liked it that way. For the moment, they were going to enjoy the party and the company of their friends, and their problems would be left at home, where they belonged. Not for long, though; they were strong enough to overcome them. And, with Eliza’s and Alexander’s constant reminders of support and helping hands, they felt safe.

Things went relatively good and peaceful for the first hour. Each person was with their group of friends; Angelica wasn’t able to find the alcohol cabinet; the kids had gotten along with each other quite easily. And, it was needed to say, Eliza felt happy for them. Especially when Jefferson’s youngest daughter came to her, excited about meeting her for the first time, along with her children. Alexander had told her about both Polly and Patsy, and even like that, she felt surprised by how excited the little one seemed to be about everything.

With that turmoil of energy, it was easy for her to get along with Angie, with whom she had been talking in all that time, knowing each other by asking each other questions. Eliza’s fond smile didn’t leave her face until her sister came in front of her, brow frowned, looking at her phone.
“Peggy and Maria got a flat” she informed.

“What?” she asked, getting on her feet immediately. “How are they?”

“Good, the tow truck came and helped them. But they don’t have enough money for a cab”

“I’ll go get them” proposed Alexander, getting up. “They don’t need to spend money in a cab when I can drive them, especially when they’re with a little girl”

Eliza hugged him immediately. “Alex, thank you so much! Do you want me to go with you?” she asked.

“No, Betsey, you stay here and stay calm. I can handle it” he reassured her.

Eliza shook her head. “No. Go with someone, even if it’s not me”

She turned her audition off – a speciality she had perfected after being seven years married to Alexander Hamilton – and scrutinized the whole living room, in search for someone who wouldn’t mind accompany her husband. After the incident, she didn’t trust Aaron with their car. And, besides, Theodosia and he were having a good time, and they needed it.

Finally, she saw Madison getting out of the kitchen, putting back on his scarf and heading straight to the front door. She smiled and talked, not caring about interrupting her husband. She didn’t know what he was saying, anyway.

“Hey, Madison!” she called, waving one arm, calling the attention of the other persons in the living room. “Are you going out?”

“Yes, miss Martha forgot to buy some spices. Why?” he explained, after being slightly startled at first.

He hadn’t talked with Eliza in his whole life. In fact, it was the first time he had the woman so close to him, and that counting on the fact that they were separated by several steps.

“Do you mind if Alex go with you? Maria and Peggy had got a flat, and they need the ride”

“Hm…” he looked at Hamilton, a bit uncertain. “I don’t mind, but what does he…?” he tried to ask.

“Perfect” interrupted Eliza, tapping Alex on the back. “There, I’ve gotten you a ride”

Alex gave her a hard look. “I told you to not get me any more rides” he reminded her. “And this is why: you made a worse choice than the last time”

“I turned the steering wheel on time, you idiot” Aaron defended himself, scowling.
“Don’t eavesdrop, noisy” retorted Alexander.

“With your average volume of voice, it’s not needed”

“Let’s have a peaceful time!” said Lafayette from the other side of the room.

Alexander sighed and walked directly to Madison. “We’re going in my car” he told the shorter man, passing him by.

Madison shrugged. “Alright…”

Everybody looked at Eliza as if she was crazy. Giving them no mind, she sat on the couch once again, resuming her conversation with Theodosia and Aaron, who looked at each other a bit dumbfounded before talking to her like if nothing happened.

Meanwhile, Madison had gotten closer to the table Jefferson was sat at with Lafayette, catching up.

“Remember to call 911 if I don’t make it back soon enough” said Madison, gaining an interpolative look from Lafayette.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Yes, yes…”

“When are you three going to make amends?” asked the Frenchman, with a bored tone.

“Well, this man made us to work together, if with that you’d feel better” explained Thomas, pointing at his friend, who scowled.

“Don’t call me ‘this man’. That’s the beginning of the ending” said Madison, offended.


“What do you mean you’re working together?” asked Lafayette, stopping an argument in time. He had had enough with the previous one back at his car. “You’ve been working in the same workplace for two years now”

“Ah, Hamilton has accepted to take care of Thomas’ case” explained James. “You know, about his daughters…”

Laf’s eyes widened in amazement. “Really? Those are such good news!” he said, smiling happily. “It was about time you could come to terms”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “We haven’t talked directly to each other, so don’t throw fireworks just yet”

James gave him a nasty look. “He’s such a negative person…”

The whole room was briefly startled by the sound of the horn outside. Eliza and Angelica bit their bottom lips, knowing that habit of Alexander too well. One honk was a warning. Two honks: he was starting to lose his patience. Third honk: ‘bye-bye, I’m leaving without you’.
“You better hurry; that was your first strike” explained Angelica.

James rolled his eyes. “And I was going to the supermarket to have some peace before dinner”

“James” called Lafayette, making him stop in his tracks. “I know Alexander can be difficult…”

“To say the least” chimed in Thomas.

Laf gave him a look, then continued. “But he’s not a bad person. It just takes time to know him. You have to… How could I say it…?” he thought for a moment; then, snapped his fingers. “You have to feed his trust slowly, so he can open up to you and not be that cold. Like bread crumbs”

“Bread crumbs?” repeated Thomas. “What is he now? A pigeon?”

Laf shrugged. “You call him gremlin, I thought you wouldn’t be that surprised with the example”

The horn sounded once again.

“Second strike!” the two Schuyler sisters said in unison.

James turned to Thomas, frowning. “Then, go yourself, Thomas. You are the one out of the two of us who likes to feed pigeons at the park, you’re trained”

Laf gave them a look, wrinkling his features. “Mon Dieu, Alex is right: you two are Bert and Ernie”

Thomas flushed at that and waved one hand to James. “Leave, before you’re left behind”

James sighed, defeated, and ran to the door, pleading Hamilton to not drive out the place without him. Once the door was closed, Hercules spoke up.

“Hey, Angelica. Where is Washington?”

“Yes, is he waiting for absolutely everybody to be here to show himself?” asked Laurens, with a tiny smile.

Angelica had shrugged and opened her mouth to reply, but the subject of the conversation appeared in that exact same time at the doorframe.

“Actually, Laurens, I was composing my personal carol” answered George, entering the living room with his hands at his back. “It’s called ‘A bunch of sub-animals invaded my house at Christmas; they’re going to pay’”

Laurens rolled his eyes. “Too long to be commercial” he spat, feeling a bit offended.
Martha came into view, cleaning her hands in the apron once again.

“Well, look who finally decided to join us!” she said, faking surprise and excitement. “None other than the host!”

“To be a host, you have to invite people over your house first” retorted George.

“Don’t start” hissed Martha, squinting her eyes dangerously. “And don’t get any closer to the cabinet where you keep the alcohol, or we’ll have it” she warned in a whisper.

Angelica leaned on her seat. “Where is it, by the way?” she asked. Then, quickly, she added. “Human curiosity”

Martha looked at her harshly. “No one is getting drunk. This is not the period for that kind of things”

“Hun, sorry I have to tell you this in front of all these people, but it is. A period where family has to be together with no way out is the perfect time to get blank drunk” said George.

“No alcohol” declared Martha, reaching for her phone in her pocket when it sounded. “We are going to have dinner, to chat and bond and… Oh, dang it!” she exclaimed as soon as she read the text she had received.

“What happens?” asked Lafayette, worried.

“Did you realize this is a bad idea?” asked George, hopeful.

“You can only wish” retorted his wife. She passed him her phone. “Your mother lost the bus and wants us to pick her up”

“Why did she text Martha instead of you?” asked Eliza, shyly.

George looked at her. “Because I turned my mobile off. Having you all here is enough suffering, I didn’t want to receive her calls or anything”

Martha looked daggers at him. “If she has called you and you didn’t pick up, then she’d give us quite the ride”

“What ride?” asked George, narrowing his eyes. “Are we going to pick her up??”

“Of course we are going, George! The poor woman has no way to get here!”

“And where is the bad part in that statement?”

“George, don’t start!”

“This is a signal from the universe!”

“No, this is just that maybe she got distracted by something and she lost the bus; it could happen to any of us”

“I don’t know about that, Martha” said Laurens. “There’s something out there: call it god, call it energy… But there is something”
“What a nagger…” complained Hercules under his breath.

“And the proof is that the Universe is always talking to us” kept telling Laurens. “There are no coincidences: if something happens, it is because of a reason”

“That’s interesting” said Eliza, nodding.

George nodded. “Yes. Listen to this bright spark; he’s smoked a lot of joints and he knows the secrets of this world”

Martha looked at Laurens up and down and then to her husband. “No. We are going” she declared, walking down the hallway, straight to their bedroom.

“Well, okay, she’ll come” George gave in. “But I’m not going!”

“Yes, you are! I am not going by myself!” shouted Martha in the distance.

“Then, don’t go! We can send someone from here! Like…” he scrutinized the room, meeting Lafayette’s eyes last. “My third favourite employee!”

“No, George, they’re our guests!”

George groaned. “Some guests we’ve got…”

“I thought I was your third favourite employee” said Angelica, with a raised eyebrow.

Washington turned to her. “Yes, but since Lucille came to my life, all of you had dropped one spot in my ranking, as she’s my number one”

“Who is Lucille?” asked Eliza.

“His rocking chair” answered Angelica.

Eliza looked at her sister, frozen in her spot, not knowing what to say or think. She finally shrugged, giving up in trying to understand her husband’s workmates.

“With all due respect, sir,” spoke Jefferson. “you can’t go around saying things like that you have a ranking of favourite employees…”

“Why not? Nobody listens to me, anyway” said Washington, shrugging. “Besides, I’m 54 and the president. When you’re that old and, if you ever achieve something in your life, you’ll understand me”

Jefferson gave his boss a nasty look while Martha came back, now wearing a coat, and looked with a frown at her husband.

“You’re still like that?” she asked, annoyed, pointing at his whole body with the palm of her hand.
Washington shrugged. “Like what? Bald and tired of living? I’ve been like this for several years”

Martha kicked the floor. “I thought you were already taking the car out of the garage!”

“Is it necessary?”

“GEORGE”

“Alright, alright…” he said, holding both hands up. “Gosh, I’m tired of this party and it hasn’t even started yet” he muttered.

“And put on a coat!” Martha said.

“Why? We’re going to Hell” he said, before slamming the door shut.

“What a man!” she complained. Her features softened when she looked at the people in the living room. “Could some of you watch the stew?”

Hercules gave his friend a nudge. “John, you do it”

“Mh?” said Laurens, taken aback.

Martha smiled at him. “Thank you, Johnny, I know I can always count on you!” she said, walking to him and giving him a hug.

“What?”

Martha let go of him and waved goodbye. “We’ll try to be here soon” she promised.

“Drive safely” said Eliza, waving back, as the rest of the people.

Martha nodded, throwing her a bright smile, and opened the front door.

“Come on, Martha, don’t make me wait! Having to go is cruel enough!” George’s voice hollered from the other side.

Martha didn’t hesitate in trying to reach his volume. “I am coming, you fatalist!” she yelled back, slamming the door shut.

“There’s nothing better than seeing other people’s shitty marriages to appreciate your own” commented the vice president.

“Angelica!” Eliza reprehended her.

She got up, ignoring her sister. “Well, now that they left, I’m going to look better for alcohol” she explained, exiting the place.

“Let me go with you” said Jefferson, getting up and following her.

“John, do you want me to help you?” asked Eliza, smiling at the freckled man.

“What are you saying?” said Laurens, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “I don’t like to cook”
“He only likes to eat” said Hercules.

“Herc!” said Lafayette, frowning at his boyfriend.

Laurens scowled at his roommate as well. “Yes, I do, so?” he asked, challenging.

Eliza got up from her seat. “I cook, and you help, then?”

“No, no, no. What do I do cooking at five in the afternoon?” he asked, waving one hand.

“Like if you did anything in the mornings… Or in life, in general…” said Hercules.

Laurens looked at him fixedly while Lafayette rolled his eyes and Eliza stood uncomfortable, seeing the scene. After a while, Laurens hit the armchair he was sitting on and stood in one leap.

“There, he has it for me… I’m the punching ball of this group” he complained.

“There he goes with the punching ball again…” muttered Lafayette, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Where the fuck is the kitchen?” asked Laurens, walking out without waiting for a response.

“Oh, jeez” said Eliza, worried over her friend and following him.

Patsy had reviewed her plan several times, her OCD taking the best (worst) of her as she did so. She only had to follow Martha’s instructions to sneak out of the house successfully. She walked directly to the laundry room as soon as the owners of the house left the place, leveraging that, for once, her sister was too focus in other thing that wasn’t making her life a living hell. Once she arrived, Patsy felt a few shivers going down and up her spine, hearing the voices of the rest of guests far away. She bit her bottom lip and waited, to see if one of those voices was her father’s. After not recognising none as Thomas’, she closed the door at her backs.

She looked around the small yet spotless room. There was a dryer and a washing machine side to side, and, above them, as promised, the rectangular window from which she could see the backyard. Patsy turned on the lights, though there was still natural light coming from the window, due to her unjustified fear of basements. She inhaled deeply and then walked down the four steps she had in front of her and headed directly to the washing machine. Patsy patted its surface, to make sure she wasn’t going to break it, and then jumped on it, carefully.

The machine did a bit of noise and she bit her bottom lip with more force, and waited for someone to burst into the room, yelling at her. But nothing happened. She sighed and threw a rapid glare to her pink watch. 17:26. She would only stay for a moment, maybe until six or half past six at
much, and then come back. It wouldn’t be long, and, besides, if Martha came back before her, she knew the old woman would make up something as an alibi in her defence.

Patsy took a deep breath and then started to count from one to three inside her head. The window opened quite easily, and Patsy thanked her namesake for their shared habit of having everything in perfect state. When the window was opened completely, she jumped in fear when a loud noise came from the other side of the door. Her heart skipped a beat when she heard accelerated footsteps at the other side of the door, and waited for someone to open the door and discover her.

Again, it didn’t happen.

Patsy heard muffled yelling and sighed, relieved. Whatever happened, it had nothing to do with her. She finally leaned in out the window, crawling a bit on the grass before getting up, and cleaned her black and purple dress and stockings.

“Well, hello there, honey”

Patsy froze. She turned her head to the right and looked up slowly, finding her father standing up against the wall; arms crossed and smiling slightly.

“Did you need a breather?” he asked, nicely.

“Em… I…” she stuttered, feeling her cheeks flushing. “Yes?” she said, making it sound more like a question than a proper answer.

“I needed one too” nodded Thomas. “What’s wrong? Are you feeling bad? Or were you just overwhelmed?”

“Em…”

“I ask” he interrupted, walking closer to her. “because when I see someone crawling out of a window, instead of getting out of the house through the door, I worry”

“Yeah…”

“So?”

“Em… I’ve got a headache?” she said, as insecure as before. “You know… The kids and all…” she added, rapidly, gesticulating.

Thomas nodded once again. His smile grew. “Well, then, it’s good that I haven’t let you go to that party. If your poor head can’t handle a few kids – who were not screaming or doing anything noisy – then, I don’t want to know what would’ve happened to you in a house full of music and screaming”
Patsy pressed her lips, upset. “Yeah, I guess”

“Are you feeling better?”

“Good as new” she answered, bitterly.

“Good” He embraced her by the shoulders and guided her back to the house.

“How did you know?” she asked, ending the silly game. “And don’t say because parents know everything”

Thomas sighed. “Patsy, have I ever told you how I met your mother?”

She was taken aback by that. “Uh… No? I don’t think so”

“Well, we were at a party, back when we were college students… You know, a bit after dinosaurs got extinct”

She had to laugh at that.

“And, well, some classmate of ours threw a party at his parents’ house, and his parents were two teachers the whole college hated with passion, and we all went there with the clear idea of destroying their place as a childish revenge. Then, some neighbour called the police, and we all ran out of there like bats out of hell, and that house had a laundry room just like this one. And your father had the same idea as you had today: I climbed to the window, crawled out, and then I ran, bumping into your mother, whom I ran with until we reached the college building, which was a few kilometres away from our classmate’s house. We laughed at that memory for our whole relationship”

Patsy smiled warmly, trying to imagine the scene. She entered the house, her father letting her go of his embrace to open the door to her. She looked at him, as he closed the door and headed to the living room, not saying anything else. Patsy cocked one eyebrow.

“And that’s it?” she asked, following him.

Thomas shrugged. “What did you want? A nine seasons story, full of little and irrelevant details?”

“No, but…”

“Look, this story has moral”

Patsy rolled her eyes. “My friend’s parents know she is having some friends over”

“No, no. The moral is that you have to go to college, so you can go to crazy parties without the need to sneak off your parents” He patted her on the back. “So, study a lot so one day your dream can come true”

“Alright…” she said, looking a bit unsure.
“Now, go watch some TV or whatever you teenagers do these days. Pikachu made a mess in the kitchen”

And, with that, he left her behind, with a puzzled expression.

“What??” she asked, confused.

“So, if I talk, because I talk; if I don’t talk, because I don’t talk. One way or the other, it’s my fault. It doesn’t matter what true intentions I might have had, it all blows back at me in the face. I stand their arguing and screaming 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, plus that damned more day of the leap year, and nobody thanks me. All I receive are complains. Hey, I know they’re making me a favour by letting me live with them without asking anything from me, but squatters also need some respect. Now, I understand he’s nervous because of his sister, but, to be honest, he should’ve seen it coming. I’m always telling him to go step by step, because Thomas is the kind of person with no peripherical view. Metaphorically talking. But he always ignores me. His whole family is a nightmare come true, and he knows it as well as I do. How could he think things would end if he accepted Lucy’s offer? I knew something fishy was going on, but did I say something? No. Because, then, I am the bad guy.

“And I love him. I care for him. I wouldn’t put up with half of what I put up with him if there were not feelings involved. But he can get on your nerves quite easily. And then he doesn’t understand who his daughter takes after… After you, man, after you. Do you know how it is like to live with a man who always wants to be right? You can’t tell him anything. I live in the Minesweeper.

“And his family has always hated me. I never knew why, but they hate me. Lucy hates me on unimaginable levels. Which is funny, because, I haven’t talked to her more than a few words. And those words were for the sake of good manners. Because I can be a lot of things, but rude will never be one of them. I understand if you don’t like me, but you could at least explain it to me, right? When I don’t like somebody, I either I pretend to be polite, or tell them. I am transparent. Like the water.

“Maybe it’s because I am a water sign. I had a cousin… Well, I have, she’s still alive… And, one Christmas, she was asking us all for our birthdays to tell us our horoscopes. It turns out I am a Pisces. Which makes sense, because I always had this sixth sense that warns me about people and situations. And I also have strange dreams that eventually turn out to be premonitory… Besides, maybe because of that I always wanted a fish as a pet. I know they don’t do much, but, you may not think so, but they keep your company. I always was a very lonely kid. The bookworm kind of kid.
“I asked my parents for a dog, but they never bought me one. I still have that business unfinished with them. I was always at home, because I’ve always been very sickly, and I always had good marks. So, I don’t know what the problem would’ve been. Money, no, that’s for sure. Nelly had a dog a few years before I was born. But Nelly always had it all. Nelly is my older sister, by the way. She was the favourite. I never understood it, she had worse marks than me, she was way less obedient than me… But my parents bought her everything she asked for. I am not jealous, I love her, but it’s a bit unfair.

“I don’t like injustices. I couldn’t have kids yet, but I know I wouldn’t do that, at least, without a reason. But what kind of reasons could a parent have to do such a thing? It’s like they do it, so the siblings can fight and hate each other. Can a person be that sick-minded? I know I shouldn’t be telling this about myself, but I am very pure at heart, so I don’t understand how some people can be so wicked. I never have bad intentions. When I do things, I do them with my best intention. I admit I may have a bit of a bad temper, but, jeez, that’s way better than being an asshole.

“Oh, sorry, I’ve told you half of my life. It happens to me sometimes when I feel nervous. Do you want to talk about something?”

Alexander kept driving with his glare glued to the windshield and both hands on the steering wheel. He waited before speaking, loving the silence that reigned for that brief moment. Maybe that was the way Eliza and all his friends felt when he talked about something. But, at least, he talked about interesting things, not about his personal life.

“Yes” he said, finally. “I once knew a shy and quiet man named James Madison. Do you know what happened to him?”

“He went to a therapist when his depression hit him harder than ever and this therapist told him to talk when he felt his anxiety growing too fast”

“Ah… You had an answer for that too…”?

James shrugged. “It’s just that I didn’t want the ride to be silent… The last time we were in a car…”

“Radios were invented for something, you know?” Alex interrupted.

“That’s tricky, because we can have different tastes in music” said James, looking at the gadget.

“Don’t worry, I have a trick”

“What trick?”

“The owner of the car decides, and their occupants shut up”

“Ah… Sounds a bit fair”

“I only care about it being practical…”
Alex waited a few moments and, when he heard nothing at all, he supposed Madison wasn’t going to talk again. He didn’t want to hear music, honestly. So, he didn’t turn the radio on and simply kept driving.

“Ah, by the way…”

_Nice going, Alexander…_ he told himself inside his mind, while twisting his lips in annoyance.

“I never thanked you properly for defending me when Adams said I did his paperwork wrong”

Well, he wasn’t expecting that at all. Alex took a moment to answer. He ended up shrugging.

“You’re welcome, I guess…”

“Can I ask you a personal question?”

“No”

“… … … I don’t mind, I’m gonna ask”

Alex snorted. “Why did you ask for permission if you were going to do whatever you wanted?”

“Because I have manners”

“Whatever…”

“Why did you decide to help us?”

No response came. Alexander saw the entrance of the garage Maria’s car had been taken to a few kilometres away and he sighed, relieved. _Just a more couple of minutes…_

“Hamilton?” called James, frowning slightly.

“I am not going to answer, Madison” he said, sharply. “That’s why I told you you couldn’t ask me something personal”

“Well, it involves both Thomas and me as well, so it isn’t _that_ ‘personal’…”

“In that case, you shouldn’t have stated it as such”

Madison rolled his eyes. “Jeez, why do you have to be so mean when you talk to me?” he complained.
“Give me reasons to be nice, and I’ll be” retorted Alexander.

“What did I do now?” asked James, offended.

“Aside from telling me the first half of your biography just because I asked you ‘how are you doing’ as a polite, decent human being?”

“You could’ve cut me off. Nothing has stopped you before to do so”

“Look, Madison, let’s have a peaceful car ride”

“It’s you the one who’s giving me the cold shoulder!”

“You cold-shouldered me when Jefferson came back, and I never complained that much!”

“The fuck you haven’t!”

“Okay, I have. But because I had reasons to do so!”

“What reasons? Me not sucking up to you?” asked James, annoyed.

Alexander finally exploded. “No! You doubting about my word and trying to get me fired for one disagreement! Those fucking reasons, friend!”

“… Oh” was all James could say after a pause. “Yes, those seem like good reasons indeed” he nodded.

“I can tolerate a lot of things and a lot of insults, but when someone I trusted belittle my word, I can’t let it slide! And then you said you don’t understand how some people can be so wicked? Ask yourself, because you seem to be an expert in the subject! Gosh… I can understand that if we haven’t talked more than a few words, you could’ve done it, but after all the things I did for you? You keep it with the right people, that’s what you do! Letting you in was one of the worst mistakes of my life, and I rarely, rather never, let myself trip over the same stone twice! So, I’m sorry if I don’t want to play along with your stupid attempts to try to start a conversation with me”

Alexander blurted out in one breath, slamming the brakes once they reached the entrance of the repair shop, where Peggy was waiting for him, along with Maria and her daughter. His sister-in-law waved at him, smiling sheepishly, and he took a deep breath to calm himself before going to her. It did nothing to him.

“Until he didn’t make me talk, he didn’t stop, my goodness!” he complained.

He hit the steering wheel with the palm of his hand. He opened the door and tried to jump out of the vehicle, but was pushed back by the seatbelt, which existence he had forgotten.

“Fucking seatbelt!” complained Alexander once again, trying to take it off.
Madison looked as Alexander fought a bit with the seatbelt, and doubted about if he should try to help him, but fortunately, the CFO was able to unlock it. Alexander pushed the seatbelt, so it could go back in place faster. That act of impatience cost him a blow in his mouth. James flinched in his seat, feeling the hit in his own mouth for a moment. He put one hand in his own lips, as he heard Alexander hissing from pain while he rubbed his now swollen lower lip.

James leaned closer, trying to touch Alexander’s shoulder, but was shoved aside even before he could even graze the fabric of his coat.

“Don’t you dare” warned Alexander. He opened the door of the car. “You’ve done enough for the rest of the fucking year”

James flinched once again when he heard the thump Hamilton made when he closed the door with rage. He saw him approaching Peggy and Maria, who looked at him worriedly. Peggy was the first one noticing his injured lip, and handed him a handkerchief Maria wet with a bottle of water she had inside her purse.

After a moment of rethinking it too much, James decided to get out of the car. Maria smiled at him and greeted him first. Before he could have a chance to return the greeting, the little girl at her side ran to Alexander’s side, arms up in a clear sign of wanting to be held.

“Alex, happy holidays!” said the girl, jumping in excitement.

Hamilton’s expression softened considerably. “Hi, Susan, long time no see” he said, picking her up. “You’ve grown so much!” he told her, making her laugh.

“I’m sorry you had to come” said Peggy, playing with her short curls. “We got a flat and then I lost the control of the car and…”

Alexander shook his head. “Are you three alright?”

“Yes, but, Maria’s car…”

“What’s important is that you are alright” insisted Alexander.

Maria nodded. “I agree. Besides, my car needed a bit of fixing, anyways” she added, giggling a bit with a flushed face.

“We were going to get some groceries. You don’t mind?” he explained.

“Not at all” said Maria, taking her daughter in her arms.

“After picking us up, how would we complain?” added Peggy.

“Will I be able to buy some candy?” asked Susan, looking at her mother.
Maria laughed affectionately. “Honey, it’s not our money”

“Martha wouldn’t mind” said Alexander.

Susan cheered at that statement, letting herself go of her mother embrace. Maria bend down to prevent the girl from falling and followed her to the car, Peggy by her side. And both women resumed whatever chat they were having while waiting for the two men.

James eyed Hamilton for a moment, following him to the car. He knew trying to initiate a conversation with the immigrant after the moment of ire he lived less than five minutes ago was risky, but he decided to give it a try when he saw how easily Hamilton calmed himself thanks to Susan’s presence.

“I didn’t know you knew Maria’s daughter” he commented, with a cocked eyebrow.

Hamilton’s silence at first was enough response for him, though he felt more relaxed and satisfied when he was given a proper answer.

“I had to know her when I took Maria’s case”

James was taken aback at first. “I thought Aaron took her case?” he half-asked, confused.

“He did” nodded Alexander.

They re-entered the car, and James looked sideways to see Alexander making sure the three girls on the backseat were too focus on their own conversation to pay them any mind.

“Let me ask you something, Madison” said Alexander, turning on the radio so their chat could be more difficult to eavesdrop. “If Jefferson and you didn’t trust me with a financial plan, why did you ask me to take care of something as personal and serious as his daughters’ custody? Or his own money?”

“I could simply not answer you” said James, a bit resentful.

“Fair” said Alexander, shrugging with a tiny smile. “Then, I’ll have to make my own theories”

“Shoot” challenged James, folding his arms.

“You told me you had no one else to turn” he recapitulated. “What about Aaron? He practises and he’s the best lawyer in the staff. Though don’t tell him I told you that”

Madison rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry, I wouldn’t want to spoil your reputation of having a rock as a
heart” he spat. “For your information, I asked him” he admitted, after a brief pause. “I asked him in its day”

“And what happened? Did he have to quit for Augustine?” asked Alexander.

“No. He declined the same day I asked him, before anything of that happened. He told me to ask you”

“That’s how he knew” said Alexander, more to himself than to the man beside him. “What a crafty…”

“Needless to say, I thought he was joking”

“What made you change your mind?”

James shrugged. “I was being honest, Hamilton. We had no one else to turn. And Lucy is one hell of a woman. I told you that family is a nightmare come true”

“Yes, for the short scene I witnessed the other day, I can tell you live in ‘Falcon Crest’” commented Alexander.

“That’s sugar coating it”

The conversation ended at the same time the light changed to red and the vehicle stopped. Peggy burst out laughing at something Maria had said, startling Madison in his seat, and making him turn his head to look at her.

“How is his anxiety going?” asked Alexander suddenly.

“What?” asked Madison, returning his attention to the driver.

“Jefferson’s. He has an anxiety disorder, if I remember correctly”

The car kept going down the road once the light changed to green. James moved in his seat, a bit uncomfortable. He didn’t like when other people found out about his own mental illnesses at his backs, and thus he never did it to anyone.

“Yes, he has” he answered simply.

“Well, tell him on my part he’s going to be fine” said Alexander, not minding about the evasive to his question. “I don’t know about the money, that’s another story. But, his daughters? He’ll win by a landslide” he assured.

“Well, you haven’t known Lucy’s lawyer yet…” James commented, under his breath.

“After of before knowing them, I will keep caring about the same” said Alexander, surprisingly hearing him above the women’s chattering and the music surrounding them.
“What?” he asked, curious.

“What the girls want. They want to stay with their father, they told me so”

“Even Patsy?” asked James, impressed after seeing Alexander nodding. “Who would’ve thought”

“So, don’t let whatever that woman tells you get over your head easily. She will need a lot of evidence to prove a kid must be taken away from their parent. On the personal, Jefferson is doing fine. Don’t tell him I said that, either…”

“I won’t”

“You will”

“Probably…”

“I’ll deny it, not a problem” Alexander waved one hand. “You still have my phone number, don’t you?” He received a nod. “Good. Then, if you need anything, call me”

“At what hours?”

“What do you mean?” asked Hamilton, frowning in confusion.

“Your schedule” answered James, just as confused.

“Madison, how can you call me ‘owl’ and then ask me for a schedule? See why I call you incoherent?”

He rolled his eyes. “Just because you don’t sleep as a normal human being, means you have no schedule…”

“Whatever…”

“His last lawyer told Thomas not to call him after seven pm”

“Well, and if Jefferson received a call from his sister at eight about an important matter?”

“He waited until twelve pm”

“Twelve pm…?” repeated Alexander, turning his head for a brief moment to look him in the face. James shrugged. “He wasn’t a morning man…”

Hamilton huffed. “And you paid him and not me?”

James moved uncomfortably in his seat.

“Ay, Señor…” muttered Alexander.

“What?”

“Call me whenever you need it, I don’t mind…”
James squinted his eyes in suspicion. “Why the sudden kindness and flexibility? You just screamed at me five minutes ago”

“Madison, I scream at all times” said Hamilton, as a matter-of-factly. “I told you that the first time we worked together. Seems I have to tell you again” He smiled, half-mockingly. “It’s clear you’re a Pisces, as you have short term memory loss, like that cartoon fish”

Any other time, James would have feel offended. But a rapid flashback of Thomas’ fight with Patsy a few hours before crossed his mind, and he couldn’t stop the fit of laughter that came over him when he realised how ridiculous the similarity was between his current friend and former friend. James only stopped laughing when he started to cough.

“What?” asked Alexander, with a cocked eyebrow.

James shook his head. “You just reminded me of someone, that’s all…”

With the positive switch of mood, they parked in the parking lot of the supermarket. Maria was helping her daughter with the seatbelt and Peggy was already out of the car, alleging she was feeling hungry already and wanted them to hurry. Alexander promised to buy her a bag of chips and not telling anything to her sisters.

“Ah, by the way” he added, now talking to James. “tell Jefferson that, when February arrives, I can go with you when the lease would be renovated any day except from the 19th”

“Why not…?” tried to ask James.

“Not your business” he interrupted sharply.

“Sorry… Too much bread crumbs…” he muttered.

“What?”

“Nothing”

Hamilton’s phone sounded with a message, and he read it as soon as he was out of the car. His frown didn’t pass unnoticed by the rest of the group.

“Is something wrong?” asked Maria, worried.

Alex took a moment to answer. “It’s Eliza, she… She’s telling me to buy several things to make stew”

“What about the stew miss Martha was cooking?” asked James.
Alexander shrugged. “I don’t know, she didn’t say anything more” He kept his mobile on his pocket. “And, to be honest, I don’t know if I wanna know” he added.

Peggy nodded, and leaded the way to the automatic doors, still complaining about how hungry she was. Susan soon followed her example, telling her mother she wanted something to snack soon.

“Ah, Madison…” called Alexander, once they had reached the entrance.

“Yes?”

“Angie is three and Philip is going to turn six in February. I remember you asked for them the other day” he said.

“Six years already?” asked James, a bit impressed.

Alexander nodded. “He still talks about you. Don’t know what he saw in you”

James rolled his eyes at the comment. After a pause in which they saw Peggy trying to find a cart that didn’t turn left when she wanted to go right, Alexander added:

“Maybe you should spend some time today with him, or come to visit from time to time”

James smiled at the thought. “I’d like that” he nodded.
Merry December 21st (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

"And we still have to dine..."

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black (jet) humour, sex scene (not explicit), misogynistic, homophobic and offensive comments.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

I think I don't need to say that I don't agree with any of Mary Washington's comments.
(More will be said at the final of the chapter)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I’ve sent Alex a message” said Eliza, blocking her phone and putting it on the table.

“What a mess you just did, man…” complained Angelica, shaking her head in disapproval.

“It’s your fault for letting Pikachu Scissorhands near the kitchen” said Jefferson.

Lafayette pointed at Hercules with an accusatory finger. “It was this man’s idea, he wouldn’t shut up about what a useless annoyance John is”

“I am here, you know…?” said Laurens, clearly upset.

Hercules smiled ironically to his boyfriend. “Honey, that kind of comments are the ones that made me look for comfort in my PlayStation’s embrace instead of yours”

“Let’s let the couple problems for later, please. Right now, we need to clean this mess” said Aaron.

“Yeah. This is starting to spread… And it’s stinking the whole house” Theodosia nodded in agreement.

The seven persons stood in a circle, looking at the spilled stew that spread across the floor, a few steps away from the top, now completely empty of food.

“Thomas, clean it” ordered Angelica.

“Why me?” asked Jefferson, crossing his arms in annoyance.

“Because you’re the secretary, aka, the errand man. Now, obey”
“No way. I’m on vacation. And cleaning was never part of my list of obligations…”

“I’ll clean it” proposed Aaron. “Where is the mop?” he asked Jefferson.

“I don’t know!” he said, offended.

The lawyer rolled his eyes. “Man, chill… It’s a holiday…”

“Some holiday…” complained Lafayette.

Aaron made his way as well as he could without stepping on the spilled food. Eliza held his hand, being at the other side of the circle, and helped him go to the closet door that was at her left.

“Now what? We’ve got no dinner. They are gonna kill us” said Hercules.

“I told you I messaged Alexander” said Eliza, scowling.

“By the time they are back, it’d be dinner time already” said Jefferson.

Angelica looked nastily at him. “Why do you have to be always so pessimistic about everything?”

“I’m not pessimistic, I’m a realistic…”

“Go with your realism somewhere else, then” she complained, waving one hand at him. “If we won’t have time to cook another stew, I can always cook my famous roasted ham” she proposed, with a proud smile.

“Famous where?” miffed Jefferson.

“You wouldn’t know, it’s an exclusive list for people who have achieved something in their lives” she retorted.

“You two, chill…” said Hercules.

“But do you have the ingredients to cook roasted ham, Angelica?” asked Eliza.

“Why don’t we order a pizza?” asked Laurens, lazily.

“How are we going to eat pizza on Christmas, John? Don’t say bullshit!” said Angelica, wrinkling her nose.

“It’s not Christmas, it’s December 21st” said Jefferson.

Angelica looked daggers at him once again. “Thomas, honey, there are blows flying around here, and your face looks a lot like an airport”

“Chill!” said Hercules one more time.

“I can always make some pie” said Eliza, clapping her hands.

She walked to the fridge, being suspiciously watched by Angelica’s narrowed eyes. Aaron
had made his way with some washcloths and the mop. He knelt on the floor, cleaning the mess. Sooner than later, Theodosia helped him.

“Here. Fruit pie!” declared Eliza, after scanning the fridge from up and down.

“Fruit?” repeated John with a disgusted face. “What kind of fruit?”

“The kind that’s healthy” she retorted.


“Yes, there’s a banana, oranges, kiwis, cherries… And there are also a few grapes” she said.

“Grapes? What is that shit?” said Laurens.

“Aren’t there any apples?” asked Lafayette, gentler.

“Nope”

Angelica huffed and made her way to the fridge, stepping on the wet spot Aaron had just cleaned. The man looked daggers at her. The oldest Schuyler sister looked inside the fridge and groaned.

“Dammit, it’s true, there are no apples”

Eliza looked offended at her. “Why would I lie about apples?”

“Because you’ve been obsessed with making fruit pie since you saw that video on YouTube”

“Don’t you dare” warned Eliza, while she took a couple of kiwis out of the fridge. “Don’t you dare spoil my moment”

“Good, we have dessert” commented Jefferson sarcastically. “What about the dinner? You know, what someone eats before the dessert?”

“I’ll text Alex and tell him to buy ham” said Angelica.

“Eliza already texted him to buy stew ingredients” Lafayette reminded her.

“Allright, we’ll make stew, then…” said the vice president, with a sigh of defeat.

“We’re back to the beginning, then. We can’t be sure they’d be here before Washington and his wife!” complained Jefferson.

“Order one” proposed Laurens, shrugging.

“He’s lazy even for fixing a problem he created” commented Hercules, passing a hand through his face.

Laurens looked daggers at him. “I know a very good restaurant that makes an excellent stew, for your information!”
“It can’t be that good if you can afford it” said Hercules, gaining a dirty look from the freckled man.

“And what do we do? Split up the bill and pay it?” asked Angelica.

“We didn’t bring any money” said Theodosia.

“Well, you always have to bring some!” condemned John.

“How can someone like you demand anyone to bring money anywhere?” asked Hercules.

“Bon sang, Hercules, cut it out!” complained Lafayette.

“Besides, the Washington should pay” said Theodosia. “They invited us”

“But Pikachu dropped the stew they made. He should pay” said Jefferson, pointing at the freckled and frowning man.

Hercules laughed. “Pay and Laurens don’t go in the same sentence. Unless there is a ‘no’ in between”

Laurens was red in the face. “You fucking annoying prick!” he hissed. He punched the table with fury. “Okay, then! I’ll go and pretend to eat it there; then, I’ll put the stew in a Tupperware and I’ll came back home!”

Jefferson smiled sarcastically. “Oh, nice. So, we’ll have a Tupperware of stew for sixteen persons plus children. What will we do? Lick the sauce by turns like cats?”

Laurens punched the table once again. “We’ll have the fruit pie to compensate it!”

“You mean the fruit pie that’s the size of an average plate?”

“Besides, we still don’t know how that will taste” commented Angelica.

“Angelica, can’t you see I’m holding a knife?” threatened Eliza.

Her sister half-closed her eyes. “You’ve spent all your marriage with a knife in your hands, and Alexander’s still alive. I’m not afraid”

Laurens passed a hand through his red face. “In that case, we can eat the vegetables Laf brought!”

Laf hissed. “Merde…”

Hercules narrowed his eyes. “You forgot the fucking Tupperware with vegetables in the truck, right?”

“Oui…” he admitted, scratching the back of his neck.

“Fucking perfect; now the car must be stinking more than before…” complained Hercules.

“I’ll take it out now…” promised Lafayette.

“The damage is already done”

Laurens looked daggers at his roommates, then added: “Well, then… Then, we can always put some cheese and cold cuts to be in the way! And marzipans, and nougat, and… and… and… shortbread cookies! Fuck! Everything are objections!”
“But what kind of dinner is that??” asked Jefferson.

“Come with something better!” challenged Laurens.

“Could you calm down?” said Aaron. “We can explain what happened to Martha and helped her do another stew when Alexander comes back. It’s alright”

“Burr, you can’t afford talking twice a year and say the truth in one of them. It doesn’t compensate” said Jefferson.

Aaron looked daggers at him. “But why do we have to go nuts because this man dropped the top?” he said, pointing at Laurens.

“It was an accident!” said John.

Aaron laughed sarcastically. “Been there, said that, got a t-shirt”

“It’s true” added Theodosia, looking at everybody. “I gave him a t-shirt with the quote for his last birthday”

“People” said Eliza, calmly. “Let’s relax. Martha is a very understanding woman”

“Yes, that’s true” said Lafayette. “But, she also has the temper of a demon when she wants to…”

“That’s why I sent her a message explaining to her what happened, so only George would have to put up with her bad mood. By the time they’d be back, Martha’ll have vented and calmed down”

Eliza turned around, returning her attention to the fruit and hummed a melody while everybody else at her backs shared glares of bewilderment.

“Eliza, that’s a plan of genius” said Angelica. “How did it occur to you?”

“Don’t sell me low, sis, I can be smart as well”

“I wasn’t saying that…”

“Besides, I’ve been married to Alex for seven years. It’s not the first time I do something like this”

At that, everybody had to agree.

Martha wanted to kill someone when she read the message she received, but contained herself. They had already arrived at the bus station, where only an old lady stood, looking at the world as a person on a mission. She sighed and blocked her phone.
“Laurens dropped the stew, the kids are making some more now” she explained, lips pressed.

George scoffed. “Still thinking this was a good idea?”

“Shut up, George”

“Tell the universe to shut up, it’s the one who hasn’t stopped sending you signals since the sun rose”

They both took their seatbelts off. Martha looked through her window and waved one hand at her mother-in-law, who didn’t return the gesture though she was watching her. Martha moved the hand uncomfortably to her short curly hair and scratched her head, in an attempt to pretend she hadn’t been ignored.

They waited for a couple of minutes, sharing confused looks as Mary didn’t move one inch from her spot though her eyes were fixated on the vehicle. Martha looked at her husband and indicated him to go out and talk to her. George said ‘no’ with the head, and she hit him on the arm, gaining a groan from the man. She ignored him, as she had succeeded in making him get out of the car.

“Mom” said George as soon as he was close enough to her. “Why don’t you get in the car? Do you need help?”

Mary looked at her son up and down. “I was expecting you to come to receive me and to open me the door as a good son” she spat. She turned her head slowly to the car. “Why I am not even surprise?” she muttered, walking to the car.

George looked at her and sighed. “We started soon…”

He made his way back to the car, seeing with his peripherical view his mother standing at the other side of the co-pilot seat. Mary frowned at the sight of Martha from the other side of the window, and, after a moment, tapped twice on it. Martha immediately rolled it down.

“Happy holidays, Mary” she said, trying to sound as nice as possible. “How was your…?”

“You’re in my spot” interrupted the old lady.

“Excuse me?” asked Martha, blinking surprised.

Mary pointed at her. “You’re in my spot”

George closed his door once he sat back in. “Mom, you can seat on the backseats, don’t make Martha move for no reason” he said, calmly.

Mary frowned at him. “I think she could use some moving” she commented, pointing at her with the
“Or is she trying to have her own personal gravitational force?”

“Mom!” exclaimed George.

Martha forced a laugh. “It’s okay, honey. She’s right, I need to do some exercise, anyways…”

Martha opened the door, got out of the car and re-entered the vehicle, now sat on the backseat.

“Enjoy of your spot, walking raisin version of Sheldon Cooper” she muttered, closing the door with too much force. She saw George smiling and she scowled. “Shut up”

“I didn’t say anything” George defended himself.

“I can hear you think”

“Marthita, if you could truly hear me think, you’d have asked me for a divorce a long time ago”

Martha looked daggers at him while she put on the seatbelt. Mary let herself fall on the copilot spot and closed the door with a thump. She looked around, seeing her slim form too separated from the dashboard.

“Aren’t you going to help me move the seat in a more comfortable position?” she complained, patting below the seat.

“Wait, let me…” said George, leaning and making the seat roll forwards. “There… You could ask, you know?” he said on the quiet.

“I’m sure that if I were one of your little buddies you wouldn’t need me to say anything. You only live for your friends. Your poor mother could die for all you care” said Mary, her voice shaking slightly at the end.

“No, Mom, it’s just…” said George, feeling a lump in his throat.

Mary’s sad tone changed for one as dry as a desert. “And then your father didn’t understand why I got my tubes tied after he got me treacherously pregnant with you”

Martha leaned back on her seat, biting her bottom lip while she saw George looking straight at his mother. He looked at her with the corner of his eye for a brief moment. Enough for her to understand how much he was hating her right now, though. Martha cleared her throat and leaned forwards again once George had started the car and had begun to drive.

“You know, um… The kid… I mean, George’s employees are making some stew for dinner” she commented, trying to lift up the mood.
Mary wrinkled her features. “Stew for dinner?” she repeated, disgusted. “My God, no wonder why you can barely fit through doors”

“Mom” warned George.

“This time, I was referring to you too”

“That’s not an excuse…”

“And what are your employees doing cooking back at your house? Since when a host ask his guests to cook?”

“Well, I made some, but something went wrong and…” Martha tried to explain, wanting to defend her husband.

“If something went wrong, you fix it” interrupted Mary. She huffed. “And then you criticised that mad fairy for being an oppressor” she spat.

“I am not oppressing anyone, they messed up and tried to fix it because we had to come to get you…” he said, sighing.

“Ahh, so now it’s my fault?”

“No, I never said that” said Washington, calmly. “Besides, George is not gay, mom…”

Mary puffed. “Yeah, right. That man is more inside the closet than a Christmas present in the middle of July”

“Hum, Mary…” Martha tried once again. “If you don’t like stew for dinner, the wife of one employee is making a pie”

“What kind of pie?”

“I don’t know, a pie…” Martha shrugged.

“Only God knows what you’d put in there… You want me dead”

“Nooo” said Martha immediately. She threw a nasty glare at George when she heard nothing coming from his mouth and gave him a nudge.

“Hmm?” he said, lost in thought. He looked at his mother. “Oh, yes. Nooo, nooo” he repeated in a fake tone.

“And who is gonna be there?” asked Mary, looking at her son. “Do you have more minions than last year or are you stuck in the same place?”

“Please, mom, don’t call them that. And I’ve got a good staff, actually”

Martha smiled brightly when she heard George talking like that about his workers.

“What staff?” asked Mary, bitterly. “The garden gnome, the tart, the monosyllable, the bimbo, the junkie, the loser, Adams…”
“You only know Adams’s name, when he’s the one who’s always missing work?” asked George, in annoyance.

“No, it’s just that he’s so irrelevant I didn’t give him any mind when I chose the nicknames.”

“Well, no nicknames tonight. They all are good persons and workers, and they helped make the company what it is today.”

“What? A failure?”

Martha’s smile dropped when she saw her husband giving Mary no response. The old lady puffed once again.

“Silence speaks louder than words, sometimes”

It only took Martha to see George’s knuckles turning white at his used force to hold the steering wheel to start praying.

Patsy was surprised when she saw watching the children was way more bearable than standing the adults, whose voices could be heard from downstairs, arguing about something in the kitchen. According to her sister, Laurens had tried to move the pot from one ring to the other and ended up dropping it to the floor. As Polly had told her, Laurens had complained about how heavy the thing was, and she suspected that was the reason why it happened.

Patsy thought it was because he was an inept. But, let’s keep on going with Polly’s theory for everybody’s sake.

Polly had been drawing some inexistent world Alex’s daughter and she had imagined a couple of minutes later of knowing each other. It seemed they clicked, age difference being damned. She always felt a bit impressed at how children could make friends with such an ease. But they were children, what would they know? At that age, having someone who drew and talked about nonsense with was enough…

Alex’s son had been listening to Burr’s daughter – who, absolutely, haven’t taken after his father, as she hadn’t stopped talking in all that time – about a book she was reading. And she felt surprised at how clever the little girl was, being so young.
In conclusion: those four children had shown more maturity than their parents and parents’ co-workers, and she didn’t know if she should be worried, proud or a mix of the two. The only thing that was able to make them go crazy was when the door was heard being shut, and Alex and James’ voices were heard, silencing the arguing once and for all.

“Daddy’s back!” screamed Alex’s daughter, getting on her feet. “Philip, come on!” she said, pulling her brother up and dragging him to the door. “Pick the drawings, Polly, I wanna show him!”

“Slow down, sis!” said Philip, though he shared a funny glare with Burr’s daughter.

“Each of you, slow down, actually” spoke Patsy, getting on her feet. “The last thing I need is some of you rolling down the stairs. Then, it’ll be my fault”

She led the way downstairs and to the kitchen, where she found Lafayette retelling the story of what had happened with the stew. Aaron and Theodosia were on their knees, cleaning the floor with some wet cloths. She got closer to them once the kids ran wildly to the new arrivals.

“Do you need help?” she asked.

“We almost finished, dear” said Theodosia with a smile.

Patsy shook her head. “I don’t mind” she insisted.

Theodosia shrugged and gave her the cloth she was using. She got up and exited the place with the bucket, heading to the bathroom to fill it with some water to finish washing the floor.

Meanwhile, the explanation was already over, and Alexander rolled his eyes while putting the bags on the kitchen table.

“But why did you let this good-for-nothing get near the food?” he asked, looking directly at Hercules. “When we lived together, I was the one cooking for a reason, and it wasn’t because I loved it, precisely”

“I vouch for that!” said Eliza, her eyes focus on the almost finished pie.

Laurens’ face was bright red by his ex’s declaration. “What a gratuitous attack! I don’t have to stand this!” he screamed, spiting on the floor afterwards and getting out the room.

“Dirty asshole, we’ve just cleaned!” screamed Theodosia, who came back in time to see the scene.

“Honey, don’t swear, the kids are here!” pleaded Aaron.
“Don’t spit, this is not your fucking house!” screamed Alexander.

“This man as well…” complained Aaron, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Johnny, don’t get mad, c’mon!” said Lafayette aloud, going after him.

“He’s not mad for real!” said Hercules, frowning. “He’s just pretending so he can have an excuse to leave and not help! He does that after every dinner!”

“What a figure of a family…” commented Jefferson.

“Like you’re one to talk” said Madison.

“He just arrived and he’s already being a pain!”

Angelica sighed. “Fuck, we can’t be in the same room for more than one minute straight without fighting. And I can’t handle this shit on a free day with no alcohol in my organism”

“Woman, you have a problem” said Alexander.

“Yes, Alex, I do. And it’s called ‘workmates’” she nodded.

“Aunt Angie, are you an alcoholic?” asked Angie, tilting her head.

“Where did you learn that word??” asked Alexander, picking his daughter up.

“Oh, yes!” said Eliza all of a sudden. “I forgot to tell you I wanted to drop them out that nursery school”

“You forgot?” repeated Alex, scowling. “Good time to tell me, Betsey, with Philip about to turn six!”

“Don’t get me in one of your fights…” said Philip, folding his arms.

“We are not arguing, son, we’re talking”

“Well, you’re talking too loud…”

Jefferson laughed at that. “Don’t come to the office, then”

Angie could stop her father on time before a fight was born. “Daddy, look, Polly and I invented a story and drew some parts of it!” she said, pointing at her new friend, who was holding the papers.

“How do you like them, uncle Alex?” asked the little girl, passing him the papers.

“Don’t ‘uncle’ him, Polly” said Jefferson. “That’s humanizing him”

“You humanized me first by asking me for help because everybody abandoned you” spat Alexander. Then, with a gentler tone, he addressed the two girls. “This is so well done, sweethearts”

“Really?” asked Angie, excited. “Philip is going to help us write it!” she explained.

“I said I’d think about it” clarified the kid.

“Don’t be like that to your sister, Philip” said Alexander, putting the girl back down.
Maria had been looking affectionately at the scene. She felt someone pulling her dress and looked down, seeing her daughter hiding shyly while watching the kids interacting with each other. Maria smiled warmly as she bent down.

“Susan, honey, why don’t you go with them?” she asked.

Maria was expecting the shake of head. Susan had been getting better at socializing after the divorce, but she still had a lot of shyness and fears to overcome, and though it broke her heart, Maria always put a brave face to encourage her. She wouldn’t push her if she said ‘no’, but she would make sure to babysit the children, so she could spend some time with kids among her age.

This time, life had other plans for them, because before Susan could give her the negative answer, Theo got closer to her, waving sheepishly.

“Hi, there, Sue, how are you doing?” she asked politely.

Susan smiled at her. “Fine…”

“Wanna meet my friends? Philip and Angie have been wanting to meet you since I talked to them about you!” she explained.

“They have?” asked the girl, blinking surprised.

“Of course!” said Theo, nodding. “Here, I’ll introduce you!” she offered, stretching one hand.

Susan looked at her mother for approval, and Maria nodded as soon as she felt her daughter’s eyes on her. That made the girl smile, and took Theo’s hand, letting her lead her to the rest of kids, who were discussing something about whatever story they had imagined while the adults were minding their business. Maria couldn’t help the smile when she saw the grins on the other three’s faces as Theo introduced her daughter to them.

She looked at Aaron unconsciously, seeing him and his wife smiling as much as her. She only was back to the real world when she heard Alexander fighting with Angelica.

“But how are you going to make another stew? It’s six pm!” he told her. “Those things take time, because they need to settle!”

“And what the hell do you suggest, then?” asked Angelica, arms in akimbo.

“I don’t know, what else can we do before seven?”

“Let’s make sandwiches” proposed Peggy, all of a sudden. “We can make them hot, as it’s cold…”
“Hot sandwiches…?” repeated Angelica. “But how the fuck are we going to have that for dinner? What are we now? Anarchic hippies in a commune?”

“I am suggesting, gosh, don’t shout at me! Jeez!” complained Peggy, heading to the door at her backs.

“That is, she says one shitty idea and then she leaves, so she can feel that she did something good” commented Angelica.

“Fuck you!!!” screamed Peggy from the entrance.

Alexander scowled. “Peggy, watch your fucking language in front of the kids!”

“They are not in front of me anymore!”

“Please, stop screaming!” pleaded James. “Let’s have a peaceful party!”

A crash from the entrance, accompanied by a soft ‘shit’ from Peggy, made them all – but Eliza, who was concentrated in only cooking – ran to the room. There, they found Peggy hesitating in touching the wall-length mirror that faced the door and had a small crack on the side.

“Good one, klutz…” said Angelica, crossing her arms.

“Leave me alone, it was an accident!” Peggy defended herself.

“And then you say you are not influential, dear” teased Theo, elbowing her annoyed-by-the-joke husband.

“What did you do, woman?” asked Jefferson.

“I don’t know. I was cursing at Angelica and I gesticulate when I mutter curses, and then I hit the glass with the finger I had a ring on and… And… I didn’t use that much force!” she explained, getting nervous.

“Well, there, it’s okay. Martha will understand…” tried to console Alexander, embracing her by the shoulders.

Laurens and Lafayette came in through the other door that connected the entrance with the living room and saw the scene, gasping in surprise.

“Oh, jeez… Whoever did that is gonna have seven years of bad luck” said Laurens.

“You are not helping, John…” said Alexander.

“Odd” commented Hercules, sarcastically.

Lafayette frowned at him. “Didn’t you complain about the car stinking? Go get rid of the fucking Tupperware, then!”
Hercules rolled his eyes and swung the door open, stepping outside and stopping in his tracks to frown at something at his right. He turned around, a confused expression on his face.

“Hey, guys, were these flowers withered when we arrived?” he asked, pointing at the row of flowerpots that adorned the porch floor.

“What flowers?” asked Alexander, going to his side.

“I saw them when we arrived” said Maria. “And took a photo, remember?” she asked Alexander, taking out her phone and starting to scroll down. “Here” she said, passing the mobile to Hercules. “They were fine!” she said, a bit confused.

Angelica shrugged. “The cold, maybe…” she suggested.

“Withered flowers are bad omen, as well” commented Laurens.

“Annoying mystic prick…” muttered Hercules.

A shrill scream from Eliza made them all jump. Alexander was the first one to run back into the kitchen, worried sick, and close followed by his sisters-in-law.

“Eliza, what’s wrong?” he asked.

“Daddy, a cat!” explained Angie, hiding behind her brother.

“He came through the window!” said Philip, trying to calm his sister down.

“It’s gonna eat the pie” commented Susan, calmer than the other four kids.

Alexander and the rest of the group looked at the counter, where they saw Eliza with the pie held above her head, trying to protect it from a black cat that persisted in getting close to her. The animal leapt a few times, making her scream again. She looked behind her, seeing the whole group gathered at the door and she ran to them, hiding behind Alexander. The pie closed to her chest.

“Get it away, get it away!” she pleaded, shaking like a leaf.

“She’s afraid” commented Patsy, getting closer to the scene.

“Most like terrified” said Aaron, looking worriedly at his wife’s friend.

“Not Mrs. Hamilton; the cat!” clarified the teenager, walking to the counter and petting the animal on the neck. “See? She’s harmless!” she said, holding the animal between her hands.

“She’s the cats’ whisperer” said Laurens, in a laugh.
“Dour beings understand each other” added Thomas.

Patsy frowned at him. “What if I take her home?” she challenged.

“What if you sleep in the garden until you get rid of her?”

“No, nobody will sleep in the garden” said James, with arms in akimbo. “Patsy, please, take her out”

The girl nodded and headed to the door after the group made way for her to pass, murmuring cuddles to the animal until she let her on the ground and closed the door. At the same time, Eliza was trying to even her breath while Alexander rubbed her back affectionately.

“Betsey, it’s okay, Patsy took her out” he told her.

“It was only a kitten, honey” comforted Theodosia.

Eliza shook her head. “I hate cats”

“One stray cat Peggy took in when we were little had it for her” explained Angelica. “He used to scratch her, hiss at her… It was funny”

“No, it was not!” said Eliza, frowning offended.

“For you, who were the victim. For me it was a way to entertain myself in the afternoons”

“A black cat is also a bad omen” said Laurens.

“See?” said Eliza.

“That was Peggy’s fault. She broke the mirror in the entrance and set off a series of disgraces for sure” explained Laurens.

“At least, I could save the pie” commented Eliza, sighing with relief.

“Hooray…!” fake-cheered Angelica, Alexander and Peggy at the same time.

“But we still have no dinner” reminded James.

“Why don’t we use John’s and Peggy’s ideas?” proposed Maria. “I mean… Yes, it’s not a proper dinner as the one Martha had planned, but it’s better than anything”

“Thank you, Maria” said John. “It’s good to know someone appreciates me”

Hercules rolled his eyes. “Cut it out, Whine the Pooh”

Maria decided to ignore John flipping Hercules off and kept talking, trying to cheer the mood.

“Then, it’s settled. I’ll set the table and you get some cold meat or whatever” she clapped her hands,
smiling softly.

“Let me help you” said James, getting the dishes and some glasses out one of the cupboards.

“Thanks. You, kids, follow us. Keep playing in the living room” she ordered, leading them to the room.

Angelica groaned as she opened the fridge.

“What a sad dinner…” she commented.

“At least, we’ve got food” said Alexander.

“But no alcohol”

“Yes, that kinda sucks…”

It didn’t get long to settle the large table for the adults and a small one Martha had prepared for the children, at the other side of the room, where they could be easily watched, even though Patsy already said she was going to eat with them. A sixth sense told her she didn’t want to eat with the adults. After the pot incident, she had made up her mind completely.

James had decided to spend a few more minutes than necessary putting everything perfectly in place, separating the plates and the dishes by the same amount of distance.

“No one is gonna notice, you know?” said Maria, her back against the wall. “They are just gonna come and destroy your hard work”

“I know, I’m used to it” he commented. He sighed, tired. “Gosh, Angelica is right. Living this without alcohol is hell”

Maria eyed him for a moment. She glared at the children, seeing them too focus on disusing something and Patsy with her eyes glued to her phone, clearly bored and trying to ignore the world around her. She sharpened her hearing, noticing Eliza arguing with her sisters about not putting too much food, as they already had her pie. A nasty comment by Angelica about the pie made Eliza start screaming and the others began to take sides on the discussion.
She got closer to James, who was cleaning the tablecloth, erasing imaginary dust from it, and tapped him on the shoulder.

“Hey, do you want some?” she asked.

Maria proceeded to raise her left wrist, adorned by a thick, large bracelet that matched with her red dress. James cocked an eyebrow, and she threw one last glare to the youngest in the room, before taking off the little ball that adorned one upper part of it, revealing it to be a tap. She took one glass and turned her wrist slightly to the side, filling the glass with some dark red liquid it contained.

“I’m showing this to you because you’re one of the few that I like of this team” she explained, passing him the now full glass.

James took it hesitantly. “But, Maria, what is that?” he asked, pointing at the now-not-so-clear-bracelet.

She side-smiled. “Do you like it? I bought this on Amazon a few months ago. It’s a bracelet bangle flask, and it’s cute as well to wear. So, I can drink alcohol on PTA reunions without anyone noticing and have a nice accessory” she explained, filling another glass for her.

“They don’t know what to invent anymore…” muttered James, watching her. “And what is this?” he asked, raising his glass a bit.

“Wine” she answered, taking a sip of her own glass.

James watched his glass and shrugged, taking one sip as well. He nodded in approval.

“Hey, it’s good” he complimented.

“Of course it is. It’s a Pinot Noir, duh”

James choked on his second swing. “What?? Really?”

“Yeah… What were you expecting? Box wine? That’s for drunkards…” said Maria, wrinkling her nose in disgust.

“But, Maria, what are you doing with this??”

“What? Were you expecting me to not bring alcohol to an off-the-office reunion as well?” she asked rhetorically. “Please, Madison…”

“But what are you? The dealer of the office or what?”

Maria shrugged. “No, but I dated one once”

“What??”
“There are a lot of things you don’t know about me, Madison” she said, half-smiling while wiggling her eyebrows.

“… …”

“Do you want some more?”

James looked at the children with the corner of his eye and then lowered his glare to the half-full glass. *What the heck*, he decided.

“Yeah, but let’s drink in some of the rooms. Here, in front of the children, I feel bad” he said.

Maria smiled and nodded. “Between Jefferson and you, I always liked you better for some reason” she commented, while exiting the place with him.

“Don’t serve so much bread!” complained Eliza. “The pie will be ready in a bit, and it’s gonna be too much food!”

“Then, we’ll not eat the pie!” said Angelica, filling a third plastic dish with chorizo.

“No! I haven’t been cooking it for the whole afternoon and I didn’t face a cat, so you can now let it uneaten!”

“You didn’t face it, you hid behind your husband”

“Whatever! That pie is gonna be eaten! If not today, tomorrow!”

“We’ll leave tomorrow, Eliza”

“Hopefully” muttered Aaron, exiting the place rapidly with the dish Angelica gave to him.

“Then, I’ll send you all slices of it!” threatened Eliza.

“I’ll throw it away!” screamed Angelica.

“FOOD CANNOT BE THROWN AWAY!”

“Eliza, for God’s sake, calm down!” said Alexander, filling one dish with the recently hot sandwiches. “Let’s have a peaceful dinner. If someone doesn’t like the pie, then, don’t force them to eat it”

“What’s wrong with you now?” asked Jefferson, taking out some coke cans from the fridge. “Did you take a whole box of Valium?”

“An overdose of Valium is what you’re gonna have to take in order to get through your shitty live, new poor” spat Alexander, getting out the kitchen.
“Fuck off, you evil gremlin!” shouted Thomas, red in the face.

“Your bitch mother, asshole!” the CFO shouted back in the distance.

“I’ve gotta say he’s right there. She was an evil bitch” agreed Thomas, nodding.

“Please, everybody, calm down, stop teasing!” begged Lafayette, overwhelmed with the food he saw being put on the dishes. “Gosh, what a dinner… I hope Washington is in a good mood…”

“What time is it, anyways?” asked Peggy. “I think it took both Martha and him a while…”

“Or maybe they don’t want to come back” commented Hercules. “I couldn’t blame them…”

“There’s a clock over there” said Eliza, pointing at the wall where the door was.

“Five thirty??” read Jefferson. “That’s wrong”

“The clock stopped” said Angelica.

“Uuuuh, that’s a bad omen as well” commented Laurens, with his hands in his pockets and waiting for the oven to make a sound, beside Eliza, both with waists against the counter.

“Everything is a bad omen with you, man…” complained Hercules.

Jefferson just gave an eye-roll to the HR manager. “You’re more annoying than James, who reads me the horoscope every day”

“Oh, he does that with us too…” said Lafayette.

Eliza frowned at her sister when she saw Angelica taking out another plastic dish, and opened her mouth to tell her off when the door being swung open startled her and the rest of the room. Their heads turned in the direction of the front door, through which George Washington and his wife entered, accompanied by a thin and tall old lady with brow frowned, all dressed up in a black dress and a grey cardigan. Once her eyes met theirs, they felt a shiver up and down their spines, and the whole team shared a troubled glare.

“Fucking hell, we’re gonna dine with Dracul…” muttered Laurens, looking at the lady up and down.

“Hush” said Lafayette, elbowing him in the side.

“We’re back!” informed Martha with a tone that tried to match its cheerfulness before leaving, and failing resoundingly. She entered the kitchen and her eyes fell on the burners, which she saw empty. “Oh? And where is the pot with the stew you where preparing?” she asked, through clenched teeth, trying to not sound as angry as she was feeling.

“Yeah, that…” Eliza laughed a bit. “Em… A bit of complications occurred…” Her eyes moved uncontrollably, trying to focus on anything that wasn’t Martha’s face. Her husband entered the kitchen in that moment and she smiled. “Alexander came back late with Madison from the supermarket, and we didn’t have enough time to make another one without making us all wait way too much”

“Eh?” said Alexander, looking at the new arrivals. He frowned at his wife. “No way, Eliza, I am not
“Thank you, friend…” said John, squinting his eyes at him.

“Besides, I was late because that place was a war field” continued Alexander, ignoring his ex’s glare. “Ask Maria or Madison if you don’t believe me. We had to get through places by elbowing strangers. And, when we were already on the line to pay, an old fat lady cut into and we had to let it slide, because otherwise you are seen as rude”

“Gosh, I hate those fat ass fossils” said Mary, clenching her teeth.

“Welcome to my daily live, honey” said Eliza, sarcastically.

Martha passed a hand through her hair. “Okay, okay, don’t worry… This can be fixed”

“Yes, we already fixed it” said Peggy, smiling. “We made hot sandwiches”

“Hot sandwiches…?”

Peggy nodded. “Yep. Alexander put them on the table already. Oh, we also served a bit of cold meat and cheese… A few marzipans, shortbread cookies, bread… Oh, Eliza made fruit pie as well!”

“Fruit pie?” repeated Mary, wrinkling her features. “What the heck is that fucking shit?” she asked, looking at the brunette woman the curly-haired girl had pointed at.

Eliza swallowed when she felt Mary’s eyes on her. “Um… Well… You know… You take some fruit and…”

“But what kind of fruit?” interrupted the old lady.

“The one that’s healthy” said Laurens, resentfully.

“John, I swear to God…” muttered Lafayette.

“Mom, please” said George, taking one step closer to her. “They did it with all their best intention”

“Oh, nice, so we’re going to eat on plastic dishes like some stupid toddler on their shitty birthday party, but nothing’s wrong, because the intention was good”

“We can serve you on a normal dish…” suggested Aaron.

“And what fruits does that pie have?” asked Mary, looking angrily at Eliza.

Eliza choked in her own words. “Em… Well… I…”

“Bananas, oranges, kiwis, cherries and grapes” answered Angelica, looking nastily at the old lady for the bad time she was making Eliza live.

“I am allergic to cherries” exclaimed Mary, still with her eyes glued to a now trembling Eliza. “What do you want? To kill me?”

“No, no, I didn’t know” said Eliza, taking John’s offered hand to calm herself a bit.

“I won’t be that lucky” whispered George.

“Ma’am, you don’t have to eat it if it’s gonna hurt you” said Alexander, walking to his wife to
comfort her. “We have other things on the table” he reminded her, taking Eliza’s free hand.

“She has other things on the table” reminded Peggy, timidly.

“Stop nagging with the sandwiches…” said Angelica.

Mary now looked daggers at the youngest Schuyler, and Eliza sighed with relief. “And what kind of
sandwiches?”

“The ones with two slices of bread and something else in the middle” spat Alexander.

Mary turned her head rapidly at him, angrily. “Do you want to shut up, fucking ass-kisser? You
came here thinking you’re the big thing and you’re nothing else than a pigmy orphan who got my
son in his pocket. The people back at your island kicked you out because they were ashamed of you”

“Gosh…” muttered Hercules, taking a step backwards with Lafayette.

“Ma’am, don’t make me mad, I was trying to be calm during dinner!” said Alexander, starting to feel
enraged.

“Hun…” said Eliza, trying to contain him.

“Fucking depraved, you couldn’t choose between one genre or the other and so you decided to fuck
both until you found a good full wallet to grab. You got your mother’s whore genes”

Alexander tried to take a step forwards, being retrained by Eliza’s trembling hands. “But who the
hell do you think you are to come here and accuse me for not loving my wife and calling my mother
that?!” he screamed.

“Mom, please!” said George, frowning. “Don’t say things like that to my employees!”

“My God…” whispered Martha, a hand over her mouth. She walked to Alexander. “It’s okay, it’s
just that she speaks her mind too often” she tried to excuse her mother-in-law.

Mary puffed. “Of course I do. I am 79 years old, I’ve lived long enough to be sincere if I want to”

Thomas scoffed, unable to control himself. “That must’ve felt like looking yourself in a future gender
bend mirror, huh, Hamilton?”

Hamilton’s cut remark was stopped by Mary’s soon movement towards Jefferson.

“What do you have to criticise, human waste? Living from your sister’s charity though you hate her,
because you have no self-love nor dignity. You had to ask that banished man over there for help
because no one want to be by your side if you don’t have money to offer; the only one who still
stayed was that repressed fag whose parents kicked out of their house and bank account for being a
pill popper”

“There, for talking” said Alexander, still a bit taken aback for the speech.

“Ma’am, how do you know all that?” asked Jefferson, annoyed.

“Mom, did you search for my employee’s personal information?” asked George, arms in akimbo.
“Are you surprised, though?” asked Martha, eyes half-closed. “She did the same to me when we started dating.”

Aaron cleared his throat and took a step forwards.

“Excuse me, ma’am, but no one insulted you…” he tried to say to calm things down.

“Shut up, inner wiener, you are so sad that you couldn’t get a normal girlfriend, you had to get in between a shitty marriage because no normal and single lady with self-esteem would have ever dated you, and you knew that as well. You are no man, you are nothing”

“… … Ma’am, I’m gonna ask you to calm yourself before you could insult someone…” said Aaron after a moment of silence and with a tiny voice.

“Thank you very much…” said Alex, Thomas and Theodosia while looking nastily at him.

“Well, now that my mother introduced herself to you, why don’t we eat so this night can get over sooner?” asked Washington.

Everybody nodded in agreement, and tried to not make eye contact with Mary as she made her way to the living room, muttering curses to all of them.

“I’m gonna protect the children” said Theodosia.

“Thought Maria and Madison were there” said Aaron, with a cocked eyebrow.

“No, I saw them exiting the place a few minutes ago” she answered.

“Well, someone go look for them” said Angelica. “I don’t want to spend more time than necessary with the evil granny of Simon Cowell with no alcohol”

Hercules made a face. “Stop annoying us with the alcohol…”

“Honestly, I am on her side” said Aaron. “I’m so overwhelmed after what just happened that I wouldn’t refuse a glass of whiskey…” He frowned slightly at Angelica. “Hey, have you seen if there’s Seven-Up in the fridge?”

Washington inhaled through his nostrils, wrinkling his face in disgust. Without looking, he grabbed the knife that was on the counter beside him, slowly. Martha grabbed his wrist firmly.

“No, George” she ordered.
Washington groaned and let go of the knife through clenched teeth. Alexander let out a sigh after having been watching the floor in all that time, lost in thought, and walked straight to the door, no making eye contact with anyone.

“I’ll go look for Maria and Madison” he explained.

“Alex…” tried to call Eliza, worried over his prior silent.

She stopped in her tracks when Aaron looked directly at her, and she nodded, letting the man go after her husband. Eliza rested her chin on the palm of her hand, sharing a worried look with Laurens.

“Is it necessary to have that CD of carols playing in the background?” asked Mary, sat in front of her son and narrowing her eyes at him while *Jingle Bells* sounded in the background.

Martha smiled softly. “For setting the mood” she explained, sheepishly.

“And are your employees going to take long to come back?” she asked again, sharply.

George shrugged, his eyes fixated on the dish full of marzipans he had in front of him. He felt Martha moving uncomfortably in her seat, by his left. Laurens looked at her, at the left extreme of the table and smiled softly at her when their eyes met, trying to comfort her. By the HR manager’s right, Hercules and Lafayette, who took Martha’s hand to give her physical support, were sat, looking boringly at the different set of plastic dishes that adorned the table.

Angelica, sat at George’s right, looked at her sister Eliza, who had an empty chair at her left, waiting patiently for Alexander to come back and fill it. The two sisters shrugged. Peggy, sat at the right extreme, facing Laurens, began to tap her fingers on the table to entertain herself a bit. She had to stop when she felt the annoyed look Mary dedicated her. She looked at her right, where Theodosia had her chin on her clasped hands, looking at nothing exactly and with the chair on her right as empty as the one in front of it.

Theodosia glared up, feeling Peggy’s eyes on her, and she sighed as quietly as she could, wanting her to understand this was starting to be as difficult for her as it was for Peggy. And Peggy had to leaned back on her chair, feeling defeated as even the optimistic of the group was starting to feel desperate for the growing pressure on the environment. Theodosia looked at the other side of Aaron’s unoccupied seat, seeing Mary looking at the wall with her chin up and a stern face. She looked a bit further, seeing Thomas sat in between two empty chairs reserved for both Maria and
Eliza began to move her finger in circles on the red tablecloth, wanting the time to go faster. A few giggles made her look up and she saw, a few steps away, the children table, where they were already eating and chatting peacefully. She didn’t know if she should feel ashamed for admitting that she was feeling envious of their easy world right then. Maybe she would have replaced Patsy as the babysitter, but she couldn’t do that to the poor girl. She was still sixteen, she wouldn’t have to live these things for a few years more…

Angelica’s groan brought her back to her serious and uncomfortable world of an adult.

“George, how big is your house?” she asked, looking at her boss. “Because I think we may call the police to search for our lost friends…”

Washington sighed. “It was you the one who sent them”

“That much it’s true” commented Eliza, gaining a dirty look from her sister.

“Why don’t we eat?” asked Laurens.

“Yes, the hot sandwiches are starting to be cold sandwiches” said Peggy, looking sadly at the plate full of untouched sandwiches.

“What’s wrong with you and the sandwiches? Is that a new kink or what?” asked Thomas.

“No, seriously, we should start eating” said Lafayette, stopping the fight in time. “I’m sure Alex and the rest won’t mind”

“No” said Mary sternly. “We must not eat until we’re all seat on the table. That’s called manners, I assume neither of you know what that is”

“Then, why do you complain?” asked Eliza, feeling offended.

Mary looked at her up and down before speaking. “Because I can and because it’s rude to be late as well, Mrs. Rabbit”

“Excuse me, what did you call me?” said Eliza, leaning on her seat.

“Mrs. Rabbit” spat the old lady, sharper than before. “You get pregnant just by looking at you. No wonder why you are married to who you’re married to”

Eliza looked at her nastily for a good moment, inspiring through her nostrils. Mary ignored her, and decided to look at the rest of the group.
“What do you bet that that guy sneaked into one of the rooms once he found that Playboy girl, told the other two to get lost, and the rest is history”

“Ma’am, don’t insult and don’t create problems” Theodosia defended her friend.

“I don’t create problems, I speak the truth” said Mary, looking harshly at her. “Listen to me, I’ve got experience on these matters. I was married to a cheater asshole once”

“Mom!” exclaimed George, indignant.

“George, you’re old enough to accept the truth: your father was a son of a bitch”

George huffed, and Martha was fast enough to hold his hand and try to calm him down. Eliza simply leaned on her seat, eyes dangerously squinted.

“Excuse me, ma’am, my husband may not be perfect and have lots of defects, but he’s not a cheater” she defended Alexander, chin up with pride. “He wouldn’t do a thing like that. Ever”

They were a bit startled when a loud moan-scream by a woman was heard from upstairs, soon followed by the groan of a man. They looked at each other, eyes wide in bewilderment. Eliza paled, thinking the worse, and got up from her seat noisily, running to the stairs. Mary laughed cruelly.

“What did I tell you?” she asked, getting up and following her.

Angelica slapped the table, teeth clenched with fury. “That fucking bastard, I’m gonna murder him!” she declared, running in the same direction.

“No, Ange!” said Peggy, following them as the others imitate them. “Dialogue, dialogue!”

“Fuck dialogue!” screamed Angelica, walking upstairs by two steps at a time. “I’m gonna slap him, kill him, resurrect him and then kill him again!”

“Please, let’s calm down!” said Martha, a bit scared. “Let’s talk things out, I’m sure everything has a rational explanation”

“Of course it has” said George, going upstairs by her side. “Two of my employees are having sex in our house. That’s why I don’t like parties”

“And that’s why nobody invited you to anything, you lonely dull!” said Mary a few steps ahead. George groaned. “I thought old people deafened with age…” he complained, under his breath.

Eliza was the first one to arrive upstairs, finding the hallway with its light off. She looked desperately in all directions, sharpening her hearing and trying to ignore Angelica’s threats and Peggy’s attempts to calm her down. Finally, she heard where the moans and the incessant sound of
springs were coming from.

At first, she felt her heart aching, but then, the hurt turned into pure hatred and rage. She patted her pockets as she walked straight to the closed door, being able to take out her lighter once she was in front of it.

“Fucking bastard” she muttered.

Peggy’s eyes widened when she saw what her sister was holding. “Oh, no, Eliza, don’t!” she pleaded.

“Yes, don’t!” agreed Angelica, also looking for something inside her pockets. “Wait until I find my mobile, I want to record it”

“Angelica!!” screamed Peggy.

“I want you to send me that later” said Thomas.

“Please!” begged Peggy. “Let’s talk this out”

Eliza looked at her youngest sister. “I have nothing else to talk!” she screamed. “I knew it, dammit! I knew it, this is what happens when you’re a good person!”

Eliza kicked the door, opening and crashing its wood with the heel in the act.

“That is! Destroy my house so it can match my office!” complained George.

Eliza ignored him and entered the room, completely dark. She was able to distinguish two figures on the mattress, which had stopped their movement abruptly for her entrance.

“Nice” commented Eliza, feeling her face burning with a blush of rage. “Fucking nice!”

“Eliza?” Maria’s voice asked, confused. “What the…?”

“That’s the way you have to thank me for the time I helped you when you most needed it, slut?” she screamed, trying to light the object in her hand.

“Sorry?” said the receptionist, still sounding puzzled.

That made Eliza’s blood to burn more. “No, I don’t forgive you, bitch!” she screamed, launching herself on the bed, now with the lighter lit.

“Maria, Alexander, run!” hurried Peggy, scared. “She’s gonna kill you!”
Maria’s shrill scream was heard shortly after, while she tried to get away from Eliza and the flame.

“What the fuck are you doing?!” she asked.

“She dares to ask!” said Eliza. “I’m gonna burn your fucking hair off!” she threatened, grabbing her by the ends of her long hair.

“I knew I couldn’t trust that asshole!” commented Angelica, filming the fight. “I knew it!”

Martha had a hand over her mouth. “For the love of God, Eli, calm yourself!” she screamed, too scared to enter the room.

“Do that outside, don’t burn my house!” screamed George.

“What the hell is going on here?!”

The whole group turned around when they heard the voice, seeing its owner, Alexander, and Aaron running towards them.

“I knew I could trust you!” said Angelica. “I always knew it!”

“Cut it out, faker” said Peggy.

“We heard a commotion, what’s wrong?” asked Aaron, going directly to his wife.

Everybody looked at each other in bewilderment, only coming back to reality when they heard Eliza’s scream and a loud thump coming from inside the room. Alexander ran in.

“Eliza!”

“Alexander?” she asked, confused.

“What the hell is wrong with you?!” asked the receptionist, massaging her head from the hair-pulling.

“Maria?” asked Alexander, while he helped his wife up.

Theodosia decided to enter the room as well, patting the wall until she could flip the switch and turn on the lights. There, they saw a dishevelled Maria, still with a hand buried in her head and a face twisted with pain, covering her chest with the sheets. The figure at her left moved from under the sheets.
“Did she calm down?” he asked, showing himself.

“James?!” exclaimed Thomas, surprised. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Look at Dobby, letting himself go” commented Laurens.

James sat straighter on the bed, out of breath. “I don’t know what happened. We were setting the table and things went out of hand”

“But how does someone go from setting the table to have sex?” asked Thomas, wrinkling his nose. “And with this woman, no less. You didn’t lower your sights, you removed them completely”

“Man, no one had watered her garden for a couple of years, she needed an outlet. And so did I” James excused himself.

Maria looked at Jefferson offended. “Besides, Lemongrab, have you looked at yourself in a mirror lately?”

Mary scoffed. “Uhuhu, ‘Lemongrab’. So quick-witted, Mary Magdalene”

Eliza got closer to Maria, guiltily. “Jeez, Mari, I’m so sorry. Jealousy can blind anyone…”

“Fuck off, crazy pyromaniac, you almost burn my hair!” complained Maria, pushing her a bit.

“What?” asked Alexander. “My God, Eliza, you need to go to a psychologist!”

“I am a psychologist!” she retorted, offended.

“Not a very good one, for what we saw” commented Mary.

“But who got her wound up?” asked Thomas, looking annoyingly at the old lady.

George shook his head. “Nobody. She was born that way” he explained, clearly sad.

Maria looked at them all infuriated. “Now, please, close the door, you stopped us at the best part!”

“What a vice, hooker!” condemned Mary.

“Mom, please!” said George, trying to get her away from the door.

“Drunkards, the whole room is smelling of wine!” kept saying the old lady.

George looked angrily at the receptionist. “You had alcohol and you didn’t share it with me??”

“It wasn’t planned” said Maria, rolling her eyes in annoyance. “Now, please, close the door. I don’t like to let things unfinished”

Martha clapped her hands. “No! We have to dine, or the food will cool down!”

“It’s already cooled down, anyways” commented Lafayette.

George groaned in pain. “Gosh, we still have to dine. What a shitty night…”
After reassuring the kids that everything was okay and lying saying the reason why Maria was screaming was because she fell and hurt herself, they all sat back on the table, letting the silence rule over them as they tried to ignore it by only looking at the food in front of them.

Eliza’s eyes turned to her untouched pie, in the middle of the table. She tried to keep eating and waited a few minutes, to see if someone cut themselves a slice. After her third shortbread cookie, she thought she had given them enough time.

“Does anyone want pie?” she asked gently. Her brow frowned when she saw everybody evading her question. She moved her tongue inside her mouth. “I mean, I’m seeing a few dishes empty and I want to let you know that you can start eating the pie before it cools down. Just saying…”

She wringed her hands, waiting for someone to follow her advice. She pressed her lips and cleared her throat, while scrutinizing the whole table. Everybody had their heads down, even though their plates were empty.

“Do you want me to ration it, so everybody can have a piece?” she insisted.

“Betsey, let it go…” advised Alexander.

She looked nastily at him. “It’s gonna perish”

“It already looks bad…” commented Mary, taking a swing of water afterwards.

Eliza looked at her fixatedly, undaunted. “Ma’am, what do you have against me?”

“Nothing” she said, shrugging.

“The worst part of that is that’s true” said Washington.

Alexander took Eliza’s hand. “Betsey, honey, do you want a sandwich?”

“No. I want you to eat the pie, so you can tell me how it tastes”

“I can tell you without eating it: like shit” commented Angelica.

Eliza looked daggers at her sister above Alexander’s head. The immigrant bowed his head, so he couldn’t be in the middle of his wife’s deathly glare. Eventually, Eliza let go of his hand and got up, to reach the pie more easily. Alexander looked worriedly at her, as she sat down, taking a fork and prepared to eat.

“Eliza, honey, no…” he tried to say.
“You too?” she asked, her dark eyes now light up with fury.

“… Eli, I love you”

“But?” she asked, squinting her eyes with suspicion.

Alexander swallowed. “But… making pies has never been one of your best qualities”

“… … …”

“I mean, you know how to cook other things…” he added when he received only silence and a fixated glare from her. “The frozen pizza you put in the microwave the other day? Delicious. As well as those fish fingers and… And… Those instant noodles! Those were scrumptious!”

“All those are pre-cooked food” she said, wrinkling her nose disgusted.

“See where I’m going?”

“Excuse me…?”

“I mean… There is a reason why I barely have ten dollars bills: I have to spend them in buying cookies at the supermarket before dropping the kids off the nursery school, so they have something good to eat at lunch break…”

“You what…?”

“It’s okay, Betsey, I didn’t marry you for your cooking skills”

“We all know that…” commented Mary bad intentionally.

Alexander looked at her nastily. “Ma’am, please, I’m talking with my wife”

“No” said Eliza. “You’re embarrassing your wife in front of all these people” she corrected him, with a shaky voice. “You don’t like my food?”

“… You’re good at other things”

Eliza sniffed a bit and then frowned, looking angrily at the pie. She buried the fork in it and then took one piece out, prepared to eat it.

“Betsey, please!”

“You’ll see how delicious this is! And I won’t give you any of it, no matter how hard you beg me!” she promised, taking one bit.

“My gosh…” muttered Alexander, passing a hand through his face.

“Don’t worry” said Angelica, pointing at her phone on the table. “I already dialled 911. We’ll only have to click one button if she starts to convulse. May the will of God be…”

Eliza was watched by the whole table as she took her first bite of pie. After the first couple of
bites, her eyes began to water, and she had to put a hand over her mouth. She was still for a few seconds, looking down, as if she was trying to concentrate. Alexander reached one hand to pat her back, but she shook her head, pushing the hand away. She coughed a bit and then looked up, biting again. She gagged a few times, but put both hands over her mouth and kept eating.

She coughed a couple of times and inhaled through her nose before finally swallowing the piece. Eliza let out a breath, blinking away the tears that were forming in her eyes. She looked up, seeing them all watching her with either confusion or sympathy. She held her chin up, flexing her pride.

“How was the pie, Mrs. Rabbit?” asked Mary, almost unable to restrain her laughter.

“Delicious” said Eliza with a hoarse voice.

She coughed a bit and took her glass of water, drinking the whole thing in one swing. She breathed out, coughing a few times again. She looked at the pie and, hesitantly, picked up her fork once again, prepare to repeat the action.

“Betsey, please…” begged Alexander once again.

“No, Alex, I told you I wouldn’t give you any”

“There is not enough water in the whole planet that can help you swallow that…” commented Alex, wrinkling his features in disgust. “Eliza” he repeated once he saw her eating the second bite. “Eliza” he said, more sternly this time. His wife began to cough violently, dropping the fork. He offered her his glass. “Here. Told you”

“Nothing” said Eliza between coughs. “It was a pip… From the gr-grapes” she managed to say, coughing exaggeratedly and drinking again the whole glass in one sip.

“You just made such a fusion in there…” commented Peggy, looking at the pie with squeamishness. “Really, if you were a crystal gem, you’d mess up…”

“What?” asked James, a bit confused.

“I had a ‘Steven Universe’ marathon the other day and I can’t stop with the references. ‘It’s over, isn’t it?’ has been replaying inside my head all day” she admitted.

Mary nodded sarcastically at her son. “Wow, George, I thought you wouldn’t be able to outdo yourself after wishing me for a happy birthday by text instead of a call, but you proved me wrong. The fine cutlery of plastic made in China; a pie with cherries I am allergic to as the only ‘good’ food around here; cold cheese sandwiches; and the final touch: your own X-rated in the room where I sleep when I come to visit…”

Thomas sighed. “What a move, you two” he muttered, looking at both sides, at Madison and Maria.

Mary pointed threatening with her fork at George. “You better burn those sheets and mattress, I don’t want to sleep over those things. Only God knows what I’d catch…”
Maria looked nastily at her. “Excuse me, ma’am, but I’m cleaner than anyone in this table. In all the acceptations of the word, actually”

Mary looked at her with her lips twisted in disgust. “After doing it with that repressed because you have no self-love, allow me to doubt your statement” she spat. “And with your daughter in the living room… What a mother”

Maria’s eyes burnt with fury. “You have to clean your mouth if you want to talk about my daughter”

“Maria…” tried to say Aaron, frowning in worry.

“Ma’am, let the poor woman. She’s an adult, she can do whatever she wants” defended Peggy timidly.

“Besides, it’s her body and her life” blurted out Angelica, more harshly than her sister. “None of us are anybody to judge”

Mary puffed. “You are not, that’s for sure. You want to pass as the coolest feminist that ever walked on this Earth, so you can have an excuse to get in bed with whatever desperate loser you can catch”

“Excuse me?” she said, leaning dangerously on her seat.

“Adulterous” spat Mary.

“Mom, please…” begged George, passing a hand through his bald.

“She’s gonna spare no one…” said Martha, biting her bottom lip in worry.

“Ma’am, only because my sister’s a bit easy doesn’t mean you can insult her” said Peggy, gathering a bit of courage.

Angelica looked upset at her. “Thank you, sis…!”

Mary didn’t hesitate in turning at Peggy. “You can’t even defend your own sister properly due to how little you talk, good-for-nothing. You have less lines in your own story than the Sleeping Beauty in her own movie”

Laurens laughed a bit. “She spends the whole day sleeping as well” he explained, gaining a dirty look from Peggy.

“And what do you have to say about anything, sad loner?” spat Mary, now turning at him. “Even this fornicator broke up with you, that says a lot about you already”

“Ma’am!” screamed Alexander, offended and with his face flushed.

Laurens’ bottom lip began to shake, and he let out a sob. “Son of a bitch, he hurt me so badly…” he complained, looking at Alexander, and then, at his wife. “Be careful, Eliza, this man will play with your heart” he advised, now crying uncontrollably.

Alexander looked at him with a frown of fury and hit the table, making the glasses to shake. “How can you be so shameless!? Me, hurt people?” he scoffed. “Don’t make me talk, John, don’t make me talk!”

“You abandoned me, leaving me alone with the rent, asshole!” accused John.

“Uh, like father, like son” commented Mary, smiling delighted.
“What was I supposed to do? To stay?” screamed back Alexander.

“No! To talk to me!”

“About what? It was enough with seeing what I saw! You should be thankful I still talk to you!”

“Honey, relax…” said Eliza, still with a hoarse voice. She coughed a couple of times. “Damn pips…” she muttered.

“But what happened?” asked James, alternating his glare between the two.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “There goes the fishwife!” he complained.

“Leave me alone, I wanna know the people that surround me!” James complained back. “It’s called socializing” he added, patting him in the arm.

“Fu, what a snoopy. So clear he’s deprived of love…” commented Mary under her breath.

Alexander shook his head. “Nothing, nothing happened”

Eliza talked over him. “He went back home earlier than he was supposed to, and found John in bed with the bartender of the bar he went to that night” she explained, naturally.

Alexander hit the table, with more force than before. “Eliza!”

“Huhu, what a meanie bitch” Mary commented, laughing cruelly.

Laurens also hit the table. “I told you: they dropped something odd in my drink!” he defended himself.

“In what of the 21 you drunk that night?!” asked Alexander, sarcastically.

“He’s even a drunkard. What a full pack…” commented Mary.

“It was your fault!” accused Laurens. “You were always working, you neglected me and killed the relationship!”

“Nooo, no! Don’t put the blame on me! You were the one who killed our relationship with your fucking jealousy!” Alexander looked around, seeing the whole table had its eyes on him. “I couldn’t even go out with a friend to have a coffee!”

“Oi, oi, oi, what an annoying nuisance. That’s why even your father kicked out of his life” commented Mary.

Laurens looked angrily at her. “Ma’am, shut up already!”

“Ungrateful son, after all the hard work your father must have done to raise you and you thanking him like that…” she said, shaking her head in disapproval. “Learn from this repressed homo, he slept with Mary Magdalene to cure himself from his gayness” she added, pointing at Madison.

“Ma’am, don’t you have a filter?” asked Lafayette, eyes widened in awe.

She looked at him, confused. “Why? Are you gonna make coffee? I don’t want any, it keeps me awake…”

“What…?” asked the Frenchman, lost, and sharing a glare of bewilderment with his boyfriend.
Maria clicked her tongue and inhaled through her nostrils. “Ma’am, I really wish we were living in the era your brain is settled in, so I can be able to see you burn in the stake for witch!” she blurted out, bitterly.

“Maria…!” said Aaron, trying to calm her once again.

“Ssshh, eeeeh” said Madison, leaning forwards to be able to see the old lady in the face. “Don’t say nonsense, ma’am, I’m single because I want to be. I am very manly. I’ve slept with, at least, one hundred women throughout my whole life!” he claimed.

“When? You’re always at home, buried within blankets like a burrito” said Thomas.

“Because I am a gentleman, I don’t say those things aloud” he retorted, proud of himself and drinking a sip of water.

“You just let us see it by saying that in the middle of a dinner in our boss’ house” commented Alexander.

Martha hit the table once with her two hands. “That is enough everybody!” she pleaded, getting up abruptly and looking at them with sadness. “Stop throwing past mistakes in the other’s face, criticising and judging each other! Okay, the dinner could’ve been better; okay, a few things went out of hand, but look!” she said, pointing at the children’s table, a few steps away. “The kids are behaving better than us! Aren’t you ashamed?”

Her statement made everybody looked down, except from Mary and George, who only rolled their eyes. Martha ignored them, feeling exhausted and disappointed. The only sound they heard in the brief moment she was silent was the CD player changing from one track to another one. None of them could tell which carol it was, as Martha talked once again, with a desperate tone.

“Please! I know we have our differences, and I know we all made something bad at one point in our lives, but is it so difficult for you to let it go for tonight and have a nice time, all together? Is it so difficult for you to be like that for Christmas?” she asked.

“Yes, it is, Martha, it is!” said George, getting up, as well as her. “It’s difficult, because, for your information: it’s not Christmas, it’s December 21st!”

“Thank you!” said Alexander, Thomas, Aaron and Hercules at the same time.

“Besides, who do you think you are to be talking about good will and telling us off because we’re not enough altruist to put up with this horrible idea you came out with? You only did this hell of an event because you couldn’t cope with the fact that your children wanted to spend Christmas at their respective places instead of coming here!”

“Excuse me?!” exclaimed Martha, arms in akimbo.

“Your empty-nest syndrome cost us dearly! Well, not you, but me!”

“I don’t have an empty-nest syndrome!” denied Martha, red as scarlet.

Mary cackled. “Not even her kids can stand her…”
Martha looked at her with fists and teeth clenched. “Ma’am, shut your mouth. Here, the ones whose kids can’t stand and hate their mother are yours” she spat.

Martha felt something hit her in the forehead after that sentence. Everybody looked at her speechless. She rubbed her hit part with a frown whilst George turned slowly towards his mother.

“Mom, did you just throw a marzipan to my wife…?” he asked, as calmly as he could, making use of all the experience he had for past meetings.

Mary didn’t have time to even open her mouth, as Martha groaned while climbing on the table and launching herself to her mother-in-law, throwing both of them to the floor with a loudly thump that made the children turned their heads in their direction and saw the floor-wrestling with eyes wide open.

“My gosh…” commented Polly, shaking her head in disapproval and folding her arms across her chest. “And then, we are the ones who need babysitters…”

Maria, who had been sat at Mary’s right the whole time, frowned at the two fighting women, rolling on the floor, changing from upper handers every few seconds.

“Be careful, I’m trying to eat” she said, returning her attention to the remaining food on the table.

Jefferson threw her a nasty look before getting up. “But help them, Betty Boop!” he reprehended her, trying to separate the two women. “They’re gonna kill each other!”

“That!” said George, snapping out of his shock and rounding the table to get to them. “That’s what I feel at each meeting with you and Alexander!” he told the secretary.

“Not now!” complained Jefferson.

They saw their useless attempt to separate the two women, as Mary grabbed Jefferson from the hair, pulling him to the floor with rage. George ended up falling to his knees, as his wife was holding his hand for support and refused to let go of him even though Mary rolled them to the right.

The remaining guests on the table watched the fight with passiveness, with the exception of Peggy, whose frown became more knitted as the seconds passed by. She startled the rest of the group when she hit the table with her two palms, standing from the chair and grabbing the pie. Eliza smiled at her.
“Are you gonna eat it???” she asked, hopefully.

Peggy simply ignored her and walked to Laurens by strides, who was still watching the fight. She tapped him on the shoulder, calling his attention.

“What did you have to say about me, you piece of shit?” she said, resentfully.

Laurens opened his mouth to protest, but his response died down as Peggy smashed the pie in his face. John went backwards for the used force, and Peggy grabbed him by the ponytail, moving the pie against his face in circles for a couple of seconds.

Once she was finished, Laurens gasped for air and tried to clean his face with his hands, now all covered with pie. He looked at Peggy with rage and threw part of what was on his face towards her, staining her dress. Peggy gasped and pull him by the hair, an act that Laurens imitated. The both stumbled from one side to the other.

Lafayette and Hercules got up from their seats and tried to separate them, joining to the festival of screaming that came from the other side of the table.

“Please, stop!” said Hercules, grabbing Peggy by the shoulders.

“You’re gonna hurt yourselves!” added Lafayette, grabbing John’s arm.

Alexander looked worriedly at his sister-in-law and best friend, and got up, with the idea to try and end the fight, until someone caught his attention. He turned his head to his wife, seeing her with her purse wide open and putting some bread in it.

“Eliza?” he said. “What do you think you’re doing?” he asked, frowning.

Eliza looked at him. “Em… It’s just that the bread tastes so good… Who knows when we’ll come back?” she excused herself, giggling nervously.

Alexander shook his head. “You disappoint me, Eliza” he said, making her drop her head in shame. Then, holding her by the arm to pull her up, added. “You can’t take the bread and not the butter”

Eliza smiled brightly and got up in an instance. “These kinds of moments remind me why I chose you over the other boyfriends I had”
Alexander laughed as she looped her arm with his and both walked to the kitchen. Once Alex got silent, he turned his head to Eliza and asked:

“And how many boyfriends are we talking about…?”

Angelica looked at them go and shrugged. “If they can get the butter, I deserve something as well” she said, looking at Theo and Aaron. She got up. “I saw a precious kerchief in the closet when I was looking for alcohol before” she explained, lowering a bit her tone.

Angelica made her way to the door, avoiding George and Jefferson, who were on their knees holding Martha and Mary by the arms, trying to separate them as the women kicked angrily at each other while swearing to the two men, demanding them to let them go. Aaron looked at the scenes surrounding him and frowned. He got up.

“Please! It’s December 21st! Doesn’t that mean anything for any of you?” he shouted, trying to call the attention of his co-workers.

Theodosia tapped him on the forearm. “I’m gonna take the little giraffe figure I saw in the bathroom” she told him, in a whisper only audible for him.

Aaron rolled his eyes as she got up. “Theodosia, we talked about this! No stealing!” he said, following her to the exit.

“It’s not stealing. It’s just that I like to take souvenirs from the houses I’m invited into” she explained.

“What a woman!” complained Aaron.

Maria and James were left alone at the table, and they looked at each other when Theodosia and Aaron were too far away from them to hear.

“Do you wanna join the kids?” asked Maria, pointing at them without turning back.

“Sure” said James, getting up with her and taking a couple of plates still full of ham and chorizo. “I’m gonna have to meet your daughter, anyway”

“Well, let’s go slowly…” said Maria.

Once they arrived, they saw the kids had turned their chairs to look at the fights while eating. From time to time, they even commented what they were seeing. Susan saw them coming first, along with Patsy, and both girls waved at them.

“Hey, mommy!” said Susan, jumping from her seat to hug her.
Maria patted her in the head. “Can we eat with you?” she asked, looking at the other kids. “We’re feeling misplaced with those idiots” she added, pointing at her backs.

“We sure” they all said.

“We were betting how long will it take for the police to arrive ‘case a neighbour called’ explained Philip.

“Can we play?” asked James, sitting on the floor with Maria.

“Wait, let me show you the sweepstake” said Polly, handing them a paper.

Angie tapped her brother on the shoulder. “Hey, Phil, are you hearing that?”

“What?” asked the boy, confused.

“What happens?” asked Patsy, making the rest of the group to pay attention to their conversation.

“Pay attention to the song that’s playing right now” explained Angie, giggling.

They looked at each other and shrugged, sharpening their hearing and trying to ignore the screaming adults and the fighting. Once they caught a few notes, they all started to cackle along Angie.

“Oh, my, that’s ‘Silent night’!” said Philip, giggling.

“It is!” nodded Angie, laughing uncontrollably.

“If that’s not a sign that God exists and he is a joker, then what would be?” said Madison, as Polly collapsed on his shoulder from laughter.

Theo jumped in excitement when she won the bet, as the police arrived just twenty minutes after the fight started. The rest of the kids, especially Philip and Angie, complained, as they would have to give her all the candy they would get next Halloween. Patsy didn’t enter the bet as she couldn’t give her any, but Polly prayed to not see the girl for next October 31st. And if she did, at least, that maybe she had forgotten about the whole thing.

Angie and Philip promised her that Theo had the memory of an elephant, and she would remember. She would even arrange a sleepover to invite her over and get her candy. Polly decided to start to plan an excuse to not go to the, by the moment, non-existent party.
She sat by her father’s left side, who had a plastic bag with ice against his cheek, where he received an accidental blow from Martha. The woman swore it was directed at Mary, but Jefferson had his doubts. Patsy, sat at his right, patted his shoulder with irony.

“Thank God I didn’t go to that party, huh, Dad? Things would’ve gone out of hand… With violence and all that…” she commented.

“Shut up, Martha, you don’t want to make me angry…” said Thomas, hissing when he felt the coldness of the ice against his cheek.

Philip and Angie, on their part, were already at their parents’ side, while these explained what happened to two police officers, who were listening to the story of why the table was broken in half on the floor, why half of the adults were hurt and why the old lady in there had an open wound in her forehead.

Mary was being attended by Hercules, killing him with the glare, nonetheless, whilst Lafayette brought water to Washington, sat on the armchair, and another bag of ice for Martha, sat by her husband’s side, on the armrest. They were listening to Eliza and Alexander finishing to tell the story, seeing the confused and shocked expressions of the two officers, who looked at each other from time to time, to make sure they were hearing the same thing.

“So, then, I almost burnt this woman” said Eliza, pointing at Maria, who waved at the officers with a smile. “because I thought she was sleeping with my husband. But it turned out, she was making out with this man” She pointed at Madison, who also waved, more timidly.

“And then we went to have dinner” continued Alexander. “Which consisted in shortbreads, sandwiches, marzipans… Things like that”

“We had a stew” said Eliza, nodding, very serious. “But this man over there” she said, pointing at Laurens, who nodded his head as a greeting while he cleaned his face with a wet cloth Lafayette brought him when he went to fetch the ice bag. “dropped the pot and we had no time to make another one”

“So, we dine” kept telling Alexander. “And then, this woman over there started to say nasty comments to make us fight”

“And she succeeded” said Eliza.

They pointed at Mary, now without Hercules by her side as her wound was taken care of. The old lady flipped them off. The Hamilton marriage half-closed their eyes.

“We like you too” said Alexander sarcastically, before turning his head back to the officers. “And… well, in summary. A few things were said, some got offended… Then, Mrs. Washington jumped on
her mother-in-law, the old lady, and started to fight…

“And Peggy” said Eliza, turning to point at her sister, who only looked in their direction. “got up, took the pie I made – which was delicious, by the way…” she said, looking bitterly at Alexander, who rolled his eyes. “…and smashed it against the man with the freckles”

“The one who dropped the top…?” asked one of the officers.

Eliza smiled. “Yes! Glad you’re following the story fine!”

“You have to understand, sirs” said Angelica, entering the room once again with Theodosia and Aaron. “The top dropper is the ex of my sister’s husband” she explained, pointing at Alexander. “And he cheated on him”

Angelica threw daggers at her. “The world doesn’t need to know my personal life…”

Angelica simply ignored him. “And this man…” she said, pointing at Madison. “has been living as a squatter with this other man” She pointed at Jefferson. “who hates this woman” She pointed at Maria. “And, then, this old lady” She pointed at Mary. “hates both her son and daughter-in-law” She pointed at George and Martha. “So, you can only imagine what a mess we can do when we’re all together in one same place for more than two minutes in a row. Shit came out as easily as through a tube”

The two officers nodded, still lost in thought.

“We are so sorry, officers…” said Martha, shaking her head sheepishly. “We were just having dinner, and, all of a sudden… You know… Like… Whoa, crash, kaboom, chik-a-plao” she tried to explain.

George gave her a weird look. “Where I heard that before?” he asked, confused. Martha shrugged.

“It’s alright” said the taller officer, scratching the back of his neck. “We’re used to receive these kinds of calls all Christmas… They’re usually from someone within the family or some neighbour” he explained.

His partner nodded. “Yeah. Just when we received the call, we were finishing the rounds each couple would have these holidays…”

“Nice, it’s good to know we’re gonna have a safe Christmas” commented Madison.

“Well, try to control yourselves until January” advised the shorter man. “Try to think in nice things or to take breathers every five minutes or so”

“Will do” promised Eliza.

She accompanied the two officers to the door, thanking them for their work. Once she was back, Mary got up from her spot, dedicating all of them – especially to George and Martha – a deathly glare.
“This isn’t over, assholes” she declared. “You can’t simply ashamed me in front of the police and get off lightly” She turned around, and pointed at Martha. “Especially you, sons-stealer-bitch”

She started to walk straight to the door. Eliza and Alexander picked up their children, and made way for her, looking nastily at her as she passed them by.

“Oooh, oooh, I’m so afraid. Oh, look at how much I’m quivering, ooooh” mocked Martha, shaking her hands on purpose.

George sighed. “Mom, don’t threaten people…”

Mary stopped at the door of the entrance and turned around slowly, making them all flinch in their places for her cold glare. She raised her index finger.

“I’ll be back” she swore, turning around, this time leaving through the front door.

“Ma’am, but who do you think you are now? Terminator?” said Laurens, receiving the door closing as a response.

“More like Grannynator…” said Martha.

“Wееееell…” said Theodosia, clapping her hands while her husband gave her a nasty look at her backs. “I think we should be going now”

Theo got closer to her father, and Aaron picked her up, receiving a hug from the little one and more than glad to give it back.

“Theodosia is right. It’s getting late” agreed Angelica. “Nice party, George, Martha!” she said, heading to the door, and hurrying Eliza and Alexander, who looked at her with suspicion.

“Merry Christmas!” said Eliza and Alex with the children.

“Merry Christmas, my dears!” replied Martha, waving back.

“Happy holidays and happy new year, Martha, George!” said Theo, waving goodbye above her father’s shoulder.

“Same, sweetie!” said George, returning the gesture.

Alexander opened the door for the girls and whispered to Aaron, who was the last one to get out of the house. Theo and Philip almost falling asleep on their respective fathers’ shoulders.
“What did they do now?” he asked, pointing at Angelica and Theodosia, walking by strides to the car.

Aaron shrugged. “Bah. Theodosia just took the giraffe figure from the bathroom and I think Angelica took a kerchief…”

“Gosh, let’s hurry, then, because Eliza and I didn’t only take butter from the kitchen” hurried Alexander, dragging him along.

Aaron sighed. “Birds of a feather…” he muttered, exhaustingly.

George started to tidy up the living room, stopping only to wave goodbye and wishing for good holidays to the remaining employees that stayed a few more minutes to chat among them or to confirm Martha it had been a good night, despite everything. His wife hugged them all, being the Jeffiersons and Madison the last family to say goodbye to her.

“Have a happy Christmas, Martha” said Patsy, hugging the old lady along with her sister.

“It was a nice day” said Polly, cheerfully.

Martha hugged them both with all her might. “Take care, dears, and enjoy the holidays!”

Washington heard the conversation while he looked sadly at the table that was now broken in half on the floor. Laurens was going to pay for this, he would make sure of that.

“Goodbye, Mr. Washington” said Madison, passing by his side with his family. “Em… Good party…” he said, more hesitant.

George waved goodbye at them. “One hell of a party…” he muttered bitterly, as he heard the door closing. “I only wanted to watch some movies in peace, jeez…” he muttered.

Martha walked to him and kissed him on the head. “C’mon, don’t be like that. At least, we’re gonna have the rest of the holidays for ourselves…”

George smiled at that. “Yes, you’re right”

He nodded and got up, a few pieces of broken glass and shredded plastic in his hands. He was heading to the kitchen to throw it to the trash, when Martha’s phone sounded, and she gasped.

“What? What happened?” he asked, stopping by the doorframe, concerned.
He felt a shiver up and down his spine when he saw Martha’s surprised expression changed drastically for one of pure happiness.

“Georgie, guess what! In the end, the children are coming for Christmas! They’re arriving tomorrow at seven! We’ll have to get up a bit earlier than usual, but, who cares? Hey, do you think we could…? George?”

Martha stopped her excited rambling when she looked up and saw no one standing there. She felt a chill and looked at the entrance, seeing the door completely opened. She ran to it and stopped in the doorframe, seeing the running figure of her husband.

“George, what are you doing?!” she screamed.

“Fuck Christmas, I’m gonna spend these wonderful two free weeks in the office!” he shouted back, not looking back.

“Come back here!”

“Never! Lucille, wait for me, I’m coming!”

Martha shook her head. “Mnh-mnh… What a man…” she looked at her phone and smiled again. “Well, if George won’t come home; home will come to George” she decided, closing the door at her backs.

Chapter End Notes

Mary Washington was based on a lady character from a Spanish sitcom who acts and says things like that.

Sadly, she could also remind anyone about somebody they have met in their lives. Just remember those kind of people deserve no attention.

I think I've gotta say I have nothing against conservative people, but I do have a lot against disrespectful persons. For me, as long as you live your life without hurting others and respecting the rest, everything's fine. People who insult and try to make others feel bad for being different or for not living life the way they think it should be lived are the ones with the problem, not you.

Besides, if we all were and thought the same, life would be very boring, wouldn't it? Be yourself, because nobody else will be it for you! :) 

Thank you for reading this silly and exaggerated story and for constructive criticism. Hope you're having as a good time reading it as I do while writing it (and learning about the Founding Fathers).
I wish you all have a very Merry Christmas/Holidays and an even better New Year 2018!
Chapter Summary

“Stop watching History Channel, man…”
“You were the one who asked!”
“Because tomorrow’s your birthday!”
“Yeah, well, but I haven’t done anything for being mentioned in the History Channel… Yet” Alexander added with a sided smile.

Chapter Notes

Yes, I know what you all are thinking... Stop typing. Stop typing. Stop... I know this chapter would’ve better been updated on the 11th, and that was the initial plan... But, well, I received a visit from my old friend Writer’s Block, who decided to stay with me for two weeks... And, when it finally let me be, I fell ill. Yep, just my luck. So, I couldn’t even update this on Philip’s birthday to compensate it a bit... Oh, well, just hope you like the chapter of this story that’s going crazier and crazier as I write.

WARNING: Swearing, black humour (most like jet humour) and me being bad at writing flirting...

DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hercules Mulligan didn’t like to rise early. He doubted anyone in this world liked it, and if there was someone out there who did, then, he was sure something was wrong with them.

So, it wasn’t unusual for him to groan as soon as the strident sound of his boyfriend’s alarm reached his ears, taking him away from Morpheus’ arms. Lafayette wasn’t the early riser type, either, but he always had a better way of dealing with being up before the sun. And he was good with standing his bad morning mood as well, which had always been a plus since the beginning of their relationship.

After a short fight to see who’d pull the sheet with more force – a scene they made all the mornings, even on Sundays, when they didn’t have to go to work – Hercules decided to get out of bed, feeling the chill of the winter’s morning, barely acknowledging what Lafayette told him before he locked himself up inside the little bathroom connected to their bedroom.

Hercules decided to make his way to the kitchenette and start preparing breakfast while he
waited for his partner to get out the shower. A thing that wasn’t going to happen at any time soon, he knew that pretty well. He sighed when he saw it was only six in the morning. Today was going to be one of those long showers days, one of those ‘I had to turn the hot water off because Aquaman called saying you were about to leave planet Earth with no water left’ days.

With the idea already programmed in his mind, Hercules got out of his shared bedroom, shaking slightly for the sudden change of temperature. He found the living room immersed in the natural darkness and he went mechanically to where the switch was, turning on the lights. He jumped scared when the light clearly showed him the figure that occupied the armchair at the right-side of the room.

“My goodness, Laurens!” exclaimed Hercules, a hand over his heart, feeling it beating faster than normal for the sudden startle. At least, he was completely awake now. “You scared the heck out of me, man! What are you doing rising up early? Did the planets lined up or something?” he asked, half-mocking.

Laurens shrugged. “I never went to sleep” he answered, eyes fixated on nothing in particular.

“Never went to…” repeated Hercules under his breath. “John, did you just arrive now? Today we’ve got work!” he condemned, with arms in akimbo.

“In my defence I’ll say that I actually came back at five…”

“That doesn’t make it any… Wait, what?” he stopped mid-sentence. “You’ve been sitting in the dark for an hour?”

Laurens nodded, and Hercules took a time to look at his roommate and friend. Now that the slumber was gone for good from his eyes, he could see John was wearing the same t-shirt and jeans he had last seen him with last night, before heading out the door.

What last night had been an elegant outfit – thanks to him and Lafayette, honestly – now looked like to have gone through a war field. Wrinkled, a bit teared and with a stain in the middle. His hair was also a mess, as his ponytail seemed everything but. Knowing Laurens as he did, Hercules was starting to sweat at the thought that maybe ‘war field’ was a close summary of what may had happened to his friend the night prior.

“Laurens, whom did you fight with last night?” he asked, carefully.

“With nobody…”

“John”

“I didn’t fight anyone last night, Hercules” repeated John, now upset.

“Your appearance tells me the opposite”
“This wasn’t because of a fight, this is the evidence of me being a human disaster!” explained Laurens, bursting into tears by the end of the sentence.

Hercules looked at Laurens, throwing himself from the armchair to the couch to be able to cry his eyes out in a lying position. Mulligan sighed when he saw his friend in such distress and in disarray. He walked until he was in front of Laurens and sat on the coffee table, sure that it wasn’t going to fall apart as Alexander had helped him make it instead of Lafayette. He had made the mistake of letting the Frenchman make a furniture for their house once. He still had the scar that loose shelve left him…

“Hey, pal, don’t cry” he said, rubbing Laurens’ the back, trying to give him some kind of comfort. “You know what will make you feel better?” he asked, gently. “Talking to Laf. He’s not the therapist friend for anything”

Hercules pat John’s back before getting up and walking directly to one faucet at the corner of the kitchenette. He turned it to the left, and a curse in French was heard from the bathroom, almost inaudible due to John’s crying. Hercules managed to ignore them as he opened one cupboard and took out the sliced bread.

“What did I tell you about turning the hot water off while I am in the shower?”

Hercules waited until he had swallowed the bread and then turned around, seeing his boyfriend in his yellow bathrobe and with a frown in his face that disappeared as soon as he heard Laurens’ crying.

“What’s wrong with him?” he asked, worried.

Hercules shrugged. “He had a tough night/morning”

“Did he just arrive?” asked Lafayette with a cocked eyebrow. “John, you have to go to work today”

“No, I don’t wanna go” whined Laurens, with his face buried in one cushion.

“No” said Hercules rapidly and firmly. “If you’re old enough to come drunk at five in the morning, you’re old enough to take a pill for the hangover and go to work”

“Hercules, s’il te plaît!” hissed Lafayette, kneeling in front of Laurens and rubbing his back. “Don’t worry, John, if you are not feeling up to go to work today, you can stay”

“Don’t spoil him!” reprehended Hercules.

“Herc, our friend is suffering. Why do we have to do when a friend of ours is suffering?” asked Lafayette, with his free arm in akimbo.
“Ignore them. I’ve got enough problems inside my head, I don’t need to stand other people’s”

“No, we give them our support” said Lafayette while giving his boyfriend a hard look. It turned gentler as he turned his attention back to Laurens. “Tell us what’s wrong, John”

“Can’t we do that on the way to work?” asked Hercules, sighing heavily. “We’ll be late for tomorrow if he starts explaining now…”

Lafayette gave him another hard glare. “And who cares? If Washington stays inside his office all day with that chair. He won’t know”

Hercules shook his head. “That man is going to end bad…”

“It is taking him longer than I thought, actually…”

Lafayette stopped the rubbing on Laurens’ back when the freckled man got up, sitting properly on the couch while sniffing.

“Last night I went on a spree” he admitted.

Lafayette nodded and gave him a tiny smile. “And how did it go, chérie?”

“How do you think it went, man?” asked Hercules, huffing. “Like a fucking shit”

“Herc…” hissed the Frenchman once again.

Laurens nodded, his eyes watering again. “Yes, yes, it was”

“And that’s why you punched someone on the way back or what?” asked Hercules.

“I didn’t hit anyone, I told you!” complained Laurens.

“Your clothes tell me another story”

Lafayette pinched the bridge of his nose. “Bon sang, Laurens, I hope whomever it was, was too drunk to even remember your face…”

“I didn’t fight with anyone, dammit!” complained John, with a blush of anger. “Let me tell you the story of last night!”

“Summarize it, please” said Hercules, filling one glass with milk. “For long story tellers we’ve already got Alexander”

Laurens took his time for things, especially with the ones that had to do with the heart. He didn’t need anyone by his side to go on, but the company always felt nice…
Who was he going to fool? He had always been a romantic, and though he preferred to be alone than in a bad company, the emptiness sometimes was too much to handle.

His friends had been seeing him a bit down and comforted him as well as they could, trying to (forcing him to) go out to meet new people. Though there were nights when he could establish a nice chat, he didn’t want to have anything to do with any of them, even for just a one-night stand.

Things started to get better once Alexander had talked to him again and made clear that he, as well as John, didn’t want to lose the friendship though they would never work out as a couple. That made some of his cheerfulness to come back, but still didn’t want to start anything with anyone.

It wasn’t until Alexander and Eliza had their first child, and he found a great, comforting and supportive friend in Betsey, that he decided that, maybe, it would be time for him to start something on his own. That, and the constant little comments Hercules said from time to time, that some days made them argue like crazy, and, others, John just decided to ignore him for the sake of Lafayette’s sanity.

Now, he believed that everything happened for a reason, and that was why he tried to convince himself that the true reason why all his dates – even the ones that would have been a one-night thing – went down the drain was because someone better was about to come. A better match.

After the 51st bad date, he started to have suspicions that maybe the Universe was trying to tell him something totally different.

And he was back to refuse to want to know new people. As this time he was in a better mood and the tension between him and Alexander disappeared, none of his roommates said anything about it. But the unfinished business never disappeared, and John was a bit ashamed to admit that he was starting to feel a bit jealous of his friends’ successful relationships.

Maybe that was the little push he needed to start going out as well, to try again. Lafayette had talked to him about that new pub a few blocks down their house; Alexander had given him some advices and even offered to be with him at the beginning, but John wanted to do it on his own, and didn’t want to keep Alexander away from home one more night that was strictly necessary when work wasn’t in the middle of the Hamilton marriage’s way. Hercules helped him with the outfit, patting him on the back and reminding him he had to call them if anything (bad or good) happened. Even Aaron sent him a message wishing him good luck.
All those shows of support and affection made his self-esteem went through the roof, and he left the house waving goodbye to his roommates with the clear idea that that night was going to be just fine and the bad run would be over for good.

After the sixth boy rejected him, he was starting to rethink about his philosophy of ‘good things will happen if you believe they will happen first’.

The first one didn’t even think twice before saying a cutting ‘no’ right after he had said ‘hi’; the second one was even more of a walking monosyllable that Burr himself (a thing he didn’t hesitate in typing in the group chat, and which started a chain of jokes and a private message from Burr flipping him off with that adorable emoji with one finger held); the third and fourth ones lost interest as the conversation went by and saw John stuttering more than maybe it was allowed within the first five minutes of an introduction (he would have to ask Lafayette for classes of flirting again); the fifth one ended up having a boyfriend in the loo that the damn boy decided not to mention and who didn’t stop throwing daggers at him for the rest of the night.

But the sixth and last one was the worst. Because John Laurens’ self-esteem could bear a lot of things, rejection among them, but couldn’t bear with being rejected five times in a row, being watched by a pissed off boyfriend and made a fool of himself in the same damn night.

Honestly, John knew it was his fault. He was about to go home. It was almost eleven, and he had work tomorrow. But he just had to stop when his eyes fell on a lonely man on a table, rolling down his mobile screen, in his own personal bubble. Shyness and reserved men were never his type, but maybe he needed something calm, some laughs, something slow. It wouldn’t kill him to go and try one more time.

“Hey” he greeted, being instantly watched by two clear eyes.

A shy smile. “Hi”

“Can I take a seat?” asked John, pointing hesitantly to the empty chair across him.

The man nodded. “Yes, of course”

“Are you waiting for someone?” he asked, trying to sit as comfortable as he could so his nerves weren’t shown easily.

“Just for some friends, they’re about to come” answered the man, waving one arm. “What about you?”

“Oh my own tonight” he replied, sincerely. “Been trying to find someone friendly to talk to, you know... Settling down?”

“Oh”
John thought to have seen the man’s eyes losing a small spark they had been having during the small conversation, but decided to ignore it and kept going with the conversation. He recollected all the advices his friends had given to him regarding dates; from small jokes to witty comments. He decided to start soothing, as the man seemed to be very demure.

“Sorry, I haven’t introduced myself before” he apologised, laughing slightly.

“It’s okay” answered the man, waving one hand while giggling.

“Name’s John” said Laurens, hesitating a bit before adding. “But you can call me whenever you want”

He laughed a bit, feeling a bit stupid, but thinking it would be enough for breaking the ice a bit more after the awkward silence they had shared a few minutes prior. Laurens felt his face burning as he blushed for the lack of response from the other man.

He saw him tilting his head to the side, both brows furrowed in clear confusion. John began to panic. If he was bad at telling jokes, he was even worse at explaining them. Without counting with the fact that he hated how imbecile he sounded when he tried to do so. He hoped maybe the man would understand it eventually, but, instead, was frozen in the spot when he heard the words that left the man’s mouth.

“But isn’t that name longer than John, though?”

“Eh?” said Laurens.

Whatever explanation was about to come from the man was interrupted by his phone buzzing. The man answered his phone with a bright smile, nodding though the caller couldn’t see him. Laurens watched in complete silence, trying to process what just happened. He was brought back to the real world when he saw the man standing up, looking apologetically at him. His smile permanent.

“Well, I’ve gotta go. My friends are waiting from me outside” he explained.

“Oh… Well…” said Laurens, choking with his own words. He felt his face warm, but that was nothing in comparison at how his cheeks were about to burn when the man kept talking.

“You know? You gave me the good vibes, and so I was about to invite you to the party I’m heading to. My friends and I like to go wild some nights and you looked like a fun and outgoing guy… But as you said you were looking for settle down, I think there’s nothing I can do, right?” he explained, giggling sheepishly as he scratched the back of his head. “Well, sorry for misjudging you. I hope you
find the someone stable and quiet you were looking for, Whenever-You-Want!”

Laurens sat there in complete silence, hearing the man wishing him luck as he headed to the door, waving goodbye.

So, that was what that lost of shining in his eyes meant before.

Without thinking, Laurens got up from the seat and ran after him, startling and pushing some people in his way, who dedicated him the nastiest look a human is possible capable of doing. He gave them no mind as he opened the door and looked around. He turned his head when he heard a loud music thumping through some car in the distance, along with the cheerful screams of a gang that was having a time way better than his.

“Wait!” he tried to scream, waving his arms in the air, to try to call their attention. “Wait, I’m not introverted at all! I am a crazy party-goer! I am a hornball! Give me some time and three shots and I’ll show you!”

The car disappeared from the distance, and Laurens didn’t even knowledge the people nearby who were looking at him a bit afraid. Some women whispered with their girl friends a few things, clearly worried, and trotted as far as possible from the pub door the freckled man was standing against.

Laurens waited a couple of minutes by the door, shooing away some clients that didn’t want to risk anything by trying to talk to him. He re-entered the pub, hands inside his pockets and made his way to the bar, where a red-haired woman was cleaning the counter with a washcloth.

She smiled politely at him and asked him if he wanted anything, doing her job of pretending kindness to strangers marvellously. John simply asked for beer and she nodded, going and coming back in less than a minute with a glass and a bottle of beer. She filled the glass with the alcoholic drink and passed it to him with a bright smile that disappeared as soon as John took her wrist to stop her from leaving.

“Let the bottle here, Louise, it’s been a hard night…” said Laurens, dejected.

The woman raised one eyebrow. “Okay…” she said, putting the bottle down slowly. “But, sir, my name’s Julia”

Laurens startled her by hitting the counter with the palm of his free hand. “Dammit, girl, I told you this night was a shit for me, at least let me call you like my former waitress, I need the familiarity!”
“Alright, but don’t expect me to come if you call me that…” said the girl, shrugging and turning around to attend other clients.

Laurens remembered drinking the first bottle of beer in record time. He didn’t remember the other five that followed, though…

“So, you eventually got into a fight with the owner of the place because you forced the girl to be called another name?” tried to guess Hercules.

“Or maybe that boyfriend kicked your ass because you went to try it out with that guy again?” tried Lafayette.

Laurens looked enraged at both of them. “No! I told you I didn’t fight last night!”

“Then what happened to your clothes?” asked Lafayette.

“Ah, this?” he asked, pointing at himself. “This is that, when I left the pub because Louise-Julia insisted in that I had drunk enough for one night, I stumbled a bit down the street, thinking I could get back here by feet, and, in a moment of rage and frustration, I kicked one pebble that hit a loose dog in the head and the owner couldn’t stop him in time before he started chasing me down while barking. I tripped over my own feet and fell down a slope…”

“The one that park a few blocks down has?” asked Lafayette.

Laurens nodded. “Yeah. That slope has a lot of rocks and sharp twigs. I think I’m gonna gather signatures to put a warning sign or something…”

“And why did you tell us the whole story of that guy at the pub if you destroyed your clothes right after?” asked Hercules.

“Because it was the important part of the night!” explained Laurens, offended.

Hercules pressed his lips. “Those were new… The last time I give you clothes as a birthday present” Laurens punched the couch and got up in an instant. “My friends care more about clothes than about me!” he accused.

“Don’t talk in plural, I did nothing…” said Lafayette.

“I just lost the opportunity to be part of a huge orgy and all you care about is a fucking shirt!” Laurens took off his shirt and threw it to Hercules with fury. “There! Selfish son of a bitch! With friends like you, why would I need enemies?” His eyes began to water. “I’m gonna go cry in my bedroom for the rest of the day!” he informed, running towards his room and closed the door with a thump.

“And now, with the nonsense, he will just skip work” commented Hercules, looking angrily at the destroyed and dirty shirt. “Fantastic”
“Really, what’s wrong with you? The poor man is devastated” reprehended Lafayette.

“He’ll be fine in five minutes. Half of an episode from ‘Brooklyn Nine-Nine’ and he’ll be laughing as if nothing happened” said Hercules, throwing the shirt to the trash can.

They both jumped when they heard the loud cry Laurens was making from the other side of the closed door. Lafayette sneezed right after and he looked daggers at his boyfriend.

“There, now I got a cold for your nonsense!” he accused, heading back to the bathroom and closing the door.

Hercules shrugged, puzzled. “Everything’s always my fault. I’m flipping out with these two…” He looked at the watched and shrugged once again. “I’m leaving. Those are full grown-ups to know how to go to work”

Hamilton wasn’t stupid. He used to talk a lot, and so people tended to think of him as the kind of a person who didn’t listen or pay enough attention to his surroundings. But that was only a façade he had created to fool people. If someone thought they weren’t watched, they would act more naturally than when they suspected the contrary.

His friends didn’t know any of this. Lafayette might have had his suspicions, but never said anything (and he was careful with everybody in general, so it never made a difference at how he’d act towards him if the Frenchman had discovered his plan); his workmates were just as clueless, even his boss. And his wife.

Eliza had been acting strange since the beginning of the week. And though her strange behaviour was about letting him sleep on the office or work till ungodly hours without scolding him or making a fuss about it, it still put him on his nerves. Alexander had been watching her actions, her words and her suspicious smile that never left her face in all yesterday and the day prior. He thought about interrogating her or trying to make her spit out a bit of information without her noticing (he was very good at that, actually), but decided against it.

Now, he was regretting it.

He knew he was gonna be screwed as soon as he heard the first sentence his wife said to him when he entered the kitchen, more than ready to drive to work (it was Wednesday, and if he liked to be early in the other five days, he wanted to be extra early on Wednesdays. It was a hard day for
everybody in the office).

“Hello, my sweetest and most beloved husband” half-sang Eliza, handing him a thermos full of hot coffee and a toast for him to eat on the way from the door to the car.

Alexander took the two things, eyeing her slowly. “What? Have you been married before and you never told me?” he half-joked.

Eliza laughed loudly. And that made Alexander see red flags in his mind. When someone as Eliza laughed so loudly and exaggeratedly, something was going to go wrong. Especially for him. His wife patted him on the back, still laughing and sweeping off some imaginary tears from her eyes.

“Oh, Lexi, so quick-witted and funny in the morning!”

Lexi? Oh, shit, this is not going to be good… “What is going on, Eliza?” he asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Nothing” she said rapidly, grabbing her ponytail and combing her raven hair with her fingers.

“Eliza, what have you done?” insisted Alexander.

“Nothing” she repeated, now with a high-pitched voice. “Why would you ask something like that, silly?”

“Eliza, you’re lying!” he accused.

“How could you tell?” she challenged.

“Because your voice is matching Bubbles’ from the *PowerPuff Girls*!”

“Is that why I’m that powerpuff girl when you compare my sisters and I with them?” she asked, with a frown. “I thought it was because I like blue”

“That’s a plus, actually” admitted Alexander. “Now, what’s happening?”

“Nothiiiiing…” said Eliza, now noticing that high-pitched voice her husband was talking about. She cleared her throat and repeated, in a deeper voice. “Nothing”

“Elizabeth” he said, with a stern tone.

Her full name always struck a nerve in Eliza, and she gave in. “I can’t tell you, Angelica would kill me”

“Aha, so, there’s something you’re hiding” Alexander smiled with superiority.

“I hate you” she said, crossing her arms.

“Yeah? Well, get in line with half of my acquaintances, then… What is it?”

“What”
“What you’re hiding from me”

“Nothing”

“Did you break the car again?”

“No”

“Did you spend half of our money in clothes you discovered you didn’t like once you got home and forgot to take it back before the deadline?”

“No”

“Did some of my workmates do something with my work and that’s why Angelica told you not to tell me?”

“Nah”

“Did you…?” Alexander took a step backwards and eyed her fearfully. “Did you burn someone…?”

Eliza’s eyes grew wide. “Jesus, Alexander, of course not! How can you think something like that?!?” she asked, horrified.

Alexander’s fear disappeared from his face, now as emotionless as before. “It’s a matter of time…”

Eliza narrowed her eyes and looked at him with fury.

“What is it, then?”

“Now, I won’t tell you!” she said, childishly.

“I’m going to find out, sooner or later” He took a step closer to her, being now face to face. “And, after seven years of marriage, I hope you know I like to know things sooner than later, and thanks to the person I asked information for; not by myself”

Eliza swallowed, terrified. Angelica’s wrath or Alexander’s? Her sister or her husband? Both were whirlwinds when they were angry… Angelica was her sister, and so, she’d always love her no matter what. Alexander, on the other hand… was a man with a sharp tongue and a killer silence. Just as Angelica, but… Angelica wasn’t the one living with her anymore… Would indifference through a phone hurt as much as in person? Eliza doubted so.

She sighed.

“What do you know what day is tomorrow?” she asked.

Alexander cocked one eyebrow. “The birthday of John A. Macdonald” he answered, not thinking it
too much.

Eliza wrinkled her nose. “Who is that now?”

“The first Prime Minister of Canada, around 1867”

“Stop watching History Channel, man…”

“You were the one who asked!”

“Because tomorrow’s your birthday!”

“Yeah, well, but I haven’t done anything for being mentioned in the History Channel… Yet” he added with a sided smile.

Eliza rolled her eyes. “Whatever. You’ve done something for having a party to honour you becoming a bit older, though” Alexander’s eyes opened with realization. He kicked the floor.

“Eliza, I told you I didn’t want a party!”

“And your words went in one of my ears and out the other” retorted Eliza, simply. “Come on, Ange made a great effort to make everything perfect”

“Call your fucking sister and tell her I said no! I’m saying no to this, I’m saying no to this and you won’t convince me to say otherwise!” swore Alexander, heading to the front doors by strides. “The last thing I needed, fuck! The year has only started and you all are already getting on my fucking nerves!”

“Alexander, come on!” said Eliza, following him with impassiveness. “Your friends are already invited!”

“Ahh, they knew and didn’t tell me?!” he exclaimed, turning on his heels to face her. “This is a group backstabbing…” he muttered.

“We all agreed on not telling you. Because you wouldn’t have agreed to…”

Alexander cut her off. “Exactly, I wouldn’t have! I wouldn’t have because why would I want a party to celebrate I have a foot nearer the tomb?”

“You’re turning 31, man, chill… You’re always acting is if you were running out of time”

Alexander frowned at her words and indifference. “A group of only-god-knows-how-many-people in my house, eating, drinking and making a mess they won’t clean afterwards…” explained Alexander. “Don’t you remember the Christmas party at the Washington’s?”

“Yeah. We got his house dirty, now he can get ours dirty. That’s how friendship works” she said.

“Maybe for you”

“For the whole world”
“I don’t mind. Use that group chat that seems to exist only so you all can send the vids and audios from private meetings and conversations about work, and text them all saying the party is cancelled”

“Okay, look, first of all: you can’t go all dignified saying the group chat is something serious, especially after all the audios and vids I received in which you and your workmates fight over which colour you should paint the walls…”

“Light blue helps the concentration, something anyone in there could use from time to time!” began to argue Alexander.

Eliza raised one hand to silence him. “I don’t care, Alex, it’s absurd and you know it. And second of all: I won’t cancel the party just because you’ve become obsessed with not letting people come over our house”

“I’ve become obsessed because a certain someone threw a party that ended up with half of the house, the wall outside and the car destroyed” he accused.

Eliza clenched her fists. “You told me you forgave me for that!”

“And I did” Alexander nodded. “But one thing is to forgive, and another one, to forget. Funny thing: when I was learning English, I used to confuse those two verbs as they sounded so similar”

Alexander laughed at the fond memory.

“Come on, that’s not fair! If you forgive someone, you should forget the action!” she complained.

“Listen, Eliza, I am the first one who wants to forget certain things more than anyone. But it’s really useful: it helps you for not making the same mistakes of the past. In summary: no party”

“It’d be very private! Only family and friends that are considered family!” explained Eliza. “Nothing bad can come from that!”

“Eliza, honey, listen to me” he said, taking her hand and rubbing it with his thumb. “I spend my whole life in meetings: there’s always a way for it to end bad”

“You can’t compare work meetings to family meetings, Alexander” said Eliza, taking away her hand to cross her arms.

“True: family ones are way worse” he nodded.

“It’s only going to be your friends, Theo, Theo Jr. – for the kids, you know? –, my sisters, my parents…”

“Your parents are coming??” he cut her off, blinding perplexed. He frowned, clearly upset. “Now, cancel this immediately”

“… What are you trying to say with that, increasingly old man?” she asked, upset.

Alexander was bothered immediately by the name. “One: I’m as old as you are. Two: I can tolerate your parents on holidays as any other human being that’s married, but I refuse to see them out of those obligatory moments”

“Hey, I’m going to put up with yours, it’s fair!” argued Eliza.

“What?” asked Alexander, eyes wide.

“I said it’s fair!”
"No, what did you mean by ‘put up with mine’?" he repeated slowly, feeling a bitter taste in the tip of his tongue. He frowned his lips in disgust. "You didn’t dare to try to contact either my brother or James, right?"

"Of course not! What do you think, that I have a dying wish?" retorted Eliza, both arms crossed and eyes half-closed.

"Then, who are you talking about?"

"About the Knox, of course!"

Alexander let out a sigh. "The Knox are not my parents, Eliza…" he reminded her, the volume of his voice clearly lower.

She rolled her eyes. "They took care of you, though…” she commented on the quiet. “Besides, we haven’t had the chance to spend time the four together… And you told me Lu wants to…”

Alexander thought about her words for a moment, unwillingly rewinding time in his mind. He remembered the meal he had with Henry and Washington before the Christmas holidays, how Henry didn’t stop asking him about how things were going, clearly intrigued to know why he had stopped taking cases; how Henry would name Lucy’s name time and time again, promising on his life that she wanted to come as well but had fallen ill. Not that Alexander didn’t believe him: Henry and Lucy were one of the truest and most sincere persons he had had the pleasure to meet and spend time with.

He saw the little frown Eliza was dedicating him and his stubbornness. He still didn’t like the idea of so many people in his house, especially for celebrating something as trivial as a birthday. He was expecting to spend it either in his office writing essays or in his house reading a good book in silence after a brief and small celebrating with only his children and wife. But, of course, Eliza’s outgoing nature had other plans.

Honestly, the woman deserved to see the Knox, they were very supportive once he had told them about their relationship and sudden engagement. Maybe a bit overprotective when their wedding present was their current house, side by side with theirs for the first six years or marriage. Neither Alexander or Eliza ever thought they would feel the emptiness of that house beside theirs that much, but they did.

With a sigh, Alexander gave in.

“Okay, okay… But something intimate”

“That was the plan” said Eliza with a bright smile. She took his hands in hers. “I’ve already arranged it all: the time, the menu, the seating…”

“What menu?” asked Alexander, carefully.
“I called a cake shop, don’t worry…”

“Good”

“But I was thinking…”

“No, don’t think” he said rapidly, placing a kiss on her forehead. “For our electrical appliances’ sakes”

He took a few steps backwards, opened the door and headed out, glaring at his watch. Alexander groaned under his breath.

“Gosh, I hope I still have time to get my cup of coffee and spend some good minutes psyching myself before the meeting” he said to himself.

He turned around and waved goodbye at his wife before closing the door. Eliza returned the gesture with a kind smile on her face, which didn’t abandon her features even when she said through clenched teeth:

“I should’ve ordered a mint cake, asshole…”

He didn’t remember who was the person who invented or said, “in the eye of the hurricane there’s quiet for just a moment” but, in George’s opinion, that person was a genius. There was no better sentence to summarize Wednesdays mornings in his workplace.

Everything was quieter than usual, everyone was inside their offices, getting out just to take several mugs of coffee or to make themselves a cup of tilleul tea. In fact, George had seen that it was in the middle of the week when they would run out of caffeine and theine. And he couldn’t complain or scold his employees about it, because he was also responsible of the speed those things disappeared. He thought about it as he savoured his fifth coffee. He hadn’t read the papers he was supposed to read before the meeting started, but that was also very common around here: nobody read or wrote anything at all.

Sincerely, George didn’t want to get angry before the meeting began. He had made that mistake the first weeks of working there, and had learned his lesson. Now, he simply let Alexander or Jefferson tell him what problem they’d be discussing, and he would allow his employees to talk (argue) among them, hoping that someday some of them would come with an actual solution and not
a witty insult about someone’s habits or personal life.

He caressed the armrests of his rocking chair with affection. Well, at least now he had a good friend on his side who always knew how to calm him. The others could criticise him all they wanted, but if they only knew how many times Lucille had prevented him from killing them, they’d think twice before commenting at his backs. He had entered the chair in the meeting room earlier than usual that morning. One thing was evading a headache for a few weeks, and another one was to evade them forever. With those people George couldn’t distract himself or let them to their devises.

A knock made him come back to the real world, and he looked over his right shoulder, seeing the figure of Burr standing at the doorframe.

“Sir? Can I come in?” he asked.

“Ah, Burr, of course” said George with a nod. “You’re one of my favourite sub-animals, you’re always welcome to come in whatever room I am” he explained.

Aaron stood a few steps away from him, with a serious expression. “Yeah…” he said, uneasy.

“Um… I just wanted to give you this”

George then realised his employee had been holding a plastic bag all that time, Aaron handed it to him and George took it and looked inside, raising one eyebrow. There were a few squeeze balls of different colours.

“What is this, Burr?” he asked, curious, as he took one of the blue ones out to look at it closely.

“Um… Well, I’ve been using this kind of balls since younghood… Em…” he scratched the back of his head and frowned his features, as if trying to erase some bad memory. George waited patiently. Aaron cleared his throat and continued: “They are kinda useful, actually… They are called stress balls… The other day I went to buy some new ones and I thought of you, and well…”

George nodded with a tiny smile. “I think this must be the best present someone ever gave me” he said, putting the bag down and keeping the blue ball on his right hand. “How is the coffee machine?”

“Almost empty, sir…”

“Already? We have only been here for ten minutes…”

“Yeah…”

“Do you know what we will be discussing today, Burr?”

“Em… Well…” he swallowed.

“Is it that bad?” asked the CEO, frowning slightly.
“It’s just that I just saw something I’d like to discuss with you in private…”

“Go ahead”

“No, I’d prefer to show it to you once the meeting is over and everyone is too busy insulting each other to notice our absence”

George nodded. “Clever man, clever man. Anything else?”

“Well… We also saw another thing, which I’m still trying to comprehend and… Hm… Maria and Adams had an argument and… Well… To summarize: we are going to have an action-packed meeting, sir…”

George inhaled through his nostrils and squeezed the little ball in his hand. He exhaled, feeling his shoulders more relaxed than before.

“Yep, I think this will work…” he commented, looking at the ball with a grin.

“Good…” said Aaron, taking a step backwards, a bit afraid.

“Thank you, Burr”

“My pleasure, sir”

“Keep going on like this and you will climb up in my ranking”

“… Okay?” he half-asked, a bit insecure. “Em… I’ll be leaving now…” he explained, heading slowly towards the door.

“Tell the others to come here already. I think we shouldn’t be delaying the inevitable”

Aaron nodded, closing the door with a bit too much force than necessary, unable to control his fear when he heard Washington talking to himself, wondering how he would name the little ball he was holding.

Everybody groaned when Aaron told them they had to go to the meeting room already. Aaron dedicated an interrogative look at Angelica when he noticed how quiet Alexander had been. The vice president simply mouthed ‘He knows about the party’ before showing him her phone, with a message from Eliza telling her she could convince Alex to have the birthday party at their house. Aaron huffed, remembering all of a sudden that tomorrow was going to be another hard day. He was glad he finally decided to buy new stress balls yesterday.

Aaron went to gather the rest of the team. He tried to ignore Adams’ grim face; the tension that could be easily felt between Lafayette and Mulligan; Laurens’ crest-fallen expression and red puffy eyes; Madison and Maria’s dishevelled hairs and shirts buttoned up wrong; Jefferson’s annoyed expression as he tried to also overlook how long it took his friend to come from the
restroom and Maria to make the last mugs of coffee. Lastly, he knocked on Peggy’s door and tried to ignore… Well, that, as he woke her up to inform her that the meeting was about to start.

Aaron walked in the meeting room and took his usual seat, by Alexander’s right and Lauren’s left. Lafayette and Mulling sat next to Laurens, still not glaring at each other. Angelica made his way to seat at George’s left, being in front of Alexander, in the CEO’s right-hand side. Jefferson soon filled the chair at Angelica’s left, accompanied by Madison, who was now trying to put his shirt right, with a flustered face. For sure, Jefferson had hissed him something about it on their way there.

Adams sat at Madison’s left, not looking at anyone and letting one chair empty in between him and the accountant. Aaron felt Alexander looking at him with the corner of his eye and then sighing, burying his nose again in his papers. Aaron started to pray his workmate wasn’t going to read or explain anything that might have been written there… For what he could tell off hand, there were more than twenty pages…

Maria walked in the room in quite a hurry, mumbling an apology while she rounded the table to give them all the last cup of coffee or tea they would be able to drink in the whole day. She also brought a few snacks she shared with everybody, except with Adams, who looked nastily at her. The receptionist didn’t hesitate in giving him the same expression, even more hateful, if possible.

Peggy was the last one to arrive, yawning while stretching her arms, saying ‘good morning’ at everybody. A few workmates ‘hm’ in response, for the sake of good manners. The youngest Schuyler sister looked around and decided to sit in between Madison and Adams, shrugging, and clearly overlooking the tension between the three men. Aaron felt a bit jealous at how easy it was for Peggy to do something like that.

Washington noticed the tension between Maria and Adams; Mulligan and Lafayette; Adams and Jefferson; Jefferson and Madison… Well, he felt the tension between everybody and noticed the quietness at his right. His glare was fixated for a good whole minute on the papers his CFO was reading and re-reading, seemingly to not want to look at any of his workmates. George shared Aaron’s prayer that those papers had nothing to do with anything they would discuss that day. Now, he was starting to regret not having read the documents Laurens had redacted that week…

Bah, in for a penny, in for a pound…

He played with the little stress ball in his hand for a moment, gaining a few looks from Angelica and Lafayette, but the CEO simply ignored them and leaned back and forth in his rocking chair, the cracking noise calling the attention of everyone. Even Alexander eyed up for a moment, before resuming his attention back to the papers, his facial expression unreadable.
“Before we get started, I’d like to introduce you to someone” the president began, going back and forth a couple of times more before stopping. He raised the blue stress ball for them all to see. “This fella is my new friend, lil’ Gus. He, along with Lucille, will help me to not kill you in our weekly meetings”

Everyone shared a glare of confusion mixed up with fear, and Aaron rubbed his temples, feeling a bit guilty. He could only hope everybody would assume Washington had bought those himself.

“Now that you know our new friend, let’s start. Who wants to go first?” said Washington, starting to rock himself in the chair once again.

His glare fell on Alexander and then on Thomas, for pure habit. Angelica seemed to do the same, and both shared a confused look when neither the secretary nor the CFO even made a move to complain about something or condemn the other.

Aaron shrunk in his chair, feeling the tension too much to handle. He looked at Maria, standing by George’s left as she used to do when she was in one of the meetings. She had started to come more often as her confidence came back and decided she also had the right to speak her mind and complain about something that made her workplace uncomfortable. Some days, she only listened and recorded vids and audios, as Angelica had taught her to do when she couldn’t or in case she would forget; but today, Aaron knew it was going to be Angelica the one recording, because Maria would be very busy arguing.

As if she had read his mind, Maria took a small step forwards, her cold glare still fixated on Adams, and, finally, opened her lips.

“I’d like to say that I am not going to give any desk back” she declared, and squinted her eyes at Adams as the man turned his head rapidly to give her the nastiest look a human could possible manage to get. “Before Christmas break, we agreed that I’d keep Adams’ desk until the crèche and the tree were removed. As far as I know, the crèche is still there, on my counter, and so, I don’t have the responsibility to give the desk back”

Washington looked at her for a moment before opening his mouth. “Alright…? What…” he tried to ask, but was stopped when he saw a hand raising with his peripherical view. “Yes, Adams?” he said, turning to the lawyer now.

“I would like to say that nobody told me anything about that, neither I was asked for my desk”

“And I would want to say that maybe we would have asked for your permission if you answered through the group chat or the texts we send you once in a while…” retorted Maria, “Or if you
bothered to come to work, as we all do” she added, with a sharper tone.

Adams’ dark expression sent shivers to some workmates, but Maria stood her ground and folded her arms upon her chest.

“At least, I didn’t get this job for pure pity” spat Adams with venom.

Alexander looked up and frowned at Adams at the same time Aaron did so. Adams talked little, but the few times he did it, he was sure to either say some nonsense or leave a scar if you ‘pushed him too far’. Aaron was a man of few words as well, but he wasn’t one that liked to sit around while seeing some friend being insulted out of the blue. Especially, when he felt partly responsible. He was the one who talked to Washington about Maria’s need of a work…

Alexander didn’t seem to be going to say anything – his lips were pressed and his fists, clenched – but he did look at Aaron with an inquisitive glare when he felt him leaning on his desk, raising his chin and clearing his throat.

“Adams, if you don’t have arguments to defend yourself, it’s alright” Aaron began to say, calmly, “but, please, do not attack on a personal level. What you brought up has nothing to do with the problem at hand”

“How am I not surprised you are the one defending her?” snorted Adams, rolling his eyes. “Among us all, she is the one who has nothing to do here”

This time, Aaron did feel Alexander huffing and moving in his seat, and knew the immigrant was about to lose it. To be honest, Aaron was starting to feel the urge to punch the lawyer in the face as well, but keep his cold façade intact. Maria, on her part, had recovered from the verbal attack and was more than prepared to dedicate Adams some of her repertoire of hurtful responses. Which, Aaron had seen, could match Alexander’s with no problem. Washington also sat straighter in his seat, squeezing the ball while he tried to maintain his stern look.

Before any of the four could open their mouths, though, Jefferson made their words go down their throats. He was also the other one around there, Aaron could vouch for that, who could match Alexander’s witness and sharp remarks. That was why he relaxed a bit after hearing the cutting comment that came out from the secretary’s mouth.

“And still, she does more around here that you in your own house*”
Alexander and Maria looked at Jefferson with perplexed eyes, and trembled a bit when they turned their eyes on Adams and saw the killing glare the lawyer was dedicating to the secretary. Though they would never admit it aloud. Washington was frozen in his seat, and decided to be silent for a bit more.

“I suggest you that, if you have something to say, Jefferson, you do it face to face” argued Adams.

Jefferson turned his head slightly to the lawyer, indifference clear in his features. “I’ve never been shy in that regard. You know I’m very used to stand for what I say, while you only stand for yourself” he retorted.

“I’m sorry if you haven’t had the normal mentor a child must have to confront life with no companion by your side, Jefferson, but I’d advise you to keep your personal problems at the front door before coming in to work*”

Everybody at that had dedicated Adams a frown of either anger or confusion. Even Hamilton seemed upset by the statement, a slight flush took over his cheeks, pointing out his anger. Madison dedicated Adams the coldest glare in juxtaposition of the CFO’s heated expression, and Peggy leaned back on the chair, not wanting to be involved in anything that had just happened.

“Well, I’d advise you that, if my personal problems bother you that much, you stay out of them. You’ve already proven me that that isn’t difficult for you” said Jefferson, after clearing his throat and taking his pen to toy with it. “And, this time,” he added, closing his eyes for a brief moment before returning his hateful glare to Adams. “Try to stay out for real and not to come back when better suits you”

“And I’d advise you to use your wicked tongue with the ones who wrong you” talked back Adams, his tone turning harsher. “At least, if you’re going to keep on showing off how little it cost you to be straightforward, that is…*”

“I’m sorry my alleged ‘boastful’ personality vex you this much, Adams. Maybe one day you’d have something good to boast about and you’ll get over that inferiority complex”

“No, Jefferson, I am the one who is sorry; it must be really difficult to be so weak that you, every day, need to pick different victims to fool yourself into thinking you’re actually strong”

Aaron felt Adams giving Alexander a sideways glance*, and, for a moment, he thought the CFO would take this as an invitation to intervene. Not that he wanted a headache to appear, nor that Jefferson was a friend or even a close acquaintance, but Madison was a close friend, and it was beyond clear that he was having one hell of a time for the ordeal Adams was making Jefferson – one of the closest friends Madison had – live in front of the whole staff. Which, absolutely, would do no good to the social anxiety Jefferson had. Aaron hadn’t stopped looking at the pen Jefferson had taken after the bad taste comment about Jefferson’s personal life and loss, and the object was now being shaken with more ferocity than before between the fingers of the secretary’s hand.
But Alexander said nothing. And though Aaron could understand Alexander wanted to have a peaceful day today for what was about to happen tomorrow, he still needed to see the scene in front of his eyes to be over, and was aware that he wasn’t going to be the one doing it, being his anxiety nothing better than the secretary’s. He threw a glare to Washington, hoping for the man to look in his direction and understand what his eyes were trying to tell anybody in the room, but the CEO was listening to the passive-aggressive exchange of nasty comments with brows furrowed.

Jefferson’s voice took him back to the real world, made him feel the tension the room possessed.

“Adams, I really appreciate the great effort you’re making right now to come up with something to insult me with. It is very difficult to invent lies to talk bad about someone. I know first-hand, because I had to make the same big effort when I had to speak well of you”

Finally, Jefferson noticed the rapid moves his shaking hand was making the pen make. He let the object on the table and cleared his throat once again, now clasping his hands and trying to pretend he had been like that during the whole argument.

“Believe me, Jefferson, the one who can know that first-hand is me. It is way easier to say bad things about you than good ones, for the formers are always plentiful when it comes to you. I freely assume you are becoming more and more aware of this as more lonely days pass you by*”

Aaron was always observant, but he felt he wasn’t the only one who noticed Jefferson wincing at that last remark. Not only because the whole room had its eyes on him, but because it seemed to be the last straw that broke Hamilton’s silence.

“It may be sad that people stay with you only for your money, but sadder is to endure someone’s personality you despise only for their money” spat the CFO, with his eyes still focus on the papers in front of him, missing the surprise expression Jefferson and Washington gave him.

“Hamilton, I’m gonna ask you to stay out of this conversation” said Adams while frowning at the immigrant.

Alexander shrugged, his eyes still glued to the documents. “I’m not getting in between your arguing, I’m only commenting it. If you don’t like that, then, I’d advise you to leave personal matters at the door before coming in the meeting room”

It might have been the clear mock in Alexander’s voice when he repeated Adams’ previous words and tone, because the tension seemed to disappear even though Adams’ frown was deeper than before. A few laughed, Washington included, and Aaron could feel Jefferson’s shoulders relaxed slightly as he let out a breath the man didn’t even seem to know he was holding.
Hamilton finally looked up from his papers, sighing with a tiny smile on his lips.

“Alright, everybody, I think that was enough, let’s focus on important matters now…” he said, re-reading the paper in front of him for what felt like the zillionth time.

“Can we decide what will happen with my desk before you make us fall asleep with your new novel?” asked Adams, getting more upset as the minutes went by.

Hamilton looked at him, making the tension to come back for a brief second before speaking.

“Adams, how long have we known each other?”

Adams was taken aback at first by the question, but answered nonetheless. “Hm… Two years I guess?”

“Well, after all that time, I’m still trying to figure out what kind of good traits you might have to compensate that ugly personality and attitude of yours” he declared with a calm tone. He looked at his papers once again. “Alright, let’s go back to real serious stuff…”

“But…” tried to complain Adams.

“I’m not going to give you the desk, Adams” blurted out Maria.

“Why not!!” complained the lawyer.

“Where would I sit, then??”

“In your own desk!”

“The crèche is there, I’ve told you!”

“And what is a crèche doing on a table right in January!”

“If you spent more time coming to work, you wouldn’t be that surprised” said Madison, frowning upset at the man. “And still, we all do more in one day than you in the whole year”

“James…” tried to say Jefferson, eyeing his friend carefully.

“Why do you want a desk, anyways? Maria is gonna give it more use; she comes to work every day!”

“Of course you stick up for her now, as she’s your little nookie…” commented Adams.

“I stick up for who deserves it, not like you, always keeping in with the right people, with no opinion and crafty… I pity you, Adams, I really pity you”

“Alright, alright!” cut off Washington, rubbing his temples. “Adams, even if you didn’t come to work when that deal was made, I am sure they commented it on the group chat, didn’t you?” he asked, looking at the rest of his employees, who nodded. “See? I won’t meddle in your personal life, you’re a grown-up man and nobody better than you know why you miss so much work days, but I am going to ask for you to look at the group chat from time to time. It will do you good in the long run”
“Yes, sir” said Adams, lowering his voice considerably.

“Good. Though that doesn’t justify that we’re January 10th and the Christmas tree and crèche are still at the entrance. Please, somebody get rid of those and keep them in a box somewhere else. Appearance is a big part of a business”

“Yes, sir…” the rest said, their eyes glued to the floor.

“Good… Now, Alexander, did you have something you’d want to share with us?” asked George, turning to his CFO.

Alex nodded and adjusted his glasses before reading the paper once again. “I was doing the math and I noticed a strange expensive. Please, which one of you used part of the company’s money for…” he squinted his eyes and frowned his features slightly. “Personnel’s comfort?” he read, raising his glare to look at everybody.

“Yeah, me” said Peggy, raising her hand.

“You?” asked Alexander, a bit surprised. He felt Aaron moving uncomfortably by his side and dedicated the lawyer a suspicious glare before focusing back on his sister-in-law. “Care to explain what did you mean by that?”

Peggy shrugged and rubbed one eye. “What word didn’t you understand? ‘Personnel’ or ‘comfort’?” she asked.

Alex frowned. “The two when they’re together”

“It means that I spent the money in something that would make us more comfortable”

“Us…?” repeated Aaron under his breath.

“What is that thing, Peggy?” asked Alexander, leaning on his chair.

“A bed”

And the whole room fell silent for almost a minute.

“A what?” said Alexander, clearing his throat when he noticed how small his voice had sounded.

“A B-E-D. Bed” repeated Peggy, as if he was a little child. “You know what a bed is?”

“Yes” spat Alex offended.

“Good. As you barely use them, I was afraid I’d have to explain it to you”

“Jeez, Pegs, why so nasty?” said Angelica, wrinkling her nose.

“Mind your business!” screamed Peggy, now with watery eyes. “I am not nasty. It’s just that they’re making me stupid questions!” she added, sniffing a bit.

“Girl, if you were me and read something like this, what would you do?” asked Alex, taking off his glasses and trying to contain his harsh tone to a minimum. “I am just trying…”
Peggy interrupted his talking by punching the table with all her might. “And now you insult me by reminding me my office is nothing in comparison with yours!” she accused, getting up from her chair violently and running out of the room, crying.

“I am not… Where are you going?!” he said, following her with the glare.

They all saw with wide eyes how Peggy exited the place without giving an answer or closing the door. Angelica broke their shocked silence by standing up and running after her sister, giggling.

“Hahaha, I need to see it with my own eyes!” she commented, taking out her phone.

Everyone looked at each other, agreeing with the vice president and running out the door, pushing each other to be there before anyone else. Only Aaron and Washington stayed in their seats. Alexander eventually getting up more relaxed than the rest, but also curious. Washington started to squeeze the little ball in his hand, with all his strengths. Aaron looked at him and got up, walking closer to him carefully.

“Sir?” he called. “I don’t think they would come back anytime soon…”

“I agree” said George with a harsh tone.

Aaron flinched a bit in his spot and cleared his throat. “Would you come with me to see what I talked to you about?” he asked, wringing his hands with nervousness.

Washington breathed in and out a few times, closing his eyes and trying to ignore the laughs and screams of his employees at the other side of the wall. He got up quite abruptly, startling his employee.

“Sorry” he said quickly. “Show me what you wanted me to see”

Aaron nodded and guided the president upstairs. George gave his workers a brief stare before looking at his blue ball while he went upstairs with Aaron.

“Oh, lil’ Gus, you just saved so many lives today”

Aaron tried hard to pretend he hadn’t heard that.
Alexander didn’t know what to think. In Peggy’s little office there was a bed where there used to be a desk. The CFO looked at it for a few moments, hearing Angelica’s hysterical laughter and others’ giggles and quiet comments, and, then, leave, not wanting to know anything about it. He’d make sure to get those 300 dollars back some day, but these two days he wasn’t in the mood to fight over them.

In his way back to his office, he saw John with his peripherical view, strangely with his back against the wall instead of being first in line to see Peggy’s new purchase. Raising an eyebrow, Alexander got closer to him, noticing now his tired and taciturn expression.

“John, are you okay?” he asked, putting his hand on his shoulder, now frowning in concern.

Laurens turned his head towards him and, slowly, tears began to flood in the corners of his eyes. Letting out a choked sob, John began to slur words as an explanation.

“Slow down” said Alexander, rubbing his back. “Come on, let’s go to the break room and you can explain me there, maybe there’s something I can do to help” he suggested, with a tiny smile. “Besides, I saw Washington leaving the meeting room with Aaron; another Wednesday without solving anything…”

Alexander shook his head in disapproval as he walked with his crying friend to the break room. He tried to ignore Peggy’s screams, telling their co-workers to let her sleep and live; Angelica’s unending laughter; Adams suggesting to use Peggy’s desk instead of his; Maria flipping him off and swearing at the man; Jefferson commenting this office was getting out of hand… Alexander then had to pay attention to their screams and Laurens’ sobs to get away from the idea that Jefferson was right in his statement…

“When did you see this?”

“This morning. I was going to the washroom and I just saw it”

“True, the damn restroom is in this floor. And that is the second more visited place in this office…”

“What do we do, sir? Do we tell Alexander?”
“No, no, don’t tell him. Let’s try to solve this on our own”

“But, sir, this seems very expensive to fix. And Alexander is in charge of the money. And if he didn’t overlook Peggy’s bed, just imagine what could happen if we take so much money without telling the others…”

“We are not going to take any money, Burr… We will just… Cover this a bit…”

“Cover it, sir?”

“Exactly”

“But… But how can you cover something like this?”

Aaron swallowed afraid when he saw Washington squeezing the blue ball in his hand, his knuckles turning white. He followed his boss’ eyes, glaring again at the long and ugly crack that adorned the wall down the hallway, right in front of the restrooms doors. Aaron looked at his watch: 8.51. He sharpened his earing, hearing his workmates fighting over the bed. He didn’t know if not hearing Alexander’s voice was a good or a bad sign, but tried not to pay too much attention right now. It would only take a few minutes for anyone to come upstairs to use the toilet.

“Sir?” he asked timidly once again.

Washington sighed heavily and squeezed the ball even harder than before. “I don’t know how, alright?” he admitted, clearly overwhelmed. “Damn King…” he muttered through clenched teeth.

“What?”

“Nothing” he said rapidly. “Aaron, inform the rest that the toilets are out of service. If they don’t get this far, they won’t see the crack. And it’s not like anybody else whose office is in here is gonna come, so…”

“But, where will we do our necessities?”

“Cross the street and go to the pub”

“To the pub??” asked Aaron, perplexed.

Washington shrugged. “What? Half of you spend the day there… I’m sure everybody will be even glad that the toilets are broken”

“But they are not” Aaron reminded him.

“Yes, yes, I know…” George sighed once again. “And my horoscope said 2018 was going to be a good year…”

“Yeah, I also read mine when Laurens sent them all through the group chat on New Year’s Eve…”

“A shit is what’s gonna be…” complained George, squeezing the ball with all his strengths. The two men jumped afraid when the object simply exploded, broken. Washington looked at the now piece of plastic covering his palm with sadness. “Lil’ Gus, you defended your cause marvellously, I will never forget you” he said, serious.
Aaron took a few steps backwards. “I’m gonna tell the others” he informed. “About the toilets being broken, of course” he soon added.

Aaron ran downstairs, only looking back for seeing his boss looking at the broken plastic ball with an unreadable expression.

“Now, tell me what’s wrong”

Alexander had searched for some coffee or tea left, but found nothing. Cursing under his breath, he decided to simply serve John a muffin and a glass of water. Laurens sniffed a bit, and Alexander took his hand. Just because their relationship ended abruptly and on a bad page, didn’t mean he stopped caring for John. He was one of the best friends he ever made, and it bothered Alexander to see him like that, though his expressionless face sometimes didn’t prove it.

“I’m in a spin of disgrace” began to say John, still not meeting his eyes. “I’m in a phase of my life when nothing turns out fine, or half-fine. I’m not asking too much, to be honest, but it’s like life had it for me. I’m starting to doubt the karma and all I believe in…”

“Well, you only started to believe in those things last year…” commented Alexander.

John finally lifted up his face, looking him straight in the eye with a frown: “I thought you wanted to listen to me, not to comment as if I were some bad movie”

“Sorry, sorry…” said Alexander, trying not to roll his eyes. He couldn’t hold it back when he saw John’s expression changed quickly to a sad face.

“Last night I went out to try to meet new people, and I ended up being rejected and making a fool of myself. I ended up drinking like if there were gonna be no tomorrow and Louise had to tell me to leave before I could hurt myself”

Alexander cocked an eyebrow. “I thought Louise was in jail for drug trafficking?”

“Yes, but I needed the familiarity, so…”

“John, we talked about this: you need to stop naming all bartenders you meet after her…”

“Well, let me talk, will ya?” complained John, changing his sad face for an angry one again.

“Yes, keep going…”

“Where was I…?”

“You were saying you were blank drunk last night because nobody wanted to be your friend”
“Jeez, thank you so much for your tact!”

“If you wanted tact, you should’ve asked for Lafayette to listen to you”

“I can’t talk to him right now. He and Hercules had a fight while coming to work”

“I don’t want to know what you did this time…”

“My gosh, are you all on commission for undermining my moral or something?”

“John, I don’t want to be cruel, but admit that you’ve been living off them for eight years now… Almost nine”

“And who’s fault is that?!”

“Yours” said Alexander, resolute.

Laurens gasped. “Excuse me?!”

“Who between us two found the other in bed with a total stranger?”

Laurens punched the table and got up noisily.

“You just can’t give me a break, right?! I am the punching ball of this group!” he complained, running out of the room crying his eyes out.

Alexander shrugged. “What’s that? Your new victim quote?” he asked, picking the muffin he had offered his friend and eating it himself.

Alexander looked at the door in time to see Laurens bumping into Aaron, who was coming downstairs. Both men complained under their breath for the sudden crash.

“Jeez, Laurens, where are you running to?” asked Aaron while rubbing his chest.

“I am going to cry to the washroom” informed John.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Stop being a drama queen”

“Shut up, you’ve said enough!”

“Laurens, you can’t go to the washroom” tried to say Aaron.

“Why not?” asked John, throwing daggers at the lawyer.

“Because you have work to do, as anyone else in here” said Alexander.

Laurens looked over his shoulder before his eyes began to water again. “They don’t stop. None of the four ever stop!” he complained, running out of the building, pushing a few workmates who were still at Peggy’s office door in his way out.
“I haven’t done anything!” said Aaron, confused.

“Ignore him. He likes to make a fuss out of nothing for avoiding responsibility”

“Thank goodness he’s your best friend” commented Aaron, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Friendship doesn’t erase your flaws”

“If you talk like that about a person you love, I don’t want to know what you’d say about me when I turn around”

“You’re right, you don’t want to know”

Aaron gave him a nasty look while Alexander got up from his seat, swallowing the last bit of the muffin and clapping his hands, walking to the counter to grab the washcloth to clean the table. In the meantime, Washington had gone downstairs, throwing a rapid glare to the group that was still on Peggy’s door, now talking among each other, and to Alexander, nodding at the CFO for doing some other thing that wasn’t losing time.

Washington walked in the meeting room, exiting the place with the plastic bag in one hand and a red ball in the other. Alexander had already finished cleaning the table and was looking at his boss, exchanging a nervous glare with Aaron. Washington didn’t mind their attention at all, as he looked at the new ball.

“I’ll name you David” he nodded, in agreement with himself, and then proceeded to lock himself inside his office.

“This is not going to end well” commented Alexander, shaking his head. “First, the chair; now the little balls…”

“Hehe, yes, in what would he be thinking when he bought them, right?” Aaron laughed, nervously.

“Bah, I’m going to lock inside my office as well. Get some job done” said Alexander, shrugging.

“Could you help me take my desk out?”

“What do you mean?”

“I want to spend the whole day here. I know just telling the toilets are broken won’t be enough”

“… And then, the crazy one is me…” said Alexander, shaking his head once again. “Come on, I’ll help you, but I don’t want to know anything about it”

“Better”

“What?”

“I said thank you”

“…”
They had already put Aaron’s desk in front of the staircase and the lawyer was taking out his chair to get some job done while making sure nobody discovered his and Washington’s secret until the CEO came out with some idea to hide the crack, when Madison walked to the break room, being the first one to get separated from the group. They weren’t talking about Peggy’s bed anymore – the therapist was already snoring noisily – but they didn’t seem to want to move from there.

“What’s this?” asked the accountant, pointing at the spot where Aaron was sat at, working as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

“The toilets are broken” explained Aaron

“And you decided to work there as a protest or how?”

“Don’t try to be logical in this place, Madison” advised Alexander.

“True…”

The accountant’s nod was abruptly interrupted by a series of three sneezes. He blew his nose while coughing a bit.

“Are you sick again?” asked Aaron.

“Just a cold” Madison waved one hand nonchalantly.

“You’re a bit red, do you need to go home?” said Aaron, now frowning concerned.

“No, no. I was going to take the medicine now” he replied, coughing a few times into the handkerchief.

“Laurens is losing his time in the pub” explained Alexander. “But if you need to leave, you simply have to knock on my door, tell me, and I’ll take care of it”

“No, really…”

Their conversation was interrupted when Maria screamed to John Adams, making the rest of conversations to be cut off as well. When they turned their heads, they saw the receptionist as red as her shirt and clenching her teeth at the lawyer, who simply sighed and turned on his heels, storming out while throwing curses under his breath, all of them dedicated to the receptionist.

Maria gave him no mind, simply nodding with pride and heading back to sit on her provisional desk.
Adams stopped in his tracks when he saw Aaron in front of the staircase. His frown deepened, and Madison decided to walk over to Hamilton’s side, who stood by Aaron’s desk.

“What the fuck is this now?” asked the lawyer.

“The toilets are out of service” explained Aaron, with clear tedium in his voice. He turned to the CFO. “Alex, do you mind writing a memo?”

“Yes, I do”

“Since when do you mind writing at all?” asked Madison, in confusion.

“When I have to write stupid things, I do. For that, we’ve got Jefferson”

James frowned. “Stop insulting him…”

“Well, tell Jefferson to write it then…” said Aaron.

“I don’t wanna talk to him”

“Thought you were his lawyer now?”

“So?”

“What kind of lawyer doesn’t want to talk with his client?”

“One that accepted to do a shitty job for free”

“You accepted under the condition of not being paid” said James, upset.

“Madison, son, go take your medicine” spat Alexander.

“Hello?” said Adams, red in the face. “I am still here”

“True, you’ve been at work for almost three hours in a row. Congratulations” commented Alexander with a sarcastic smile.

Adams dedicated him the ugliest look he could managed. “Creole, the day you die, I’m gonna throw such a party that it’s gonna be recorded in the book of Guinness World Records as the biggest party ever made”

Alexander moved his tongue inside his mouth, annoyed. “Well, the day you die, Monstro, I’m gonna gather as many signs as I can to make that day a national holiday”

“Settle down, you two…” said Aaron.

“Could some of you tell me how on Earth I’m gonna go upstairs now?” asked Adams, both arms in akimbo.

“We have to go the pub” explained Aaron.

“To the pub??” asked Madison. “But those are public restrooms”

“Don’t say…” commented Alexander, mockingly.
“I mean that I don’t like to go to public restrooms, they are a sea of infections”

“If nothing has happened to you after making out with Betty Boop, nothing will come out for peeing on a public toilet” said Adams.

“Don’t insult my friend with benefits” said Madison, frowning annoyed. “Besides, she’s the cleanest and purest around here. I don’t give myself to anyone, that’s why I’m single”

Jefferson, who was making his way to his office, heard his friend and rolled his eyes. “Yes, I’m sure it’s because of that and not because you’re annoying as hell” he said, opening his door.

“I defend him, and he insults me. That’s the price of being a decent human being these days…” commented James out loud, heading straight to the break room.

“Jefferson, you have to write a memo about the toilets being broken” ordered Hamilton, arms crossed and without looking at him.

The secretary frowned at him. “What are we? Toddlers?”

“Jefferson, if you’ve been working here for almost three years and still wonder that, you’re not doing a very good job” said Alexander, as if it was nothing. “And if you could ask for my removal when I was doing my job fine, imagine what I could do with someone who does his job wrong and refuses to do it” he added, with a sided smile.

Jefferson groaned under his breath, cursed Hamilton’s name and then entered his office, closing the door at his backs with a thump.

“This one won’t bother me until tomorrow. One less” said Alexander under his breath.

“Jesus, Alex…” said Aaron, feeling bad.

“Now, Adams, go to the pub and try not to get lost on your way back”

Adams frowned. “I don’t need to go. I just want to go to my goddamn office” he complained.

“You can play on your phone in the break room” Alexander kept talking calmly. “It has better Wi-Fi connection”

“I don’t play with my phone” said Adams. “And I don’t know the Wi-Fi password…”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“Alexander, please…” begged Aaron.

Adams huffed and headed to the break room, punting on the floor, complaining under his breath, saying something like “Fucking assholes, all of you!” before disappearing from their sights. Aaron and Alexander looked at the break room door, having a perfect spot to see both Madison and Adams. The accountant was taking the medicine and getting ready to go back to work, while Adams opened and closed the cupboards noisily, grumbling.
Finally, the lawyer exploded and screamed, silencing the rest of the staff at the other side of the hallway for the second time.

“WHERE THE FUCK IS MY MUFFIN, FOR JESUS H. CHRIST! I THINK THAT’S ENOUGH FOR ONE DAMN DAY!”

The whole team looked at each other with one cocked eyebrow, while Alexander began to smile slowly. He clicked his tongue, calling Aaron’s attention.

“I wish I had known while eating it” he said. “I’d have enjoyed it a lot more”

Aaron simply shook his head and tried to work and forget about the crack for the rest of the day.

Laurens had decided to go to do some grocery shopping that afternoon. Usually, it was either Lafayette or Hercules, but that day Lafayette had asked him to go, and, not wanting to embitter the environment of the house just when things had started to be calmed again, he obliged. The grocery list wasn’t that long anyways, just a few spices Hercules needed to make dinner that night.

It only took him half an hour: five minutes to grab the necessary things and give a little walk throughout the supermarket to see if he saw something for himself; six minutes to pay – it could have been one, if it hadn’t been for that shameless old man who cut into the line, alleging he only had one item and, once he was in front of the poor cashier, spent five minutes asking for return some thing he had bought that morning, which ticket went mysteriously missing – and the rest was just to find a good parking stop.

So, it was needless to say that Laurens was in a foul mood by the time he was driving back home. He had patience for a lot of things, but going to the supermarket wasn’t one of them. Back when he still lived with Alexander, the man used to joke saying that God should have mercy of whomever dare to bump into him in his way back home after a few minutes at any supermarket.

Laurens never laughed as his other two friends, but he silently agreed.
Especially when, at a red light, the driver behind him hit the rear bumper of the car, with enough force to push him forwards and almost drop the bags on the co-pilot seat, if Laurens hadn’t been fast enough to grab them.

Laurens growled under his breath and took the seatbelt off, forgetting about the traffic light and all his surroundings as he trotted to see the state of the back of the car. Hercules’ car, to be more exact. The back of Hercules’ car with a dent.

_Fucking. Perfect._

“I go to the supermarket without complaining and this is the way the Universe has to compensate me” complained Laurens under his breath, clenching his fists.

“Excuse me, sir, are you alright?” a male voice asked, nervously.

“No, I’m not alright!” screamed Laurens, feeling his face burning with rage. “Look at the fucking bumper! This isn’t even my goddamned car, it’s a friend’s! In what driving school for idiots were you given the shitty driver’s license?! For the love of Christ, that’s enough, I think all this shit is already enough! The damned street light is red, can’t you see?! If you can’t drive, stay in your fucking house, you imbecile! You asshole! Y-”

Laurens whipped around, more insults and swore words burning in the tip of his tongue, both fists clenched and his cheeks now burning for all the fury he was feeling. Everything cooled down once he looked at the man that was standing in front of him. Intelligent eyes in a hefty frame. Suddenly, all his rage evaporated but the burning feelings in his cheeks stayed. Though this time not due to anger.

“Gosh, I’m so sorry, sir!” apologised the man, scrutinizing the bumper while hesitating in getting any closer to the vehicle. “I just got distracted for one second, I’m so sorry. Are you hurt?” he asked, now walking closer to him, with a frown of concern.

“Eh?” asked Laurens. He blinked a couple of times while shaking his head. “Eh, yes, yes. Don’t worry. It was just a silly little hit, and the car was already old” he said, giggling and stroking one lock behind his ear.

“But didn’t you just tell me it was a friend’s?” asked the man, confused.

“Eh? Yes, yes, but… But we’re not that close. Screw him” he laughed a bit.

The man smiled sheepishly. “Let me give you the documentation of my car, so your friend and I can have an Agreed Statement of Facts” he said, entering his car for a moment.

“I could give you a ride” suggested Laurens. “I mean, I was heading home right now…”
“But do you two live together?” asked the man, reading some papers he had taken out from the glove box.

“Three. He has a boyfriend”

“Aha, and you live the three together?” asked the man, documentation in one hand and an eyebrow raised. “I thought you said you weren’t close?”

“Well, I wasn’t close with my father either and I lived with him until I turned eighteen” he joked.

“I know what that feels like” commented the man.

“Is that right?”

“Yep. My father and I never understood each other. But I was lucky enough to have good friends who stood by my side”

“Likewise. I mean, though this friend and I are going through a tough patch lately, I’m close with the boyfriend. Both were my friends back in college” explained Laurens. “They were the ones who offered me to stay with them for a few days after my boyfriend broke up with me”

“Such good friends” the man said, nodding. “Sorry if I’m too straightforward, but what happened with your boyfriend?”

“Oh, well… he and I… We didn’t work out as good as a couple as we do as friends. He was also one of my closest friends back in college” answered John without wanting to get into detail. “Which is good, because he’s one of the cleverest and best friends I ever had”

“Well, he doesn’t seem that clever if he let you go” commented the man with a tiny smile while he handed him the papers.

Laurens grabbed them while giggling. “Yeah, well, nobody’s perfect”

“I’ve got some proof in front of me right now that prevents me to think so”

John looked around. “Where?”

The man was taken aback at first. “I was referring to you”

“Ah… Ah! Ah…” exclaimed Laurens, feeling his cheeks burning.

“Sorry, I’m not good in these flirting thing…” apologised the man.

“Oh, no” said Laurens, laughing while waving one hand. “If you only knew what happened to me the other night… You’re an expert beside me”

“I’d love to hear that story”

The man laughed slightly, and Laurens bit his bottom lip, thinking for a moment before blurting out:

“I could tell you right now” He gave him the papers back. “I know a pub just around the corner’
“And what about those supermarket bags?” he asked, pointing at the inside of the car.

“I don’t have any frozen food in there” he said, shrugging.

The man smiled at the same time he did. Just like that, Laurens began to recover faith in karma.

“Where the hell is this man?”

And, meanwhile, Hercules was losing patience as worry took over his chest. He dialled John’s number for what seemed to be the millionth time and groaned under his breath when the voicemail sounded at the other side again.

“It’s been more than an hour” he commented out loud, looking at the clock. “Jeez, I hope he didn’t get into a wreck or something worse…” he said, worried. Then, his tone changed for one of pure rage. “That idiot. I’m sure he’s fine, making me worry over him as some kind of revenge for what happened this morning…”

Hercules groaned under his breath and trotted to his shared bedroom, muttering in all his way there.

“Stupid immature, it’s actually my fault for letting him go alone to the supermarket… He gets distracted by a fucking fly! It wouldn’t surprise me if I find him in the entrance of the supermarket watching a butterfly flying!”

Hercules was about to swing open his bedroom door, keep badmouthing Laurens and complaining about how much he was always worrying over him with no need, but had to stop abruptly when he was able to hear Lafayette’s voice from the other side, talking to someone in whispers.

Now, Lafayette was discreet with his life and conversations, and Hercules was used to it. But he had never locked himself in their room and talk to the other person in whispers, as if afraid of being heard.
Raising one eyebrow, and trying to ignore the guilt, Hercules pressed one ear against the wooden door, catching his boyfriend’s part of the conversation.

“What do you want me to do about it? You know I wasn’t sure, but you keep insisting, and insisting… Oh, yes, now it’s a pain. What do you think, that this was going to be easy? [...] No! We can’t tell them just yet! Angelica and Alexander would kill me if they knew I let their sister do this. [...] Yes, I know Eliza would calm them down, but the poor woman has enough. Alex’s party is tomorrow, and I don’t want to overwhelm her more, or to spoil Alex’s birthday. [...]”

A faint scream was heard, and Hercules tried to catch some word, but it was useless as Lafayette calm the other person – Peggy – down rapidly.

“Don’t scream at me! I told you what this was about, you weren’t left on your own devices… Look, I’ll help you through it, I promised you, but you don’t tell anyone just yet. I’ve got a lot on my plate. [...] Alright, yes, go to sleep and try to rest as much as you can… Bye, chérie, bonne nuit”

Hercules heard Lafayette’s steps getting close to the door and he got separated from it before it was swung open, with the Frenchman looking worriedly at the phone in his hand. He looked up.

“Herc, something’s wrong?” he asked.

“Eh? No” he answered quickly. Then, he corrected himself. “Well, actually, yes, it is. Laurens hasn’t come back yet, I was about to go for him”

“Ah, give it no mind. I’m sure it’s fine” said Lafayette, waving one hand nonchalantly and heading straight to the living room.

“Who were you talking to?” he asked, following him.

Lafayette sat on the couch, turning on the TV. “It was just Peggy. She needed some help with something”

“What something?”

“She… is going to French classes”

Hercules narrowed his eyes when he saw Lafayette touching his earlobe. “French classes, huh?” he repeated.

“Yeah, she… wants to wish Alex a happy birthday in his mother tongue”

“Yeah… You’re very thoughtful” said Hercules, suspicious. “I’m gonna look for Laurens” he declared, feeling upset.

“Leave him alone…”
“He’s been gone for more than an hour. The supermarket is not that far away”

Lafayette rolled his eyes and muttered something unintelligible in French, while he put on his coat and was prepared to open the front door. This opened by itself at the other side, revealing a smiling Laurens talking animatedly with some man. The chat stopped as soon as John bumped into his friend.

“Oh, Herc, hi! Where were you going?”

“Where was I going…?” repeated Hercules, blinking dumbfounded. “I was going to look for you!”

“Why?”

“Wh…? Because you were gone for more than an hour!”

“Ah, well, yes, it’s just that I met Alf on my way back” explained Laurens.

“Alf…?” repeated Hercules, while Lafayette walked to the door.

“Nice to meet you, Alf” said Lafayette, nodding.

“Same” said the man. “Excuse me, are you the owner of the car?”

“It’s mine” said Hercules.

“Then, I should give you this” said the man, handing him some papers. “I hit the back of the car”

“Excuse me…?”

“Oh, are you two alright?” asked Lafayette, frowning slightly.

“I’ve never been better in my whole life” said Laurens, with a dreamy glare. “Come, let me show you my room. Herc, you have the bags in the car”

“What?” asked Hercules, eyeing them both walking down the hall.

“Do you want something to eat or drink?” asked Lafayette.

“No, thank you” answered Alf.

“We’ve got some of both at the pub” added Laurens, opening the door of his bedroom.

“Good to see you found someone” said Lafayette quickly, before the door was heard closed.

“Fucking hell!” Hercules’ screamed was heard right after from outside the house.

Laf sighed. “This man always at the verge of an anxiety attack…” he complained.

Lafayette exited the house and saw his boyfriend looking at the back of the car with a frown of pure fury.
“Look, look at this!” he said, pointing at the bumper. “That’s why I prefer to go to the supermarket myself! This is going to cost an eye, a leg and even some organ!”

“Don’t overreact, it’s barely seen” said Lafayette, squinting his eyes. “See? You have to narrow your eyes to actually see some damage”

“Buy yourself glasses! Your friend deformed my car!” complained Hercules, passing a hand through his short hair.

Lafayette wrinkled his lips. “Oh, nice, so when he messes up he’s my friend, but when he does something fine, he’s your friend?”

“I don’t know; when he actually does something fine, I’ll tell you”

Lafayette rolled his eyes as his boyfriend began to pace, one hand buried in his hair and the other squeezing the documents he was given. He looked at the bumper and, yes, maybe it looked bad, but it wasn’t such a big deal. Or he wanted to think that.

“Think positive” he finally said, making Hercules stop. “John finally found someone to spend the night with”

“Yes, that’s the other thing, he doesn’t only destroy my car, but he also brings his fling… Well, not today” he said, heading straight to the inside of the house.

“Herc, what are you gonna do?” asked Lafayette, running after him.

“No shagging in my house! There will be no shagging in my house and that’s final!” he declared, raising one fist as a sign of an oath.

Lafayette frowned and trotted until he was in front of him, both arms in akimbo. “May I remind you this is also my house?” he said, a bit annoyed. “What I say matters, as well, and I say let John be. It will be a one night-stand”

“One can never be sure with John. Or with the people! That man can be even playing with him to avoid bigger problems”

“What bigger problems, for God’s sake? The car isn’t that bad”

“I know these kinds of persons, Laf. You just live in your ideological Euro Disney land, but I live in the real world, full of assholes who…”

“Hercules, I hired Alf” blurted out Lafayette, fed up with his boyfriend’s paranoia.

“Hired him?” repeated Hercules, frowning in confusion. “What the heck are you talking…?”

Hercules stopped mid-sentence, frozen in his spot for a few moments. He blinked a couple of times, processing what he had just heard and praying in his mind that he was getting it wrong.
“Did you hire a rent boy?” he asked in a whisper.

“Male prostitute, I think it’s the right term” said Lafayette, with normality.

“Oh, my God, you did…” said Hercules, covering his mouth in bewilderment. “In what the fuck were you thinking?!”

“You were the one who wouldn’t stop complaining about Laurens being a nuisance. Now, things will flow more easily”

“This… This is not happening” Hercules shook his head in disapproval. His face turned red and he clenched his fists, wrinkling the papers in his right hand. “Now, I’m gonna kick him out!” he declared, trying to run to Laurens’ room.

Lafayette stopped him by grabbing his arm. “No, you are not” he contradicted. “It cost me a whole heap of money”

“Ah, you paid for this craziness?!”

“No, ‘hiring’ now means asking someone for a free favour” said Lafayette sarcastically.

“Are you nuts?! With what money did you pay him?!”

“With the money I’ve got hidden in my secret account, of course… With which money do you think I’m gonna pay him?” he asked, crossing his arms.

“With ours?! But I didn’t hear the notification on my phone!”

“That’s because I silenced your phone”

“What?!”

Hercules patted his pockets and started to scrutinize the whole room.

“Where is it?! WHERE THE HELL IS IT?!” he asked, feeling his heartrate increasing.

“I hid it” said Lafayette naturally.

“Why?!”

“Just in case you were going to read something before going to bed”

“This… This is… I don’t know what this is…” said Hercules, sitting on the couch, totally defeated. “My car gets destroyed, my defaulting roommate is having sex with a prostitute my boyfriend paid with our common money without telling me…” He shook his head. “Gosh, I was in such an ease in my parents’ tailor shop… Why did I have to give up that normal life for going to college? My mother warned me, I still remember how she used to tell me not to have big dreams and ambitions. I should’ve listened to her”

“Jesus, Hercules, you’re overreacting” said Lafayette, taking a seat beside him. “Listen to me, it will
only be one time. Then, Laurens’ self-esteem will be high enough for him to go out”

“Hope you’re right” said Hercules, bitterly. He threw the documentation, not giving it any mind as he got up and went straight to the bedroom. “I’m gonna sleep”

“And dinner??” asked Lafayette.

“I’m not hungry!”

Hercules slammed the door shut, as a way to let some anger out. Laurens shushed them from the other side of his door, and Hercules opened his bedroom to look at his roommate’s door with fury.

“He even shushes me in my own house. This is fucking fantastic…” he looked daggers at his boyfriend. “You sleep on the couch!” he declared, before closing the door, unwillingly quietly.

Lafayette sighed. “The price of being a good friend is so high…”

Alexander awoke earlier than usual, having to take the kids to the nursery school that day. He woke the children up, returned their hugs with a smile as the little ones wished them a happy birthday, prepared them some breakfast and the lunch for that day along with John’s bottle, and some coffee for him, and the four of them had their first meal while chatting.

Eliza made her way in the kitchen with a soft smile by the time they were finished. The kids said good morning and she kissed their heads with affection and then proceeded to hug her husband with all her might.

“Happy birthday, hun!” she said, peeking him on the cheek.

“Thanks, Betsey” said Alex, patting her and returning the kiss on one of her cheeks.

“Guess what a wonderful surprise I have for you today!” half-sang Eliza.

“The whole party thing was a joke?” he asked, hopeful.

Eliza pressed her lips, trying not to erase her smile. “No” she spat, and ignored her husband’s complaints. “Today you can stay at work until late”

“So I can have an excuse for missing the party?” asked Alex, again hopeful. “Eli, I love you so much”
“No, man. I mean that we need time to prepare all the things” explained Eliza, her smile now gone. “Around eight sounds alright?” she asked.

“What about around eight of tomorrow evening?”

“Alexander…”

“Alright… Yes, it sounds perfect…” he said, shrugging and preparing his paperwork with less enthusiasm than usual.

Eliza’s hugged him once again. “You’re gonna love this! I’ll make it the best birthday party you ever had!” she promised.

“You don’t have a lot of competition, anyways” commented Alexander, shrugging in her embrace.

“What a man… Cheer up! It’s your birthday! Joy, joy!” she said, jumping in excitement as a little child. “Now, come on, have a nice and long day at work. Especially, long”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever…” said Alexander, rolling his eyes. “C’mon, kids…”

Lafayette was starting to rethink his understanding of friendship when he was unable to reach the cabinets without feeling a horrible pain in his back. Hercules’ grumpy face didn’t help, neither did his silence while he ate breakfast by his side or the fact that he decided not to shower that morning for not making things worse.

What did help was seeing Laurens humming happily in his way to the bathroom and hearing him singing even more happily while showering. Lafayette didn’t even mind that he was going to have to stand a scolding from Hercules about the hot water anyways as Laurens seemed to want to imitate his habit that morning.

“See?” he said, in a whisper. “Happy as a clam”

Hercules rolled his eyes and kept eating his cereal, not wanting to admit he was right. For Lafayette it was enough to know it himself. Alf got out from Laurens’ bedroom, dressing up in quite a hurry, and went directly to him, nodding at Hercules. His boyfriend returned the gesture for the sake of good manners.

“I’m leaving already” he whispered, handing the Frenchman a payment terminal.

“Yes, thank you so much” said Lafayette,
He took out his credit card and swiped it in the gadget. Hercules leaned to see the numbers on it, and his eyes grew wide. He almost choked on his milk with cereal as Lafayette passed the object back to Alf, nodding with a polite smile.

“Ninety dollars?!” he screamed once he had coughed and cleared his throat.

“Sssh! John could hear you!” said Lafayette immediately.

“But what the hell? I hope whatever you did to him yesterday in bed lasts him for the rest of his days!” he told Alf, frowning.

“Actually, we didn’t do much” admitted Alf, adjusting the neck of his shirt. “He just wanted to cuddle and talk a bit”

“What?” asked Hercules, astonished.

“Poor Johnny, he feels so alone” said Lafayette, concerned. “Thank you for your service, I’m sure he will have a lot more of self-esteem now”

“He better will…”

“Shut up, walking agony…”

“Honestly, I also want him to be happy. He seems like a very nice guy” commented Alf.

“Do nice guys not have a discount?”

“Hercules!”

“What? He charges you ninety bucks and now he wants to act all cool” Hercules hit the table and got up from his seat in one leap. “Come on, get the hell outta here already!” he said, pushing Alf to the front door.

“Don’t take it as something personal!” apologised Lafayette, following them. “He has bad morning moods”

“Alright, alright!” said Alf, opening the front door. “I’ll go. Don’t worry… Laf, say ‘hi’ to Adrienne on my part”

Hercules looked at his boyfriend with one cocked eyebrow. “What does he mean by that?”

“He’s a common friend of Adrienne. She knows him from the time she spent in America. She was the one who suggested him to me when I told her John’s problem”

“Ah, so he’s your ex’s friend and he still makes you pay?”

“Business is business. Pepita needs to eat as well” said Alf, as a matter-of-factly.

“Pepita?”

“His cat” explained Lafayette. “I’ve got some photos. She’s such a cutie!” said Lafayette, going to collect his phone.
Hercules was red in the face by then. “I don’t mind how cute she is!”

“What’s all this noise?”

They turned their heads to the bathroom door, from which Laurens emerged, already with his hair done and with his shirt half-buttoned up. Laf went to greet him first.

“Johnny, good morning!” he said, hugging him. “We were saying goodbye to your friend”

“Oh, you’re leaving so soon?” asked John, a bit sad.

“Yes, I… I’ve got a call from the hospital”

“Oh, my doctor, always saving lives” said Laurens, blushing slightly. “But you’re still coming this afternoon, right?”

“What do you mean this afternoon?” asked Hercules, interrupting Alf, who nodded at his back.

“To Alexander’s party” explained John, matter-of-factly.

“Oh, em… Johnny, do you think it will be a good idea?” said Lafayette, while Hercules passed a hand through his face. “I mean, he’s your ex…”

“Alex is not the jealous type of guy, he won’t mind”

“But maybe Alf does” tried Lafayette one more time, looking at Alf pleadingly.

The man simply shook his head. “Not at all”

“Of course you don’t” muttered Hercules.

Lafayette forced a smile. “All settle then”

“Of course! We are very open, were called the Revolutionary Set back in college for something!” said Laurens. He then waved goodbye at Alf. “See you there, we’ll drive you there!” he promised.

Alf said goodbye and closed the door, while Hercules threw daggers with the glare at him, and then at the door.

“Isn’t he wonderful?” commented Laurens. “We just clicked”

“Yes, nice, Johnny…” said Lafayette, trying to match his enthusiasm.

“And how is he in bed?” asked Hercules, straightforward.

“There he goes, all romanticism as always” complained John. “I’m talking about love, man”

“Well, love… You knew him yesterday” Lafayette quickly said.
“Because he hit my car” added Hercules.

Laurens made a face at his friend. “Really, Hercules, I’ll never understand how you got a boyfriend before me, being so materialistic and dull”

“Look, Johnny, don’t make me talk, don’t make me talk because I could ruin your mood” threatened Hercules.

“Hercules” said Lafayette, serious.

“And jealous as well” said Laurens. “You’re gonna end up alone with that attitude” he told him before going to his bedroom, humming happily once again.

“Quelle pagaille, quelle pagaille…” muttered Lafayette, overwhelmed. “He fell head over the heels…!”

Hercules laughed with sarcasm. “It will be a one-night thing, Hercules” he said, trying to imitate his boyfriend’s accent. “When am I not right, Hercules?”

“Alright, alright, there’s no need to be mocking and cruel!”

“There is, Laf, there is! THERE. FUCKING. IS!”

“Well, let’s sort this out” said Lafayette, running to him to be able to whisper and not to be heard. “We’ll tell Alf to tell Laurens this afternoon that he cannot be with him because Laurens’s too much for someone like him”

“But who is gonna believe that shit? Who is gonna break up with somebody because they admire them too much? It’s a nonsense in itself!”

“I’m trying to find a proper way for Alf to break up with John without breaking his heart! He’s starting to get back on his feet”

“There’s no way to break up with someone in a painless way. A break-up is someone telling you that they don’t want to be with you anymore”

“No, not always. Alf saw he was so special that he understands that Laurens has to keep looking until he finds someone who can match his awesomeness”

Hercules looked at him for a moment. “Lafayette, your European fairy-tale gene is showing, and I don’t like it one bit! Rent boys can’t love!”

“The rent boy will do whatever I tell him, because I hired him for something” retorted Lafayette.

“Yes, because you’re fucking crazy!” screamed Hercules, grabbing the keys of the car and opening the front door.

“Where are you going?!”

“I’m going to work!” he informed, putting on a scarf.

“You’re still on your pyjamas, Hercules!”

“I don’t mind! Nobody is serious in that goddamned office anyways!” he said, closing the door with a thump.
“What a man!” he complained. “Now, to share bus with Aurora…”

“Are you sure I never told you this story before? How comes? Well, whatever, yes, it did happen: my uncle once beat the hell outa me when I was fourteen, and I ran away from home for two days straight until a forest ranger found me because I accidentally burnt my tent with one of the few candles I ran away with. My uncle again beat the shit out of me once the officers were gone, but it was worth it. He and I know who won that day”

Alexander looked at Aaron, sat at his right drinking his mug of milk with cocoa, while he had his own mug half-way to his mouth, now opened in shock and his brows furrowed. Aaron, as if he had told him nothing at all, kept reading the papers in front of him while taking sips from his drink. Alexander finally managed to remember how to talk correctly.

“But, Aaron, how can you tell me something like that and then act so peacefully? Man, I just sat down!”

Burr frowned. “Jeez, for one day I try to start a conversation. Screw you, last time I try to be talkative with an asshole like you” he said, turning around to give him his back as well as he could, acting offended.

“No, I mean…”

“Here” interrupted Aaron, throwing some paper in front of him. “Read and help me with this. The sooner you do it, the sooner I can ignore you completely”

Alexander took the paper and skimmed it. “When did you have to go meet Prevost again?” he asked.

“Around the final of February, I think. The twenty something, so don’t worry” he added with a sympathetic smile towards his workmate.

“Good” nodded Alexander, now with his glasses on and reading the paper more carefully. “Once you know the exact date, tell me”

“Of course. Thank you again”

“Not needed… At the beginning of the month I also have to meet with Jefferson’s sister; their lease will be up around that time” he commented.

“Ah”

“Wish yours will come first, honestly” he added, on the quiet.

Aaron threw him another sympathetic smile. “It will turn out fine. Do you want me to go with you?” he offered.
“That will have to be talked with Jefferson. And the less I talk to him, the better”

“But you’re his attorney”

“His *free* attorney” clarified Alexander. “There’s a legal vacuum there. I’ll talk to him only when it’s strictly necessary. And telling him why I need a co-counsel for something as simple as the renovation of a lease, it’s not part of one of those moments”

“I think talking about what you’re gonna do with his sister and the lease fits into the ‘strictly necessary moments’, though”

“True” Alexander sighed.

“Hey, didn’t you have to work until late today? You could go to his house and talk it out”

“Really, Aaron? You are invited to that party; do you really want to stand me right after I had to endure that man for the whole afternoon?”

Burr shrugged. “Suit yourself… The sooner the better”

“Alright, I promise you that if I see either Jefferson or Madison today, I’ll ask them if I can come over”

“Good” said Aaron, with a satisfied smile. “Hey, Alex”

“Yes?”

“Do you know what I just did? I just had a conversation with you. You know, in which you told me one thing and though it had nothing to do with me I still listened respectfully without questioning why you were telling me? Now, *that* is how you talk to people” he blurted out, turning his back again to him.

“You resentful asshole” said Alexander, frowning and burying his face in the paper he was given.

“Well, is this January the month when you two can’t stand each other?”

Alexander looked up, eyes half-closed. Of course, it had to be Madison. He looked over at Aaron, and saw that the man wasn’t going to let the chance slide. If he didn’t ask Madison right there, Burr would do it for him.

The accountant made his way while coughing to the cupboard. He blew his nose and took a deep breath.

“How does this go?” he asked, taking one pack of pills from the cupboard. “The uneven months you hate each other, and the even months you are best of friends?”

“Better be that way, Alex and I need to do something together on February” joked Aaron.

“What a bright man you are, Dobby…” commented Alexander with sarcasm.
“I’m only asking to orient myself”

“Are you feeling any better?” asked Aaron, now with a hint of concern in his voice.

The accountant simply shrugged. “So, so” he answered, trying to sound as honest as possible.

Aaron waited until he saw Madison swallowing the pill with some water to clear his throat. Alexander frowned at him, while Burr pointed at Madison with the glare, pressuring him. The CFO finally sighed, putting the papers down.

“Madison” Alex called, making him stop in front of the door.

“What?”

“Is Jefferson busy this afternoon?”

“That depends on your definition of ‘busy’”

Alex half-closed his eyes. “Don’t start with your habit of twisting words. Is he or not?”

“Alexander has to stay working till late, so Eliza and her sisters can prepare his birthday party” explained Aaron, in a gentler tone.

“Write him a whole diary of my day” retorted Alexander.

“You’re hassling the poor man. He’s sick” defended Aaron.

“What a novelty”

“I think it won’t be a problem” Madison cut them off. “But just let me ask him”

And he left after a wave of hand to Aaron, who returned the gesture with a shy smile.

“Why do you have to be so disagreeable with him?” he asked.

“Take it as a life lesson, Aaron: if you doubt my word, we’re through” explained Alexander, not raising his glare from the papers.

Words died down Aaron’s throat as Hercules made his way into the break room, like a loose bull in a glass store.

“Please, tell me we still have some tilleul tea” he said, looking in every cupboard.

“Sorry, Herc” said Alexander, looking at him with wide eyes of confusion. “Maria hasn’t gone to the supermarket yet”
Hercules closed the cupboards noisily and then opened the ones where the medication was, mumbling to himself.

“In that case, I’ll take some of Madison’s pills. I need to evade myself”

“But what’s wrong?” asked Aaron. “And what are you doing on your pyjamas…?” he added, looking at the man up and down, perplexed.

“You don’t wanna know” muttered Hercules, between clenched teeth.

Laurens made his way into the room, with the brightest smile he was ever seen with in a long time. “Oh, Alex, here you are! I was looking for you” he said.

“Really? The office is not that big… And everybody is in the first floor” commented Aaron.

“Maybe it has something to do with that goddamned desk that’s in front of the staircase…” said Hercules, bitterly.

“Hey, Alex, happy birthday!” said Laurens, hugging his friend and giving him a kiss in each cheek. “Hope you have a wonderful day!”

“I hope that too” said Alexander, laughing a bit when he saw his friend’s happiness. “What with that large smile, Jackie?”

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about” began to say Laurens, scratching the back of his neck, his face blushing. “You see, I met this awesome boy yesterday and I was thinking… if he could come to your party?”

Aaron turned his glare to Hercules when he saw him with eyes closed and both hands clasped in a praying manner, muttering things along the lines of ‘please, tell him no, tell him no’. Burr raised one eyebrow. This group has always been so strange, he thought to himself.

“John, I’m so glad for you!” said Alexander, getting up and giving his friend another hug. “Of course you can bring him. I’d love to meet him”

Hercules groaned while Laurens returned the hug with more strength, while squeaking with happiness.

“Thank you so much, Alex!” he said. “See you there, then!” he promised, heading to the door. “I’ll be in the pub if someone needs me!” he informed, jumping out of the room with joy.

“It’s been so long since I saw him smiling like that!” commented Alexander, with a sincere smile on his face. Aaron returned the gesture.
Hercules did not, his frown deeper than before. “Don’t get used to it. It’s not gonna last”

“Sweet Lord, Mulligan, be happy for your friend” said Aaron. “Even if they just met, you shouldn’t be that negative. Laurens’s been down for months, going from failure to failure and as bitter as a lemon”

“You just woke up talkative today, didn’t ya?” asked Alexander, taking a seat beside him again.

Aaron looked at him with a frown. “Man, if I talk because I talk! If I don’t talk, because I don’t talk! I always do the wrong thing according to you!” he complained, getting up and heading to the door.

“Yes, pretend to be upset so you can leave me alone with all the paperwork! It wasn’t that obvious, Aaron, don’t worry!” shouted Alexander.

Hercules, leaned on the counter and with both arms crossed, rolled his eyes. “Jeez, is this one of the months when you can’t stand each other?”

Alexander threw daggers at him. “You too?”

Aaron made his way down the hallway, which shouldn’t have been such a long walk as his office was wall to wall with the break room, but he needed some fresh air. Alexander wasn’t to blame, in all honesty, but the pressure and the anxiety of the situation was starting to be too much. He couldn’t fail Theodosia again, and he couldn’t let it all to Alexander after what happened to him that day, it would be very unfair. For not saying, selfish on his part.

He just needed some fresh air, that was all, he’d be as good as new right after.

He ignored the muffled argument that he heard behind Jefferson’s door, though it made him trot even faster to the front door, where he found Maria – still using Adams’ desk – at the entrance. The receptionist was once again with a few papers scattered all over the desk, though some of them were already filled with some sentences. He said hello to her and Maria returned the greeting with a smile.

*Count to ten. Breathe in. Count to ten again. Breathe out. Remember what Theodosia taught you.* He told himself, taking in a few breaths. He shivered a little as the temperature that winter was slowly getting lower as the days passed by, and he damned himself for forgetting his coat back in his office. Well, it would only take him a couple of minutes.

“Oh, Burr, here you are!”
Well, maybe even less than that…

Aaron opened his eyes, finding, in front of him, George Washington standing with a large plastic bag that felt very heavy, as the man was holding it with his two hands.

“Good morning, sir” he greeted respectfully.

“Good morning. Were you going to the pub?”

“No, no, I just needed a breather” he immediately explained.

“Ah, it’s true, you’re one of the only few who truly work in here” George smiled proudly at him.

“Are you finished yet?”

“I… Sir, what’s that?” he asked, shaking his head with an inquisitive look.

“This is something I bought for you to use today” he explained. “I know how to solve our problem”

“Oh, really?” asked Aaron.

Both men entered the building, saying good mornings to Maria. The girl looked at the bag with a cocked eyebrow, but quickly enough shrugged it off and resumed her writing. Washington seemed pleased for his employees’ indifference for once. Aaron offered himself to take his desk out of the way of the staircase, but Washington simply stepped on it and jumped to the other side. Aaron did the same, after a moment of shock. He could feel Hercules and Alexander’s glares of confusion in the back of his neck, but tried to ignore them.

A hit was heard from inside Jefferson’s closed office, along with the secretary’s voice lowering his volume in time, so the rest of the office could not hear what he was saying. Washington simply looked at the wall with an unreadable and unsettling expression.

“We’re still energetic on a Thursday, huh?” he commented to himself. “I think I should bring the deadline for some paperwork forwards”

Aaron nodded to evade a discussion and followed his boss up the stairs. They walked to the end of the hallway, turning right to face the wall with the crack. Aaron didn’t want to look at it too much, in any case it would get worse as the time passed. Washington put the bag on the floor and took a few paint buckets out.

“Mr. President, what is that for?” asked Aaron, with a frown.

“I want you to paint something to cover this” explained Washington, taking a brush out and passing
it to his employee.

Aaron took it hesitantly. “What…? But, sir…”

“You made a great job painting that wall downstairs” he complimented, resting a hand on his shoulder. “I hope you do the same here. The sanity of the company and, especially myself, depend on you”

“But, what should I paint?”

“Anything you’d like” Washington shrugged. He patted him on the arm and made his way back. “I’m going to the pub, maybe even ask to Maria where she bought that bracelet she brought to the party back in December, and buy one myself for today” he explained.

Aaron simply looked at him go. He looked at the brush in his hand and then at the buckets. Eventually, he shrugged. Well, painting was one of his favourite things to do and he needed a distraction, anyways…

“But how could you accept without asking me first?”

Thomas rubbed his temples, finally stopping reading the papers of some cases he had to finish for tomorrow after two hours with his eyes glued to the printed words. He had been feeling the beginning of a migraine an hour ago, and the sensation had only got worse as he refused to stop working for five minutes. Now, he really wished he had done a little break of one minute, at least, because the conversation that was about to come was going to be everything but relaxing.

“I didn’t accept, I said I was going to ask you” clarified James, blowing his nose for what seemed like the millionth time.

“By saying that, you’re implying a probable ‘yes’”

“So?”

“So, if now you go and tell him he can’t come, he’d ask why not”

“I don’t think so, he doesn’t seem very thrilled with the idea either”

“He’d ask, anyways”

“And why can’t he come? In a few weeks the lease is up, and Lucy has showed no signs of being alive since Hamilton made her give you money”

“Yes, I know. Do you think I’ve been having headaches for three weeks straight because I love
them?” Thomas spat out, resting his forehead against his hand.

“And do you think I fell ill for the sake of it?” talked back Madison, folding his arms. “Your headache was optional; my endless cold is not.”

“None of my headaches are ever optional, James. I wish they were!” complained Thomas, returning his glare to the documents.

A bad decision, as a sharp pain ran throughout his forehead, making him to close his eyes while groaning under his breath while he dropped the papers on the desk to use his hand to cover the thumping part.

“You okay?” asked James, frowning concerned.

“Yes” he lied.

“Do you want to go home?” his friend asked once again, clearly not buying his answer but not condemning it either.

Thomas shook his head. “Cold would make it worse… I guess. I don’t even know anymore.”

“We can’t keep going on like this” commented James, his tone now turning a bit harsher. “This is something more than just delayed money, or a broken step. This is our health. You just can’t keep enduring headaches, migraines or whatever the hell that is anymore, and I just can’t afford falling ill more times than I already do by myself.”

“I know, James” said Thomas, resting his elbow on the desk, and, therefore, his aching head, which was getting worse as James kept talking.

“It is a miracle the girls are fine. They sure take after you. I don’t know how you are not sneezing and coughing a lung out by now. It is too cold. The house is too cold.”

“Yes, I’m the epitome of health, can’t you see me?” commented Thomas sarcastically under his breath.

James frowned. “Because you want it to be like that. How many times have I told you to call your sister already? What are you waiting for? For stalactites and stalagmites to appear?”

Thomas huffed. “Gosh, what a big nightmare…” he complained, burying his face into his hands.

“Don’t start with the nightmare thing, man. When are you going to call?” demanded James, now a bit offended for his friend’s comment.

“I am not.”

“You are not?”

“No.”

“… And you’re going to say it like that?”

“How do you want me to say it? With a dance performance?”
James’ felt his cheeks burning for something else than fever. “If you don’t want to call her, then, go and tell Hamilton to do it himself”

“No” said Thomas, more dryly than before.

“Why not?” inquired James, with one arm in akimbo.

“Because I say so”

“Oooh, right, the lord and master has spoken, and now the rest will have to fucking put up with it”

“No…”

“I swear to God, your pride will be the end of us all… Thank goodness I am little and slim, because, otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to be here, as your pride takes so much space to exist, now I understand why you always lived in big houses, though you were living alone”

“… James, don’t go that way” warned Thomas, raising his glare a bit while he massaged his forehead.

“Your pride has even its own ID card and social security number. My gosh… Look, if you don’t tell Hamilton, I’ll do it”

“No, you won’t”

“Try to stop me. Let him call her if you don’t want to do so. You let Jay made the fucking phone calls when his ineptitude was part of our lives. You are ashamed of Hamilton, who at least has enough vocabulary to talk and think, but you weren’t of that joke of an attorney?”

“It’s not that”

“Yes, it’s just that as Jay was useless he wasn’t a threat”

“Now, you’re comparing oranges to apples…”

“Look, I refuse to live in a house with no heater in the middle of January”

Thomas felt his blood boiling inside and he hit the desk with his two hands. “The last thing I needed to hear! If you want to demand things, you pay part of the rent! A person who lives for free in another person’s house is nobody to demand things!”

James took a couple of steps closer, fists clenched. “Yes, they are! They are when it’s 20 fucking degrees and their house has no heater and their health is frail!”

“I know it’s fucking 20 degrees, James, I know it’s gonna get even lower with this fucking cold snap that didn’t have any better time to come than now! I’m sick of you repeating me the temperature as some kind of parrot who spends his days in front of the Weather Channel!”

“I keep repeating myself because I expect you to finally do something about it! I’m gonna have bronchitis or something worse, man! And you know I don’t have them as the rest of the world, it can get me bedridden and with half foot at the other side!”

“Let’s see if that’s true and you finally leave me at peace for once and for all!” snapped Thomas, unable to control his voice volume.

James gasped and put a hand over his mouth. “What an ugly thing you just said to me… What an
ugly thing!” he sniffed, feeling the beginning of tears in the corners of his eyes. “And you just have to tell me that in the morning, so now the rest of my day is disrupted!”

“Sweet Lord! You can’t be told anything! I’ve been standing your stunts for two fucking weeks, your fucking complaints and comments for two weeks straight with my mouth shut, praying that you would take the hint that I don’t want to start a fight or even discuss it, but, nothing, you never stop!”

“I’ve been doing that so you could take the fucking hint and do something already! February is around the corner and you are procrastinating, and it will affect us all! You, me, your daughters! Don’t you fucking care!?"

“Of course I fucking care, that’s why my damned head’s been killing me for almost a month! Goddamn it!”

Thomas had hit the table once again with his two hands and gotten up from his seat in a hurry, causing his vision to be blurrier than a moment before and to fall back on the swivel chair. He hissed in pain as he pressed his hand against his forehead once again and he closed his eyes, trying to even his breath and ignore the nausea that had taken over him. It wasn’t long after he felt James’ hand rubbing his back. His friend sighed.

“Really, go home. I’ll go with you, I’m not at my best here” said James, with a sympathetic look. Thomas shook his head. “No, I’m fine” he managed to say, clearing his throat in a useless attempt to erase the lump that had decided to block his larynx. “I just need to wet my face, that usually helps” he added, when he felt a bit dizzy.

James nodded and helped him get on his feet. Thank goodness, he was able to stand by himself that time, and could reach the door and stepped out his office without making a fool of himself. He almost bumped into Peggy, who didn’t have the best of faces either.

“Gee, Peggy, are you feeling alright?” asked Madison, with a hesitant raised hand a few inches away from her shoulder.

The youngest Schuyler sister shrugged. “Nauseous. I think I’m gonna be sick” she admitted, walking slowly to the staircase.

“That makes two…” commented Madison, looking at Thomas.

“I’m not” said Thomas, stubbornly. “I just need to wet my face”

“Sure…”

Both men looked at their lefts when they heard Peggy whining. When they saw the cause of her complaint, Thomas rolled his eyes in annoyance while Madison simply sighed, resigned.
“What is this doing still here?” asked the secretary, walking directly to the desk in front of the staircase.

“The restrooms are broken” James reminded him.

“You wrote the memo yesterday” commented Hamilton from the breakroom, watching the scene along with Hercules.

Jefferson frowned at the CFO. “You forgot to tell me that Burr was going to set his desk here, so nobody could get upstairs”

“That was not my doing” Alexander defended himself. “Besides, nobody ever goes upstairs. Now everybody wants to or what?”

“I need to go to the restroom”

“Me too” nodded Peggy, taking a seat on the desk.

“Go to the pub” said Hercules. “We were told yesterday. Lafayette went there and he’s been there all morning… Along with Laurens”

“And Angelica” added Alexander.

Jefferson wrinkled his nose. “I am not going to get my face wet in a public restroom as some kind of vagabond”

Alexander half-closed his eyes. “As charming as always…”

Jefferson looked at the desk for a moment and then shrugged. He simply leapt on it and then jumped to the other side, mumbling complaints and swearing under his breath. Peggy was left behind, looking at him with a frown.

“I can’t do that…”

“What’s wrong, Pegs?” asked Alexander, now concerned.

“She wants to vomit” answered Madison, looking at the therapist with empathy.

Alexander didn’t lose time in getting up and trotted to his sister-in-law’s side, taking one of her hands and rubbing her back.

“Do it in the sink, honey, I’ll take care of it” he told her in a soothing tone. Peggy nodded and he guided her into the breakroom. “Was it something you ate? Did you eat at all?” he asked.

Peggy simply shook her head. When they were a few steps away from the sink, she simply put a hand over her mouth and Hercules ran to her side to help her trot to the sink, where she could let it
Alexander bit his bottom lip and let Hercules help his sister-in-law. He never did good with people throwing up since that day he and his mother fell sick, and though it made him feel useless, he knew it was better if he let Mulligan take care of the situation right now.

Madison made his way to his side, looking at the therapist with understanding eyes. He called the CFO’s attention by tapping his arm. Alexander would never admit it aloud, but, right then, he thanked the distraction.

“Hamilton, do you mind if Jefferson and I leave early today?” he asked, a bit uneasy.

Alexander shrugged. “Everybody else simply left, at least you ask for permission…” he commented.

He threw a last glare to Peggy, who was coughing a bit now, and decided to head to the door. He made a gesture with his head to tell Madison to follow him out of the room. The shorter man obliged.

Thomas didn’t know if he was glad or not that James didn’t follow him upstairs. On one hand, he didn’t have to stand his worry. Though it would’ve been comforting to others, to Thomas, feeling pity, even coming from a friend, always made him feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, if James had decided to let him go to the restroom all by himself after the shameful scene he made at not being able to stand on his own, it meant that he must be telling Hamilton they were leaving.

Yes, undoubtedly the second option was the worst one.

He tried to focus on trying to convince himself he didn’t need to go home when his stomach twisted, making him stop at the end of the upstairs. He took a few breaths in and out and could manage to calm his nausea a little bit. He just prayed he wasn’t actually sick to his stomach. That would be an excuse for not coming in tomorrow as well, and, right now, Thomas needed the distraction, even if that distraction was a day care disguised as a law office.

He made his way to the men’s restroom at the end of the hallway while trying to calm the turmoil that was his mind – and, honestly, failing spectacularly. At least, he had improved in concealing how much he wanted and needed to gasp to get some air to his lungs…

Thomas stopped with his back facing the closed red door, an eyebrow raised as he saw the scene in front of him.
“Burr, what are you doing?”

The aforementioned jumped, a bit startled, not having hearing anyone coming. Yes, he had gotten a lot better in hiding his discomfort since he was a teenager. Burr turned around, his sleeves up till his elbow, his jacket on the floor by some bucket’s side and his face a bit painted by small dots it would have been unnoticed by anyone but Thomas, who had the habit of noticing even the littlest details around him.

His eyes focus then on what was on the wall. The recent drawing of a tree was adorning the wall at Burr’s back. Oh, yes, this was a day care disguised as a law office, now Thomas had no more doubts.

“Ah, good morning, Jefferson” said Aaron, dropping his right arm to the side. He took a few steps away from the wall and looked at his work. “Do you like it? I’ve been working on it all morning” he admitted.

Jefferson took a moment to answer. “I… Why? Why did you spend all morning doing this?”

“Washington told me so”

“But why?” insisted Thomas, feeling his headache getting worse when he tried to comprehend what was happening.

Aaron moved a bit uncomfortable at his side. “He wanted to… adorn the office a bit?” he ended the sentence as if it was a question more than a proper answer.

Thomas was too tired – both mentally and physically – to even care anymore. “Whatever… Going home doesn’t sound that bad anymore”

And with that, he closed the door with a thump at his back, not sure if wetting his face was going to take his headache away now.

“What is it?” Alexander asked as he opened the door and made way to Madison to walk in first.

“What?” asked James, entering the room and standing right beside the chair that was across from Hamilton’s desk.

“Are you feeling worse? You look more feverish than yesterday” Hamilton pointed out.
“I… Well, yes” James gave in, not finding any valuable reasons to deny it.

Hamilton took a seat behind his desk. He opened one drawer and took out a stack of papers. He skimmed them for a moment until he finally found what he was looking for. He put on his glasses and took a pen, starting to write something down.

“Well, yes” Madison nodded.

“Alright. And Jefferson has another headache, right? I felt him a bit dazed” he commented.

“Yes” Madison nodded.

“Okay…” Hamilton sighed, not stopping his writing for one second. “In the end, can I come over your house or not?”

“Yes” Madison nodded once again, now frowning.

“If you feel worse as the day goes by, just call me and I won’t go” he commented, glaring up for a brief moment.

“No. And if Jefferson sends you a text telling you not to come, ignore him. You will come” said Madison, as stubborn as ever.

Hamilton raised one eyebrow. “Though ignoring Jefferson is tempting, I won’t go if you’re not feeling up to it”

“But if you don’t come, then we will feel worse”

“What does that mean?” asked Hamilton, putting his pen down slowly.

“Lucy hasn’t called or come since you knew her”

“And that is bad? I thought you barely stand her”

“And we do. But she hasn’t showed signs of being alive. In all the senses”

“I’m not following you” admitted Hamilton.

“The only thing she has done, among the all you told her to do, is not coming to the house”

Slowly, Hamilton’s brow furrowed as much as the man’s across him. He dropped his pen and leaned back on his seat, rubbing his temples.

“So, not listening to me is a tradition in this family or…?” he asked, clearly annoyed.

“Stubbornness is” spat Madison, looking sideways.

“Has Jefferson tried to call or contact her somehow?”

“No”
Hamilton nodded sarcastically. “Fantastic… Why not?” he asked, feeling his cheeks burning. He wouldn’t be surprised if they had started to match Madison’s.

“Were you told by him? Neither was I. I tried to convince him to call her, but he refuses. He says he’s going to call somebody to fix it, but even the repairer evades our calls, as he’s an acquaintance of Lucy”

“Yes, in summary, miss Lucy is the founder and the president of the Club of the Avoiders” Hamilton sighed, deeper and more tired than before. “Do you know who is not part of that club? Me. You should have called me. Or talked to me. You know, between taunt and insult, you could let the issue drop” he began to reprimand.

“I know, I know” Madison stopped him, annoyed by being told off. “I have been trying to make Thomas talk to you, but he doesn’t want to”

“He doesn’t want to?” echoed Alexander, incredulously. “I am his attorney, Madison. Well, yours”

“Mine as well?” asked Madison, blinking dumbfounded.

“Yes, you two are placed under the same umbrella”

“Ah…”

“Look, if your friend is having trouble talking to me for something else than insulting and disrespecting me, this is not going to end well” said Hamilton, straightforward.

James shook his head to get rid of the initial shock. “I know, but…”

“Tell him” Hamilton interrupted, not concealing how little he cared about what he was about to say. “that he better starts changing the chip. That, or he will have to look for another lawyer. The solution to this problem is easy. Very easy”

“Yes…” Madison lowered his glare. “I don’t know what the problem is” he admitted. “With Jay he…”

“Jay?” repeated Alexander. “As John Jay?”

“Yes”

Hamilton inhaled through his nostrils. “Of course… Who else would demand his clients not to bother him after eight pm or before twelve pm?” he commented, shaking his head in disapproval. “Really, if he works better with those petitfoggers, which I totally understand, seeing his shady nature and family, then he is free to go to someone else. I don’t have enough time to be losing it with stupid things”

“Hamilton, don’t be that extremist” complained James. “Give him time. You two have been at each other’s throats since Thomas came back from France. Now you can’t demand him to trust you right away”

“No, I’m not asking for either of you to tell me your childhood traumas, or to cry and open up to me, be careful” explained Alexander, leaning on his desk while shaking his index finger. “What I’m asking for you is to act as anybody else does with their respective lawyers. That is calling them when something is wrong. And when I tell a toff to do certain things, because those things are her legal responsibility, and that toff doesn’t do them, you should’ve called me right away, not even a minute after, and tell me ‘Alex’… Well, no, that’s for friends or closed ones, I don’t want either of you to be
that to me… You pick up the phone, call me and say ‘Hamilton, chihuahua, gremlin’, whatever the fuck you want, ‘Lucy is leaving us to freeze’. Do you know at what temperature we are?”

“20 degrees” answered Madison, more annoyed with the situation than his deadpanned expression could tell.

“And it’s gonna get worse. We’re in a cold wave. No wonder why you look like an extra from ‘The Walking Dead’”

Madison was startled by how fast and sudden Hamilton had gotten up from his chair and walked towards him, putting a hand on his forehead.

“You’re not burning up, but you’re warmer than you should be, having taken the medicine an hour ago” Hamilton made his way back to his desk. “How are the girls?”

“They’re good. Really” Madison hurried to say. “Just like Jefferson. You know I’ve always had a frail health, it’s not a big of a deal”

“It is not a big of a deal to live in a house with no heater during nights that reach 14 degrees at much?” asked Alexander. “Because for me it is”

“Yes, for me as well but…”

“And you don’t even have the immersion heater to be able to take a hot shower, right?” interrupted Alexander for the zillionth time.

“No…”

“So, Jack Frost goes to that house and dies for hypothermia”

“It’s not that much…”

“Yes, it is!” Alexander ended up screaming. “It is! A normal person would’ve called me! Again: if such an easy thing to do seems the world to Jefferson or you, look for another attorney. I am not going to be held responsible for your complexes. If having an orphan bastard immigrant as a lawyer bothers you that much, then look for an American one. Look for another American who went to college with their own money instead of a scholarship, who doesn’t allow you to call them after eight fucking pm or before noon!”

“That’s not the problem…” James rolled his eyes.

“Are you sure? What is it, then? I was too cruel filling the cupboards and the fridge with food bought with my money? I was too selfish for not asking you for that money back? I was too insensitive when I listened to all the girls had to tell me? I was too mean for offering you a 24/7 service? Tell me what I did so wrong that you didn’t want to call me, or to knock on my office door or to stop me in the hallway and tell me ‘Hamilton, this is happening’?”

James changed his weight from one foot to another repeatedly. Alexander held his glare directly at his eyes for a whole minute in which Madison didn’t know how to respond. Finally,
Hamilton sighed for the third time since he had come in, and took his eyes away from him. And James allowed himself to sigh, feeling relieved.

“Whatever. It’s your life. If you don’t care enough to be responsible, I am not going to be it for you” decided Hamilton, moving the papers in front of him as a way to keep his hands and mind busy with something else than the man across him.

James frowned slightly. “It’s not that” he said, taking a small step forwards. “It’s true we could’ve talked to you, but we do care”

“Show me, then” spat Alexander, glaring up again. “What day do you have to meet with Lucy?”

“We think some day within the first week of February”

“You think…?” said Hamilton, moving his tongue inside his mouth, clearly annoyed. “Nice, now I’d only have to guess which one of the seven days it would be!” he added, faking a cheerful tone.

“… The first ones who are annoyed by Lucy’s behaviour are us” blurted out James.

“It doesn’t seem so” said Alexander, with the same venom in his voice.

“Excuse me?” asked James, folding his arms over his chest, offended.

“For what I’m seeing, she could beat you up and you’d still do everything she tells you to do, like two lapdogs. Where are the annoying and stubborn men that made my summer a living hell back in 2015?”

“You resentful gremlin” hissed James, clenching his fists. “It’s not the same case!”

“No, it’s not, I agree” nodded Hamilton. “I was only workmate with an idea you didn’t like; that woman is just trying to take his daughters away from him and asking you for way more money than you owe her. How am I going to compare?”

“The woman is also her sister, her landlady!”

“And I am his lawyer, for your own petition! And I’m the last fucking person who knows what the hell is going own in this story! Do you think that has any sense at all?”

“If you don’t know the full story, then, don’t judge!”

“I am not judging, I am asking you to tell me the basic so I can do my work!”

“Your work is to be quiet and do as we say, not taking the mickey out of us at each chance you get!” exploded James. “No wonder why you had to quit, I’m sure nobody wanted your services with that arrogant attitude!” he added, heading straight to the door.

“But look who’s talking about arrogant attitude! Look at your reflection from time to time, Madison, I swear you would stop criticising people!” shouted back Alexander, getting up from his seat.

James swung the door open and looked back one last time. “You should be grateful to us; you’ve been rotting in here writing document after document!”

Hamilton felt his cheeks burning right then. “I should be grateful?? You fucking, self-centred assholes! You’re made for each other!”
James’ response had never a chance to be spoken as Hamilton took the pen holder and threw it at him, making a few pens and pencils to fly and fall in the way. James closed the door almost on time, feeling the bump the pen holder did as it hit the door. Madison coughed a bit, feeling a sore throat for the screaming and the beginning of a headache.

“You made him angry already?”

James turned around, seeing Thomas, a few less pale than before, but still with a tired expression on his face, standing right in front of his office door.

“It was your fault” spat James.

Thomas rolled his eyes, ignoring the pain that action made him feel. “As everything else, according to you”

“Take our things and let’s go home” said James, resting his back against the wall.

Thomas sighed and obliged, feeling slightly concerned that he wasn’t hearing Hamilton swearing at the other side of his office wall.

Chapter End Notes

Some notes because writing nasty remarks right is difficult in English...

"And still, she does more around here that you on your own house*: Jefferson is hinting that is Abigail the one wearing the pants in the Adams' house, and so underrating Adams.

"I'm sorry if you haven't had the normal mentor a child must have to confront life with no companion by your side, Jefferson, but I'd advise you to keep your personal problems at the front door before coming in to work*: Adams is teasing Jefferson about the bad relationship he had with his mother, and how Martha Jefferson was a substitute of Jane (Thomas' mother) instead of a wife, calling him emotional dependant, thus weak.

"At least, if you're going to keep on showing off how little it cost you to be straightforward, that is…*: Adams is complaining about how Jefferson boasts about traits he doesn't have.

"No, Jefferson, I am the one who is sorry; it must be really difficult to be so weak that you, every day, need to pick different victims to fool yourself into thinking you're actually strong” Aaron felt Adams giving Alexander a sideways glance*: Adams was
hinting that the only reason Jefferson argues with Alexander so much is because he feels inferior, as Alexander is Washington's right-hand man and has a higher position in the company.

"I freely assume you are becoming more and more aware of this as more lonely days pass you by": Adams is throwing salt into an open wound, bringing up the fact that Jefferson's friends didn't help him or didn't want to know anything about his situation once he was deep in debt (with the exception of Lafayette and Madison).

"Now to share bus with Aurora": The Sleeping Beauty, aka, the princess who falls in love easily and daydream.
A powder keg about to explode (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

This is one of the reasons Alexander maybe didn’t like parties. A bunch of people with repressed feelings and shared memories of past mistakes that could explode and be revealed at the littlest push. Not something Alexander wanted to live any time. The Schuyler hadn’t exploded back at the Christmas dinner, and something told Alexander it may have been better that way...

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, a lot of nonsense put together, homophobic and sexist vocabulary (which I don't agree with, just in case...) black humour. Like, dark humour. Like if you look at it for too long, you might think you’d become blind. That's how dark it is...

DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Eliza checked the clock on the kitchen wall once she was back from buying the cake. The living room was already adorned by a few balloons tied to the chairs that rounded the two tables put together for her and all the guests to use that afternoon; colour papers with the shape of a few animals or objects such as stars or plants, hanging from the lamps on the ceiling of the room; pompoms on the couch and shelves; a road of confetti that began at the front door and ended at one of the chairs – the one Alexander would sit on, Eliza guessed – and streamers carefully tied on the corner of the table and on the knobs.

Eliza had to admit it: her sister was awesome at setting a place for a party. As a small smile was beginning to make its way onto her face, Angelica appeared through the door, with glitter on her cheeks and a huge banner folded on her hands. Her hair was a bit dishevelled, and Eliza laughed a bit.

“I think once you’re finished, I’ll have to take care of you, sis” said Eliza, as she put the cake on the fridge.

Angelica took a look at herself and shrugged. “I’m not the starring role today” she said. “Hey, tell me what you think of this”

Angelica unfolded the banner that she brought and showed it to her. Eliza was amazed at the
detail and clear handwriting, which read ‘Happy Birthday, Alex’, with a heart at the end. The letters were coloured and rounded by the same colour, though on a lighter tone; and the rest of the banner was covered in glitter. Eliza smiled sincerely.

“Ange, it’s lovely!” she complimented, walking to her.

Angelica smiled, proud of herself. “Hehe, I know, I know. But it’s always good to hear it from somebody else” she said, heading to the living room.

Eliza shook her head and followed her. “Now, let me hang that and primp you”

“But I still have so many things to do!” said Angelica, stopping mid-way and turning to her. “I still have to make some origami, and I also wanted to prepare a little tablecloth with Alexander’s initials, in which each letter would be a nice adjective for him. And…”

“Whoa, slow down!” said Eliza, laughing a bit. “Angelica, this is enough” she said, taking the banner in her own hands. “Really, it’s only a little party. Alex told me so. He’d be grateful for your great work! And I’ll be even more thankful if you let me clean yourself up before everybody is here. You look worse than Philip when they do artistic projects in the day care” she laughed.

“That’s the funny part of being an artist: getting dirty. This glitter on my face is the proof of my hard work” commented Angelica, helping her sister to hang the banner on the wall that faced the front door.

“Well, I won’t let you sit on the table all dirty” warned Eliza. “And that means, no cake”

“Threatening with food is mean, Eli” pouted Angelica.

“There” said Eliza, clapping her hands once the banner was put in place. “Perfect. Do you know when Peggy would come with the children? She should’ve been here half an hour ago” she said, checking her watch.

“Don’t know. She had to leave work early, she threw up for what Hercules told me” explained Angelica.

“What?” asked Eliza, eyes wide open. “Oh, my gosh, why didn’t she tell me so??”

Eliza had taken out her phone from her pocket, and was prepared to dial her little sister’s number when the front door was opened, revealing a tired-looking Peggy, accompanied by a concerned-looking Lafayette and two amazed Angie and Philip, who looked around with eyes shining with enthusiasm.

“This is awesome, Mommy!” said Angie, jumping in excitement.

“Not ‘Mommy’. Aunt ‘Angelica, the greatest party planner that ever existed’” corrected her aunt, with a smile.

“Don’t be so over yourself” Peggy rolled her eyes.

“Pegs, why didn’t you tell me you weren’t feeling fine?” asked Eliza, walking worriedly to her sister.
“You should’ve stayed at home”

Peggy shook her head. “No, don’t say nonsense. It’s Alex’s birthday, and I’m fine” she said, waving one hand. “It was just that I didn’t eat and I was queasy” she explained.

“You sure?” insisted Eliza. “If you feel worse, don’t hesitate in telling any of us” She turned to Lafayette once her sister nodded with another eye-roll. “Laf, you helped her, right? Thank you so much!” said Eliza.

“Whenever you need it, chérie” Laf smiled. “Oh, by the way, there will be one more of us”

“Oh?”

“Yes, Laurens… Just met one guy and…”

“That’s so nice!” commented Eliza. “I hope this one stays!”

Lafayette forced a smile. “Yeah… Me too…”

“Something’s wrong, baguette?” asked Angelica, arching one eyebrow.

“One: don’t call me that. Two: yes, everything’s fine… Hm… Peggy, please, come with me for a moment to… collect the dishes…” he said, a bit uneasy.

“No, let those things to me!” said Eliza, trying to stop them. “You’re my guests!”

“Let them do something, Eli” said Angelica, sitting on the couch. “They are gonna eat and drink for free”

“You are going to do that too” said Eliza with a frown.

“Yeah, but I’m family”

“A shameless smart is what you are…”

“Hey! I made all this possible!” she complained, extending her arms to let her know she was referring to the whole adorned living room.

“Whatsoever. Come with me, so I can clean yourself up” she insisted once again.

“Let me be a child at heart” complained Angelica.

“Dad is coming”

Angelica leapt from her seat in one second. “Alright, alright, I’m coming… Why did you invite them, again?”

“Cause they’re family” answered Eliza, mocking her previous tone.

“Sis, you’re so lucky I love you more than anything in this life…”

“Even when you say you love me, you have to do it in a threatening manner”
Hercules patted his feet on the floor, throwing angry glares at his watch from time to time, groaning under his breath. He smelled and wrinkled his nose in disgust as the strong scent of conditioner, shampoo and cologne mixed together from the bathroom and spread at its own will throughout the whole house once Laurens finally decided to exit the place.

Hercules went to the bathroom, complaining about being late and cursing Lafayette’s name for leaving him alone, standing Laurens’ bad habit of doing everything at the last second. He stopped at the entrance of the room, seeing the whole floor covered in water and with two wet towels wrinkled in the middle; the towel that was hung wasn’t any drier either… The sink was adorned by the bottles of conditioner, shampoo and cologne, all without their respective tapes, as well as the toothpaste, that lay, squeezed from the middle, in one corner of the sink. Its tape was nowhere to be seen.

He walked slowly into the room, feeling a tic in his left eyebrow. He took the three towels and ran out of the room to throw them in the laundry basket with more force than necessary. He heard the hairdryer along with Laurens’ singing voice, and he wanted to slap him so badly.

“Always the same. He does not only make me arrive late to places, but I also have to clean all his shit…”

He kept complaining while he mopped the whole bathroom floor and dried the sink with a washcloth. He tapped the conditioner, the shampoo and the cologne and put them back in their place. He took one new and dry towel and hung it on the towel rack. He took the toothpaste and tried to look for its tape with no success. Hercules began to groan like an angry bear that was just woke up in the middle of his hibernation when the sound of the hairdryer finally stopped.

Hercules stormed out of the bathroom, almost bumping into Laurens. “John, where is the tape of the toothpaste?”

“It dropped through the drainpipe” answered Laurens with a shrug, and kept walking to the living room.

“And that is, right? You dropped it and now we’ll have to have this thing untapped because you can’t be responsible even with a toothpaste” condemned Hercules, following him until the doorframe. “This is the sixth time in a row, I’m sick of buying toothpastes continually because you are always dropping them… And how many times will I have to tell you not to squeeze the damn thing from the middle? You have to squeeze from the bottom!”

Laurens gave a tired sigh. “Man, don’t eat my brain now…”

“Excuse me?” said Hercules, stopping mid-sentence and with a face of incredulity.

“I was here, all happy, singing and all, and you had to come to talk my ear right off with nonsense
that only bothers you…”

“It bothers me and Lafayette!”

“Don’t lie, he never told me anything”

“He is used to not telling much lately” muttered Hercules, putting the toothpaste back on its place.

“What do you mean?” asked Laurens, putting on his coat with an arched eyebrow.

“Nothing…” said Hercules, closing the bathroom door with a thump. “Come on, we’re late”

“Are you talking about those texts he sent to his ex?”
Hercules froze. “What texts…?” he asked, fearfully.

“Ones that talked about how much they missed each other, and Lafayette planning about flying to France in a few months”

Well, Hercules wasn’t expecting that at all. Though he should be glad because John hadn’t discovered Laf’s plan concerning Alf, he felt a sting feeling in his chest. And, for a brief moment of selfishness, he wished Laurens had found out about the whole lie his boyfriend had planned behind their backs.

“I mean, before Alf appeared I was going to sit you both down and tell you off for excluding me, but now…” began to explain Laurens.

“He hasn’t told me anything” Hercules cut him off. “Besides, if it’s a romantic trip, it’s normal that he wasn’t planning on taking you with us”

“Look, I’m gonna omit the fact that you just insulted me because it must be hard to admit that your boyfriend is not being sincere to you…” said John, with eyes half-closed.

“Maybe he’s hiding it from me because it’s gonna be a surprise for our anniversary?” suggested Hercules, upset.

“Yes, that’s why Lafayette told Adrienne that you couldn’t know…”

“What?”

“Yep. And she helped him coming out with an excuse”

“What do you mean?”

“If Laf comes to you telling you he would be over to France for business in the following months, suspect”

“Ha, see? Maybe Washington told him to do something there, just as King asked Jefferson” he said, smiling with satisfaction.

“Yes, of course, that’s why Lafayette couldn’t tell you that because you work in the same place, and so they decided to tell you he was going to fix some problem with their family”
“… Maybe he knows you are a fucking snoopy and faked all that conversation to surprise me for real” Hercules tried once again.

Laurens frowned. “I help you see reality, and you insult me again. Really, Herc, go to a therapist so you can solve this hatred problem. You’re turning more bitter as you age”

“How do you want me to be when one of my friends reads my boyfriend’s texts and he tells me with total normality that I’m being cheated on?” spat Hercules, passing a hand through his hair. “Shit, and we bought this house fifty/fifty”

“That was a stupid move…” commented Laurens.

“John, shut the hell up already, I’m trying to find a logical explanation!”

“Well, I have another theory”

“Is it a good one?”

“Yes”

“Then, go ahead”

“Maybe he’s not cheating on you with Adrienne, maybe she’s just his confidant. They are very close though they had to end their relationship. A friendship after a romantic relationship doesn’t mean danger. Just look at me, Alex and Eliza. We three are good friends. Maybe something bad happened to Adrienne and she needs support, and Laf didn’t want to tell you so you couldn’t get hurt, or was waiting for a good moment to tell you”

Hercules processed that for a moment. It totally sounded like Laf, who always lend a helping hand to any friend in need and who was mature and loyal enough to end a relationship but maintain a good friendship if the person deserved it. And, if he was being totally honest with himself, Adrienne was a very nice girl and was very supportive once she found out Lafayette had found out love in America and preferred to live there. She was Laf’s pillar, without counting him or Alex or Laurens, when his family turned him down when he came out.

Slowly, Hercules began to smile. Yes, this was all a confusion. Lafayette never hid anything from him, and eventually talked to him about anything that had happened to him or any closed one, but only when that closed one gave him permission to tell.

“Maybe you’re right” said Hercules, calmer.

Laurens nodded. “Yes. I usually am”

Both walked out the house in complete silence until they reached the car. Hercules started the vehicle once both were inside and with the seatbelt on. Suddenly, he didn’t feel bothered by the fact that he’d have to pick Alf up to go to the party with them.
“Or” Laurens said, all of a sudden. “Maybe Adrienne was his confident about that strange thing that’s been going on with Peggy” he added. Hercules’ smile began to fade away as he kept talking. “I don’t know if you noticed, but those two have been acting strangely since before New Year’s Eve: all those secret meetings and conversations… I mean, I’ve never been unable to eavesdrop Lafayette before, but now it’s like he doesn’t want to be heard any time Peggy calls. He told me he was helping her with her French, but, seriously, Peggy once said she didn’t like French that much, and, most importantly, he scratched his earlobe when he told me. He does that when he lies”

Hercules knew Laurens was right, he had noticed how close he had become to Peggy after that party at the Washington’s. They had gone from just greeting each other for the sake of good manners, to become inseparable, almost meeting twice in the same day. Just look at today, he had driven Peggy to the hospital after she was sick – nothing unusual, his boyfriend was always very caring about people he knew, and Alex was a good friend of both, and Peggy was his sister-in-law, that meant that Lafayette would take care of her as if she were Alex himself – but he also left the house before any of them to drive Peggy to the Hamilton’s house.

“It’s so funny to play detectives” commented Laurens, with a tiny smile. “I can’t wait to discover which one of these theories are true”

All of a sudden, Hercules was again angry by having to pick Alf up. And, also, by having to drive both him and Laurens there.

Madison knew he should be resting. As if his internal voice wasn’t enough for him to remember that fact, Thomas had told him a few times since he had woken up from the nap he obligated the taller man to take. It was clear Thomas was feeling a lot better, as he had enough energy to tell him what to do unceasingly. This time, being right didn’t make him less upset for the interruptions.

He had to finish this today. Preferably, before Hamilton arrived. He looked at his watch, seeing it was almost eight. Though it wasn’t unusual for Hamilton to keep on working for several hours more, even after Washington had left the building (damn, their boss had even given him his own key!), he still wanted the CFO to come over. He didn’t mind if Hamilton wanted to be angry at him, but he wouldn’t forgive himself if the immigrant decided not to help them anymore because Madison had let his bad temper take the worst of him.

“Really, if you refuse to let that for later, you still should take a break. You’ve been writing and calculating non-stop since we came” commented Thomas.
Madison looked up for a moment, seeing his friend sitting at his right, at the extreme of the table, right after serving him and his daughters something to dine. James hadn’t even realised there was a plate full of cookies and each of them, even him, had a mug of hot chocolate. Patsy and Polly took each a cookie and ate in relative silence as the oldest kept reading some book on her phone that had been having her hooked for the last two days and the youngest kept drawing some imaginary realm Burr’s and Hamilton’s respective daughters had come up with back at Christmas.

Finally, he looked at his friend, who was watching him with an imperative look. Thomas wasn’t going to drop the issue. And James wasn’t going to give in, no matter how hard he would try. He wasn’t feeling that bad. Or maybe it was the coldness that surrounded the house making him think he didn’t have a fever and so he could lower his guard for a couple of hours while he worked. Whatever it was, he wasn’t going to stop until that documents were finished. And he let his friend know.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “What’s that that’s so important?” he asked.

“The accounts of the company” answered James, going back to work.

“Thought you didn’t have to have that done until late January?” insisted Thomas.

“Yes”

“So?”

“So what?”

“So what are you doing writing and doing math as if you were running out of time? You still have the whole month. And you always love to procrastinate till the end” he commented, with a tiny smile.

Madison looked up from the papers with a frown. “First of all: just because I don’t have an agenda for literally every little thing I have to do means I like to procrastinate all the time” he spat, and Thomas gave him another eye-roll. “And second of all: doing things at last minute is a very safe to live life on the limit”

“Gee, James, how comes you’re still single?” commented Patsy mockingly.

“Read” ordered Thomas, frowning at his daughter. Turning to his friend again, he added. “You just contradicted yourself, you know?”

“Said the expert” commented Patsy once again.

“What did I just say?” complained Thomas, receiving no response. “Now you are deaf again, good…”

“Please, if you’re going to make a fuss, go to another room” said James, scratching the back of his neck when he got stuck at one point. “Ah, shit, how was I supposed to do this…?”

“When I got stuck, I take breaks” commented Polly, looking at James with sympathy.

“Even my youngest daughter knows better than you” said Thomas. “Really, only for five minutes. Stress will make your cold get worse”
“Says the man who has to be dragged along to his house to take a simple nap” commented Patsy.

“Gal, what do you have? An automatic hearing aid that turns off and on depending on how interesting is the conversation to you or what?” said Thomas, annoyed.

“No, this is a gift I perfectionated within the years after standing you” talked back the teenager.

“As if you were any nicer…” chimed in Polly.

“Shut up, little devil”

“Don’t talk to your sister like that” reprehended Thomas.

“She started it!” complained Patsy.

“I don’t mind, you’re the oldest, you must be her example”

“What an example” complained Polly.

Patsy looked nastily at her. “It’s one of the many bad things of being part of this family, Polly: the lack of good examples. The sooner you learn this, the sooner you’d learn to be a bit happier”

Thomas clicked his tone. “Gal, why don’t you write your sob story if you’re suffering that much? I heard it’s therapeutic. Maybe while you’re writing you finally stop being a fucking nuisance. Look I even have the perfect title: ‘Learn how to avoid the guilt of being a good-for-nothing by criticising other people’s efforts’” mocked Thomas, smiling at bit when he saw Polly trying to contain her laughter.

Patsy laughed sarcastically. “Alright, Dad, maybe I’ll follow your advice. I can publish my book right after you publish yours: ‘Learn how to think of yourself as an eager beaver though I’ve only been working like a normal person for four years after a whole life living off my parents’ money’”

Polly let out a few giggles escape and hunched over herself to not being seen with tears of laughter streaming down her eyes. Patsy smiled mockingly, trying not to laugh as well when she felt her sister’s shaking form by her right. Thomas frowned and squinted his eyes. He opened his mouth to retort, but Madison hit the table with his two hands, red in the face.

“Nothing. I just can’t add it up right!” he complained, clenching his fists for pure rage.

“Careful, James, the mugs!” screamed Thomas, seeing with impotence as his mug was now broken. “Shit!” he got up from his seat noisily. “Control yourself, man! That hot chocolate wasn’t free!” he
complained, kneeling on the floor with a washcloth he had brought as well, and started to clean the floor as well as he could.

James frowned at him. “There he goes, always reminding me that I’m here for free! How much did that own brand hot chocolate cost? 2 dollars? Here!”

James rummaged inside his pockets while Thomas sighed, still trying to clean the mess with a wet washcloth. He got up by the time James hit the table with whatever paper he had found.

“There! Two dollars!” he exclaimed, raising his chin with pride. He looked down and his expression changed. “Oh, no, wait, this is the warning from the public library… Can you give it back, please?” he asked.

“Why would I want that shit?” spat Thomas, standing up. “What do you mean by warning?”

“Yeah, I forgot to return a book and now we must pay them 40 bucks…”

“Fucking perfect!” complained Thomas, heading straight to the kitchen. He turned the faucet on and wash the cloth, wrinkling it several times.

“Electronic books, I’ve told you” commented Patsy, as a matter-of-factly.

Thomas looked daggers at her. “Don’t get up and help a little bit, huh? You simply stay sat and don’t help a little bit!”

“O.K.” mocked Patsy, making a circle by joining her index and thumb fingers.

Thomas hit the washcloth against the counter a couple of times, as a way to dry it and let some rage out. More for the second option than the first one, honestly. The doorbell rang just when he was midway of his way back to the dining table. James looked at the clock hanging below the cupboards in the kitchen and raised one eyebrow.

“Who could it be this late?” he asked.

“It’s just eight fifteen” commented Polly, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Uncle Jemmy is an old soul in a young body” laughed Patsy.

James frowned at the girls and then at their father, as Thomas made his way to the front door after debating in his mind if he should or not.

“Look through the peephole” he advised. “It could be robbers”

“Yeah, wouldn’t it be horrible if they steal all of Lucy’s furniture?” said Patsy.
Thomas stopped when he was about to open the door to look nastily at his daughter. “Gal, what’s your problem?”

“Do you want the short or the long list?” retorted the girl, not bothering in looking over her shoulder.

Thomas huffed. “Really, girl, you’re just taking so much advantage of the fact that now hitting your children is illegal. I still feel the sting in my cheek where your grandmother used to slap me if I dared to disrespect her” he told his daughter.

“Yes, use yourself as an example, that would really change my mind” said Patsy, wrinkling her mouth in disgust.

“I’m serious” interrupted James. “Look through the peephole, it could be robbers”

“Yes, and they are so nice that they ring the doorbell before coming in” mocked Thomas, opening the door without listening to his friend’s advice. When he saw who was in front of him, he wished he had. “Now I wish it had been a robber”

“It’s a pleasure to see you as well” said Hamilton, rolling his eyes. “Mind to let us in?”

Just in that moment Thomas realised Hamilton was accompanied by two persons, who watched their exchanged of words from a prudent distant at the CFO’s backs. Jefferson made way for the three of them to enter, and closed the door as the girls greeted Hamilton cheerfully.

“Hi, Alex! Happy birthday!” said Polly, jumping from her seat and going to hug him by the waist.

Hamilton laughed as he petted her head. “Thank you, sweetie”

Patsy had gotten up and walked to him as well. “Happy birthday” she said, less excitedly but as sincerely as her sister.

“Thank you, Patsy”

“Who are your friends, Alex?” asked the youngest, looking at the woman and the man who stood by the close door, waiting patiently as they saw the scene with wee smiles on their faces.

“These are Chelsea and Andy” he introduced them. “They are coming to fix you the heater”

“They what?” asked Thomas.

“Yes, a little bird told me your sister hasn’t listened to me in all this time” explained Hamilton dryly, throwing an accusatory glare to Thomas.

The secretary looked daggers at his friend. “Good one, Tweety”

“Thought he was Tweety” retorted Madison, getting up with a few papers in his hands.

“Care to show them where the boiler is?” asked Hamilton, with his eyes still fixated on Jefferson.

The man simply turned towards his other two guests and plastered his most polite smile on his face. “This way, please” he said.
Hamilton watched Jefferson guiding his acquaintances to the door that was hidden on the corner between the staircase and the kitchen. He was about to follow them, when Madison touched his arm.

He turned around, finding the accountant with a sheepish aura surrounding him; the girls were chattering quietly in the kitchen, looking for something in the cupboards, unaware of the scene that would happen at their backs. Madison gave him some papers that he skimmed, a bit uninterested.

“What is this?” he asked.

“Those are the documents you asked me for the other day”

Alexander raised his glare with a cocked eyebrow. “I told you those were for the end of the month”

“Yes, I know… This is just half of it, I just got blocked with the other…” James tried to explain.

“What is this for?” interrupted Alexander, walking to the table to put the papers on it. “I think I told you there are better way to apologise than overworking yourself. I wouldn’t want to live something similar of what happened in the spring of 2015”

“Ah, you still remember that?” asked James, feeling his blush and wishing it could be seen as a something related with his fever.

“How could I forget?” commented Hamilton, thankfully ignoring his red cheeks. “You collapsed just when Betsey was going to ask you if you wanted to stay for dinner and almost gave her a heart attack” he remembered.

“Poor woman” commented Madison, giggling a bit.

“You gave us both quite the scare” continued Hamilton. “Though your health is not one of my vital worries, I’d rather not to live anything like that again, it’s not a pleasant experience. Besides, if you get worse, it’ll be my fault”

“I am already feeling better” said James, rolling his eyes.

“You’re always feeling better” retorted Hamilton, giving him also an eye-roll. “Rest” he ordered. “Maybe now with the heater you will be able to finally get better for real”

“Yes… How much will it be?”

“What?”

“… The repair”

“Ah, no, that’s on me”

“What…?”
“Here” she said, handing him the bag. “We decided to give you some cookies for your birthday. I know it’s not too much, and it’d be better if they were home-made, but we just knew about your birthday today at last hour and…”

Alexander took the bag from her hands and shook his head. “I love it, girls, don’t worry” he said.

“Really?” asked Polly, excited.

“Yes” insisted Hamilton with a laugh. “I’m sure my family and I will enjoy them”

The little girl cheered to herself, smiling brightly. Patsy blushed a bit while she looked at James. Both laughed at the little’s enthusiasm.

“Well, I’d love to stay a little longer” said Alexander, with an apologetic expression. “But there are guests waiting for me at home and Eliza would come after me if I get there one minute later than she told me so” he half-joked. He didn’t want to think of what his wife would be capable of doing if he got there later than she had told him. Especially with Angelica by her side to encourage such behaviour. “Have a good night, girls”

“You too! Happy birthday!” said the girls once again.

“Madison, care to accompany me?” asked Hamilton, pointing at the front door.

“No” said the shorter man, obliging though a bit confused.

Hamilton didn’t talk until they reached the door and made sure the girls were too busy chatting to themselves to eavesdrop. “How is Jefferson, is he any better?” he asked.

Madison took a moment to reply. “His head still bothers him a little, but nothing major” he explained.

“Did he rest?”

“Yes, but it’s not about resting” admitted Madison.

“What do you mean?”

“He is still stressed”

“I see. So, it’s not a headache, it’s more like a migraine?” he asked.

“He calls them that, yes”

Hamilton thought for a moment. “Alright, this is what we’re going to do” he eventually said. “I’ve got almost two whole months of free days by law, about to be three if we count the one Washington must give me for this year, and I’m not going to use any of those days, unless I fell ill and, even then,
it’d be unwillingly. So, you two are going to have a long weekend to rest and get better and go back to work on Monday, and I would take those days off my personal vacation and do whatever you may have done tomorrow and past tomorrow”

“Really?” asked James, beyond puzzled.

“Yes. Why so surprised? I recall doing this to you once”

“No, yes, I remember, but why would you do that now?” he asked, raising an eyebrow of suspicion.

“Because I can handle you two being pains in the neck throughout this whole ordeal, but not sick pains. I am not a nurse” spat Alexander, getting out the house. “Tell Jefferson to call his shameless sister. I want to have a proper date before the end of the month” he added, while heading to the car.

“Yes… We’ll try”

Alexander stopped with half-body inside his car. “According to you, you’ve been trying since after Christmas. Try harder” he condemned.

James rolled his eyes and watched him leave. By the time Hamilton drove down the street, Thomas emerged from the door he had disappeared a few moments before with the repairers. He looked around the room, and approached Madison, who had closed the door and was making his way back to the dining table.

“Where’s Hamilton?” he asked.

“He just left. I think he was being late for his own party” explained James, ordering the papers that were on the table.

“Did you ask him how much it will cost this?” asked Thomas, pointing at the door at his back.

James shook his head. “Zero” he explained.

“Excuse me?”

“Zero. He paid them himself”

“Why would he do that?”

“I don’t know. Go and ask him yourself” said James, shrugging and making his way upstairs, with the stack of papers in one hand. “I’m gonna go to sleep” a yawn escaped from his lips as if to prove his tiredness.

“That is? You’re gonna sleep?” asked Thomas, watching his friend walking to the stairs.

“What do you want me to do? A performance?” he mocked, with the phantom of a smile dancing in his lips.

“Don’t get smart with me, James. Those two know how to form sentences, those are the expensive repairer ones” explained Thomas, frowning.

“So? Better for us. We won’t need to call them the next week because the heater broke again”
commented James, shrugging.

“Better for him, you’d say” retorted Thomas, wrinkling his nose. “How much money was it?”

“I don’t know”

“You didn’t ask?”

“Why would I?”

“So I don’t have a heart attack when he asks me to give all the money he has spent on us back”

James half-closed his eyes and stopped in the middle of the stairs. “Thomas, he has said – on numerous occasions, I must add – that he doesn’t want us to pay him back”

“Oh, why wouldn’t I believe that when it comes from a man who hasn’t married his own bank account just because is illegal”

James clicked his tongue before his friend’s sarcasm. “Really, why don’t you two get along? You’re just as sarcastic and cruel is scary” he commented. He stopped before start walking upstairs to look at his friend one last time. “Oh, by the way, he’s told me we don’t need to go to work until Monday”

“Why?”

James groaned. “I don’t know, Thomas. Maybe because he’s been seeing me almost coughing a lung out and you about to faint?”

Thomas narrowed his eyes. “I was never about to faint” he contradicted. “And…”

“Whatever you say” Madison cut him off.

“And why would I use my days when he says so?” asked Thomas, bitter at the interruption.

“Because you’re not using your days, neither do I. He’s gonna give his to us” explained James, tiredly.

“How is he gonna do that? They’re days we all are given by law. One cannot exchange them as if they were Pokémon trading cards…”

“He did it once when we work together for one thing” said James, rubbing one eye. “It’s alright. I think we both need the small break”

“And what does Washington have to say about it?” asked Thomas walking until the beginning of the staircase.

“About what?”

“About the global warming, what do you think?” spat Thomas. “About us missing work”

“For being ill? I think he’d wish us a fast recovery to sound polite” answered Madison, clearly overseeing his friend’s bad mood. “Now, I’m gonna go sleep, I’m too tired for this shit” he declared, heading straight to the end of the hallway.

“Go to sleep, but you’re going call him later and tell him we don’t need his handouts”

“The heck we don’t” commented Patsy.
Thomas turned around, seeing his two daughters had their total attention on him and the conversation. He cleared his throat, and frowned at the oldest.

“Patsy, dine, read and shut up” he ordered.

James had made his way back to the staircase to look down at him. “Thomas, if you don’t want to use his days, it’s fine. Though you should, but that’s your life. But I am going to, because I need it”

“No, James, we don’t need to owe him more than we already do”

“And what do we owe him, according to you? He hasn’t asked anything from us” talked back Madison. “Admit it, Thomas, you’re so used to persons like your relatives and ex friends that now that someone is trying to be nice, you can’t see it”

“Dang” commented Patsy.

Thomas threw daggers at her before talking back to his friend. “I don’t have anything to admit. He hasn’t been nice to us since ever, and now, out of the blue, he says he doesn’t want us to pay him, he bought us food, hired two good repairers, gives us his free days… Excuse me if I suspect”

“Listen to me, Thomas: don’t fuck this up. It’s still better than Jay or the other scroungers who cared more about money than us”

“Like Hamilton is any different” retorted Thomas, folding his arms across his chest.

“At least, he is not asking you for money every time you talk to him” commented James.

“No, he’s cleverer than that. He’s waiting to all this to be over to ask the great amount”

James rolled his eyes. “Alright, then, have it your way and keep seeing him as the enemy, even when he’s on our side now” he gave in. “But, as Napoleon Bonaparte said: ‘Don’t interrupt your enemy when he’s making a mistake’” he quoted, and he walked to his room.

“Napoleon was a dwarf with complexes” spat Thomas, rolling his eyes. “Huh, look, just like Hamilton. Bet he’s related to him and all…”

“He’s part French, actually!” commented James from the other side of the upstairs hallway.

“He has to spoil everything I love…” complained Thomas.

8.17. Message: read. Last connection: 8.16. Eliza felt a tic in her right eye. If that asshole isn’t here before past twenty-five, I’m gonna go to his office and drag him here by the hair, she swore to herself.
She looked around the room. George and Martha Washington were the first ones to arrive, close followed by the Burr, whose little child had been chattering animatedly with her children while the three watched some cartoon on the TV the adults didn’t mind and took as a white sound while they waited for the birthday boy to arrive.

Angelica had spent the whole time knowing (scaring) Laurens’ new boyfriend, and Eliza felt bad for the poor man when she saw his pale face and nervous glares that John tried hard to ignore. Nobody got in between Angelica when she was trying to discover everything she could about some new member of the group. They all knew better. It would be for the better, actually. Angelica was good at judging people with only one look. If someone could know if Alf’s intentions were legit, it would be Angelica.

Hercules had been talking with her about the whole interrogation, and both came to that conclusion. Eliza didn’t say anything about his strange behaviour and nervous glares directed to Alf. It wasn’t empathy, it was something else. Eliza was too focus on the hour and the guests that were about to come to even bother.

His husband’s first friend’s sharp glare didn’t get any softer when Lafayette made his way back to the living room, accompanied by Peggy, who went straight to the kitchen while he sat at the same table they were. Eliza watched the forced exchanged of words between the couple, and, again, decided to just let it slide and pretend to have heard Theodosia calling her from the kitchen.

The conversation with the Washington and the Burr marriages was way more comfortable and less tense. They laughed at Angelica’s protective nature, and they even bet at what hour Alexander would come back. Eliza laughed though she was about to grab the lighter and go pay her husband a visit.

The doorbell rang and she almost tripped over her own feet when she went to open the door. A bright smile appeared on her face when she saw who was in front of her.

“Lu, Henry!” she greeted, hugging the couple with all her might. “So glad you could make it!”

“Are you kidding, Betsey?” laughed Lu, while she tapped her on the back. “If my kind-of-daughter-in-law calls me to tell me she is going to throw a birthday party for my Alexander, how would I decline?”

“She stood up one of the most important lawyers in her law firm just to come” explained Henry, once the hug was over.

“I am the boss for something. I stand those ass-kissers all year, I need a damned break for all that falseness” complained Lu, taking off her coat.

Eliza took it and hung it in the rack by the door. “But the business is going well, isn’t it?” she asked.
“Yes, but I think I’d always miss going to courts myself” winced Lu. “Talking of such, Henry told me Alex stopped practicing law?” she added, curious.

“Oh, yes, that… He did something like a halt…” explained Eliza, trying to respect her husband’s privacy. She knew Alexander would hate if Lucy knew from someone else that wasn’t him. “But, worry not, he has come back to it… Sorta… He has two cases now in his hands right now” she added, in a more cheerful tone.

“Already?” asked Henry, impressed. “It’s only been a month since the last time we talked!”

“Are you surprised, though?” asked Lu, with a sided smile and with a spark dancing in her dark small eyes. “Alex was always one hell of a lawyer”

“He surely is” George, who had come to the entrance, agreed. “I knew I heard some well-known voices” he added, with a warm smile.

“George, you bald kiwi-head!” greeted Henry, arms wide open. “I was expecting you to be dead, after your fatalist aura from the last time!”

“You can only wish for you to get rid of me that easily, walking barrel” said George, patting his friend on the back, and then on the tummy. “Your New Year’s resolution for 2018 is going to be to go to gym more than once per month now?”

“I don’t need the gym. This is the ‘little curve of happiness’” commented Henry, laughing with superiority at the end.

“The rest of the world calls it ‘beer belly’” laughed George. “Hey, if one of these years you finally decide to follow that resolution you’ve been claiming you’d do since we graduated, you can be my substitute in the office” he offered. “With all the stress you won’t need to get up the chair to lose weight”

“Georgie, my good friend” Henry embrace him by the shoulders. “I wouldn’t spend one whole hour in that hellhole you’re always complaining so much about, not even if I were wasted in the cheapest wine in the Universe”

“You mean the only wine you drink?” retorted George.

Henry put a hand on his chest, mockingly. “Ow, my pride!”

“First, they tell other to die, then insult each other and now they are laughing” Martha, who had been at the door seeing the conversation as the other two women, shook her head. “Really, someone please come and explain the male friendship to me” she said, walking to Eliza’s side.

“I’ve been trying to solve that hieroglyph my whole marriage, Mattie. It’s not use” said Lu, with a condescending smile. She looked at Eliza. “Betsey, dear, lesson number 43 of life: men never grow up”

“I’ll make sure to look for my old notebook and add it” she promised, with a giggle.

The bell rang once again.
“I’ll get it” said Lu, turning around.

“Thanks” said Eliza.

Lu opened the door and her smile became forced when she saw the man that was standing on the other side, the woman, the man and the child who accompanied him easily forgotten.

“Oh, Catherine, we got the address wrong. We just knocked on Lilith’s door” he commented, throwing Lu a nasty glare.

Catherine frowned slightly at him. “Hun…” she tried to say.

“Don’t sweat it, Cat; Lilith was the first woman to stand her ground against an idiot man. It was a praise” said Lu with a wee smirk.

“I haven’t talked to you in thirty years and you are still the same liberal slut I knew back in college” spat Philip.

“We could’ve talked at our children’s wedding if you haven’t run away each time you saw me, like a little coward” retorted Lu rapidly. “Catherine, honey, my most sincere condolences”

The woman blinked perplexed. “Why?”

“You’ve been married to Frederick Flintstone’s old-fashioned brother for thirty-two years, right? What else could I give you but condolences?”

Eliza had been watching the whole discussion, moving her head as if it was a tennis match. The Washington and Henry did the same, and she could feel Martha’s worried glare now directed as her. She bit her bottom lip and was about to put an end to the whole affair, especially when she saw how uncomfortable John Church and little Pip were, when her sister and their wife and mother, decided to do it for her. Angelica Schuyler, ladies and gentlemen, always on time.

“I was feeling my vision turning black and white, now I understand why” said Angelica, looking harshly at her father. “Dad, please, you haven’t put a foot inside this house and you’re already making Mum uncomfortable?” she condemned, arms in akimbo.

“And here comes your pupil” said Philip bitterly, dedicating Lu a last angry glare. “I’m going to wait for Eliza’s husband in the living room” he informed his wife.

“Do whatever you want, dear. You’re a free man” said Catherine, calmly.

“The ring on my finger says the contrary” spat Philip under his breath, passing his oldest daughter by.

“I’m sorry you had to see that, girls” said Catherine, looking at her daughters. “And you two” she added, looking at her son-in-law and grandson. “And, well, everybody else…” she said, now looking at everyone in the entrance. “I know it was a very violent scene, but Philip and I are not in our best moment” she explained, getting in and making way for John and Pip to enter.
“It’s okay, Mum” said Eliza, going to hug her mother.

“You call that ‘violent’?” commented Lu, closing the door once the father was in with his son. “While coming, Henry and I had it worse just because of a red traffic light”

“I told you I’ll stop twice on our way back to compensate it” said Henry, waving one hand nonchalantly.

“Bf, if you only see the fight George and I had on Christmas” added Martha, with a sympathetic smile.

George made a face. “You never gave me your spare key”

“And I never will” swore Martha.

“It’s my office”

“Community of property” she retorted, with a smile of superiority.

“Heh, one of the worst parts of being married” commented Henry.

“Alexander and I fight all mornings as well” added Eliza, shrugging. “In fact, it’s like a tradition. The morning we don’t fight, it will be the morning when everything will go to hell, for sure”

Angelica nodded. “Yeah, and John and I are going to have it now”

“Why?” asked her husband, surprised.

“Because I told you to pick up my parents while I was here, waiting in peace” she answered, with a smile.

“Whatever. Mum will win and Dad will sleep on the couch” commented Pip, naturally.

Angelica petted her son’s head. “That’s because Mummy’s always right” she explained, while her husband rolled his eyes. “Now, go with your cousins”

“Is it necessary?”

“Philip” said Angelica, with a sharp tone.

Pip sighed and went straight into the living room. “Alright, alright…”

“That boy needs siblings, I swear” commented Catherine.

“Mom, I’ve told you. One is enough”

“Sometimes, one is too much” added John, taking off his coat and making his way into the kitchen.

“Well, isn’t it awesome the good mood we all have?” commented Angelica aloud, so her husband could hear her. “Really, this man is way more bitter as the days pass by”

“Maybe you need a short trip” proposed Eliza. “Alex and I have short trips from time to time”

“When?” asked her sister, impressed.

“Some weekends, I drag him out of the house and bring him with me to go shopping. He buys me a lot of things just so we can leave sooner. It’s fun”
“Sis, your marriage is the weirdest shit I’ve ever seen”

Eliza frowned. “Yeah, well, at least Alex and I have conversations”

“John and I have conversations as well”

“A thing that goes ‘Honey, I’ll be in London for another two weeks’ is not a proper conversation”

“In that case, neither is ‘Hun, I’ll be in my office all night’” retorted Angelica, arms in akimbo. “You even put him a blanket and a pillow in his desk, for Heaven’s sake!”

Eliza folded her arms in a defensive manner. “Uh, yeah, because I care about my husband, not like another woman I know that only married hers because he got her pregnant on a crazy summer trip with college buddies” she snapped.

“Elizabeth, please” said Catherine, looking pleadingly at her daughter.

“Oh, no, you didn’t!” said Angelica, after a gasp. “You just didn’t!”

“I just did!”

The Knox and the Washington exchanged a surprised look with each other and then looked at Catherine, who had his nose pinched and had both cheeks red from embarrassment. The five of them watched, fearful, how the two sisters were now nose to nose, killing the other with the glare.

Thankfully, before any of them could go a step too far, the door opened.

“Well, who would’ve thought?” asked Alexander, closing the door at his backs. “Everybody is already here and nobody is dead and the house is still in one piece, maybe this can end well and all”

“Alexander!” greeted Angelica, changing her mood in a millisecond. Eliza rolled her eyes at that and shook her head.

“Hey” said Alexander, not minding her too much.

She surrounded her brother-in-law in a hug. “Happy birthday, bro!”

“Thanks… But you already told me that and hugged me this morning” commented Alexander, returning the embrace.

“You’re the least cooperative man I ever met” complained Angelica. “This is a party, we’re family, I love you. Let me wish you for a happy birthday all the times I want”

“Okay, okay” laughed Alexander. He turned to his mother-in-law. “Catherine” he greeted, with a nod.

“Alexander, how are you?” she said, giving him a colder and shorter hug for the sake of good manners.

“As good as I can be” he answered with sincerity.
“Well, I hope so!” Henry cut into the conversation. “Alexander, how comes you’re working on, nothing less than, two cases? Back in December you told me you have stopped practising!”

“Henry” acknowledged Alexander, a bit taken aback. “I’m not practising, per se, I’m just doing two men a favour” he explained, uncomfortable.

“True, there’s nothing I’d love more than him working as a lawyer again” commented George, nodding. “It would be a little spark in all that darkness…”

“George, you’re not Bécquer, stop being so dramatic” complained Martha.

“Well, whatever the case is” said Lu, walking closer to Alexander, with a warm smile. “I hope everything goes well for those two men”

“Thank you, Lu” said Alexander, and both persons hugged each other affectionately.

“Though I don’t need to hope, you’re one of the best lawyers in this city” she added after a moment. Alexander laughed, and Lu noticed how forced it sounded. With a more worried tone, she added. “What I really hope is for you to tell me why you stopped; but all in due time, dear” she said, ending the embrace and patting him on the shoulder. “Right now, I think we have a little birthday party that your wife prepared with all the love she feels towards you” she said, winking at Eliza, who blushed.

“With a big help of her sister, Angelica, who also loves you very much” added Angelica, putting a hand on Alexander’s left shoulder.

“Sure” said Alexander, with a laugh.

“We won’t have a way out of her reminders” complained Eliza, taking one of Alex’s hands. “Come, sit on the table” she urged, getting them out of the entrance and into the living room. “I’ll bring the cake and we will sing”

“No, Betsey, not the song…” complained Alexander in a groan.

“Alexander” warned Eliza.

“Alright, alright” he gave in, sitting on the chair she had pointed. “But make it quick”

“Yes, yes” she promised with disinterest, trotting to the kitchen.

“And I won’t blow the candles more than once if the photos and the vids are not the way you like them!” he added, loud enough for her to hear. “Eliza, I know you heard me!” He groaned and turned around, seeing Angelica at the door. “She’s going to make me blow the damned candles thrice, right?”

“Or more, Alex, or more…” nodded Angelica.

“Betsey, when are we going to eat the cake?” complained Peggy, as soon as she entered the room, interrupting the conversation the Burr marriage was having.
“Don’t be a child, Peggy” condemned her sister, opening the fridge. “We’ll eat right after Alexander blows the candles” she explained.

“But when? After the third time? The fourth?” asked Peggy, half-closing her eyes.

“Whenever I think the photos are perfect” deadpanned Eliza, taking the cake out.

Peggy groaned. “I hate you and your habit of making us all blow the candles seven times…”

“Well, go hate me in the living room” snapped Eliza. “I have to prepare all this!”

“Alright, alright, gee…”

Peggy walked into the living room, seeing the children talking with Angelica and Alexander with smiles on their faces. Pip was sat on Alex’s lap, hugging him while wishing him for a happy birthday, while Angie and Philip were complimenting Angelica and her work on decorating the whole house for their father. On the couch, Laurens was sat with his new boyfriend, both giggling and stealing kisses to one another, in juxtaposition to Lafayette and Hercules, who were on the armchair with stern faces. At least, Hercules was. His face couldn’t match her father’s, who was wrinkling his mouth in disgust before the exchange of affection Laurens was making with his boyfriend from the other side of the room, being silent thanks to Catherine, who had a tight grip on one of his arms, but Hercules’ expression was just as scary. It didn’t get any better when Lafayette got up and walked directly to her.

“Hey, how are you feeling?”

Peggy shrugged. “Fine, starving. I’ll be better once I tell them what we have to tell them” she added, bitterly.

Laf frowned. “Peggy, we talked about this. Not today”

“Then when?” pressured the girl.

“I don’t know. When is the next birthday?”

“Philip turns six on the 22nd”

“Shit, why do you all have the birthdays so close to one another?” complained Laf. “It’s hell enough with half of you being namesakes”

“Hey, man, don’t look at me. I didn’t name anyone in here” she shrugged. “Besides, I refuse to say this on a child’s party”

“You weren’t going to, anyways” muttered Laf.

Now, it was Peggy’s turn to frown. “Long-name Lafayette, I refuse to tell this on my own and individually” she said.

“First, learn my name if you’re going to do that twice a week” he mocked. “Second, you are not going to have to be through that… But today is not the day…”

“My father is gonna suspect something’s wrong with me”
“Well, that’s your fault for living in your parents’ house when you’re 29” interrupted Lafayette.

“At least I don’t live off my friends and make out in my ex’s living room with his current father-in-law looking” spat Peggy.

“… You know, I’m gonna overlook that because you’re going through a phase”

“Fuck you, you’re not my father to tell me what phase I’m going through” complained Peggy. “I want to tell them what the hell is happening. I don’t see why I have to hide it, we didn’t do anything wrong, I am an adult”

“Peggy…”

“Yes, and adult that lives in her parents’ house and who needs her mother to cut her the meat, but, c’mon, that fucking shit was more gristle than meat!” she began to raise her voice, calling the attention of the whole room.

“Peggy, s’il te plaît” pleaded Laf.

“And your fucking boyfriend is gonna make a hole in my forehead with that sharp look he’s always dedicating me” she added, lowering her voice through clenched teeth.

“Hercules is just…” tried to excuse Lafayette.

Peggy didn’t give his explanation any mind. “He’s gonna turn me into a cyclops at this rate. And I hate cyclops”

“Actually, cyclopes were creatures with only one eye. You wouldn’t be one…” commented Laf with a cocked eyebrow.

“Well, then a unicorn…”

“Unicorns have a horn, not a hole”

“Then, I’ll put a fucking straw bathed in glitter inside the hole!” exploded Peggy. “Gee, what a nuisance!”

“Girl, I correct you because I love you” said Lafayette. “I wouldn’t want you to go out to the real world saying those stupid things. People will laugh at you”

“Thank you for calling me stupid. Really, you’re making my day”

“I wasn’t meaning that…”

“Look, you know what? Now I don’t want to say anything, you embittered my mood”

“I’ve been asking you not to tell them yet. You’re making me happy”

“Oh, yeah? Then, be fucking happy, I don’t care”

“Now, you’re not making any sense”

“I am fucking hungry. I don’t want to make sense, I want to eat” she sniffed.

Lafayette patted her on the arm with affection. “There, there. We’ll eat after Alexander blows the candles for the fifth time” he reassured her.
“I hope so…”

“Oh, by the way…”

“What now?” she squinted her eyes.

“You’ll have to wish Alexander for a happy birthday in French”

“What the heck?”

“I had to lie to Hercules after your phone call”

“Fuck, Lafayette, I don’t like French. It’s like talking when you’ve got something stuck in your throat” she complained, kicking the floor like a little child.

“Again, I’m gonna ignore that disrespect because you’re going through a phase”

“Whatever… How do you say ‘happy birthday’ in European?” she asked, scratching the back of her head with disinterest.

Lafayette wrinkled his nose. “There’s no way to say that in European. European is not a language”

“Man, do I have the face of someone who wants a Geometry class right now?” she groaned.

“You’d mean Geography… And this would be more like Foreign Language”

“Gosh, Lafayette, I’d punch you in the face…”

Lafayette rolled his eyes and was about to tell her how to pronounce the sentence when Alexander came to them, looking worriedly and curious at Peggy.

“Hi, there, Pegs, how are you feeling?” he asked.

“Willing to kill someone if I’m not eating cake in less than ten minutes” she spat. “Ten minutes” she repeated. “You better make a fuss after the first photo”

Alexander laughed. “I’ll remember that for our sakes” he commented. “Now, seriously, how are you?”

“I wasn’t joking, but okay…” Peggy shrugged, and she made her way to the table. “Gosh, I’m craving some chocolate cake right now…”

Alexander stared at her while Lafayette could only sigh, passing a hand through his face. Eventually, Laurens changed their track of thoughts getting closer to them with the intention of introducing Alf to Alexander. It went as well as one could have imagined. Laurens was right, Alexander was never the jealous type of guy. And Alf really could act. Lafayette didn’t know if he liked that or not.
Lafayette waited for the best moment to intervene, feeling the hard glare Hercules was dedicating him in the back of his neck. He threw a few glares to Peggy, who was looking at his boyfriend with clear annoyance, while nodding at whatever thing Angelica was talking to her about. When Eliza came in, wobbling for all the dishes and glasses she was holding at once, he saw the golden opportunity.

“Eli, why don’t you let me help you?” proposed Lafayette, stopping whatever anecdote Alexander was telling to embarrass Laurens.

“No, no, no” the second Schuyler sister said immediately. “You’re my guests”

“Come on, don’t be like that, sis” commented Angelica, pointing at her. “You’re gonna break something”

“No! It’s rude!”

Lafayette had taken some of the dishes she brought away from her and put them on the table, ignoring her complaints.

“Come on, now, you’ve worked too hard today. Just for setting the table?” he proposed, blinking innocently.

“Alright, alright” she gave in, unwillingly. “But only for setting the table. Then, I’ll do it all. You’re my guests”

“Yes, yes” said Lafayette, with a bright smile that turned forced when he turned to face Alf. “Alf, please, come help me”

He didn’t give him time to decline; he simply took Alf by the arm and dragged him to the kitchen, ignoring the inquisitive look of the whole room. Eliza sat at Peggy’s side, asking her how she was feeling, and the youngest Schuyler sister snapped at her saying that she was feeling fine, just hungry and please, stop treating me like a fucking little child.

“Peggy is salty today” commented Laurens, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Not as much as Lafayette” added Aaron, getting in the living room with his wife, and interrupting whatever response Alexander was about to say. “He just threw us out of the kitchen” he explained.

“Huh, Laf being rude? Might be the end of the world of something” joked Alexander.

“Well, he said ‘please’ several times, but still…” commented Theodosia. “Happy birthday, by the way” she said, going to hug Alexander.

“Thanks” he said automatically.
He didn’t want to be rude (especially when he could feel Eliza’s glare on him) but Alexander was not a man who liked to hear ‘happy birthday’ and to receive hugs every couple of minutes. Maybe because he never stood at the same place for too long so the people surrounding him would learn about his birthday or care enough for him to prepare him a party. Alexander never knew the reason, but the discomfort was real.

“Thank you” Theodosia shook her head, taking him out of his thoughts. “You’ve been so helpful. If you ever need something…” she began to say.

“Please, Theodosia, I’m not doing it because of something in return. Besides, Aaron is the one who is taking care of the big things. I’m just the assistant” he said rapidly.

“Uh, Alexander Hamilton admitting being an assistant counsel” commented Laurens, with a mocking smile. “Now, the world is ending”

“Well, your assistance has helped me get a lot of work done in less time” said Aaron, cocking a funny eyebrow at the two friends. “So, I’m with Theodosia about the ‘if you ever need something’ thing”

Alexander sighed. “Alright, then I want you not to feel the need to repay me”

“So quick-witted” said Theodosia with a laugh. “But it doesn’t wash” she added quickly, before heading to the table where the sisters were sat.

“Hey, Laurens, congratulations” said Aaron once his eyes fell on the freckled-man. “It’s good to see you so happy”

“Thanks, Burr” he nodded. “I really hope this one turns out fine”

“It will be okay” said Alexander, hugging his friend by the shoulders. “Alf seems like a nice guy”

“Yeah, he passed Angelica’s test” half-joked Aaron.

“Poor fella. I feel him. She did the same to me when Betsey and I started dating” said Alexander, rolling his eyes playfully.

The other two laughed.

“Angelica really is a very protective friend” agreed Laurens. “If she hasn’t said anything, then, I’ll be calmer”

“I think now it might be Lafayette the one who is making him pass the test” commented Aaron, looking in the direction of the kitchen. “That or they are going to bring the whole cutlery” he laughed.

“Poor fella. I’m sure Betsey feels him. He did the same to her when we started dating” commented Alexander, rolling his eyes playfully.
“Let’s get this straight” said Alf, shaking his head while he collected a few dishes. “You want me to break up with him because he, according to you, fell over the heels?”

“Exactly” Laf nodded, hesitating in bringing the cake with them or not. He decided not to. He didn’t want to end up with first-degree burns.

“After I had to stand that interrogation?”

“Yeah, Angelica is very protective”

“Being very protective is following John in one of his dates in undercover” explained Alf. “Not devouring another human being with the glare”

“I should’ve told you she’s scary”

“And do I have the security that she won’t try to murder me if I break up with her friend?” he asked, with a raised eyebrow.

“Don’t play the victim card” spat Lafayette.

“Hey, you called me”

“Yeah, because I never thought Laurens would be so attached to you” admitted Laf.

“Gee, thanks…”

“No, no, you’re a nice guy and all, but…”

“The poor guy is needing some love, huh? He’s deprived. I think he has some kind of daddy issues”

“Wait, now the rent boy is a therapist as well” complained Lafayette, frowning.

“I’m only saying that the majority of my clients just need someone to talk to. People are very lonely these days”

“You’re not staying longer than tonight” Lafayette said, very serious.

“I know, I know. I was only commenting a fact” Alf defended himself. “But I still think breaking up with someone because I find them too good it’s stupid” he added, heading to the door.

“Why does Hercules hate you so much when you two are just as annoying?” he complained, following him.

“Don’t know” Alf shrugged. “It’s not my fault, I’m very adorable”
Catherine sighed, exhausted, when she heard her husband’s complaint at the peek Laurens gave his boyfriend.

“Honey, please, I told you I wanted to have the afternoon in peace. Our grandchildren are in here” she pleaded.

Philip groaned. “I’ve got enough with containing myself in my own house twice a week because our daughters had children for the sake of having them”

“Not that discussion again, I’m happy that our daughters have enough trust in us. Do you know how many grandparents aren’t able to see their grandchildren?” she said, looking at the children affectionately, sat on their mothers’ laps.

“Lucky bastards…” said Philip under his breath. “I never wanted children, just imagine how much I’d want grandchildren”

“Don’t say that, even if it’s a joke” warned Catherine, severe.

“Bah… Where did I put my toothpick?” he wondered, patting his jeans.

“Mmmh…” complained Catherine, biting her bottom lip to prevent words to get out her mouth.

“What?” asked her husband, frowning.

She shook her head. “Nothing”

“Ah, here it is”

Philip, finally a bit happy, took out one toothpick from his pocket and put it in his mouth. Catherine looked at him disgusted, and bit her lip with more force than before, feeling something inside burning.

“Hey, how’s everything with Madison and Jefferson?” asked Aaron, once Laf and Alf were putting the dishes on the table.

Alex snapped his fingers. “Ah, that’s right, I almost forgot!” he commented out loud. He scrutinized the whole room until his eyes fell on the Washington chattering with the Knox in the opposite corner of the room. “Thanks, Aaron!” he said, walking directly to the two couples.

“You’re welcome?” said Aaron, a bit confused.

“Alexander and his habit of talking to himself as if the rest of the world was inside his head” commented Laurens.
“I don’t think there is somebody out there with enough mental strength to survive a walk inside that mind” said Aaron.

Alexander walked to where the Washington and the Knox were, catching up among the four and laughing at old memories they were all fond of. On the way, he tried to ignore his father-in-law’s penetrating glare, Hercules’ sharp stare dedicated to Alf and Laf, helping Eliza setting the table and Peggy’s bad mood that Angelica was trying to soothe without any success.

This is one of the reasons Alexander maybe didn’t like parties. A bunch of relatives and friends who had to stand each other for the sake of one person that turned out to be born on that day. Being born wasn’t something that deserved such a sacrifice. At least he had a few friends with him and the children were having a good time. But something told him that wasn’t going to last. A personal party was very different from a professional one; here, there were repressed feelings and shared memories of past mistakes that could explode and be revealed at the littlest push. Not something Alexander wanted to live any time. The Schuyler hadn’t exploded back at the Christmas dinner, and something told Alexander it may have been better that way.

“Mr. Washington” he said, as soon as he was in front of the four older people.

“Do you need something, son?” asked George immediately.

“Don’t call me that” he said, eyes half-closed, and throwing a rapid glare to Lu and Henry, who watched the conversation with attentive eyes. “And, yes, actually, I do”

“What is it?” he asked, clearly ignoring the first part of the sentence.

“Jefferson and Madison won’t be able to come to work until Monday, at least” he explained, trying to ignore the eyebrow that was quickly raised in George’s face. “And I wanted to ask for you to let them use my accumulated free days”

Washington and his wife showed a face of surprise at that. “Yes, I don’t have any problem, Alexander” he accepted.

“Do you exchange free days as repeated cards?” half-laughed Henry.

“I wasn’t joking when I told you I worked in a day care” said George, serious enough to make Henry look at him with wide eyes.

“You should use some of those days yourself, darling” commented Lu, looking at him worriedly.

“I am fine, Lu, seriously” he said rapidly, and Lu let him be. For now. “Ah, by the way, how about the house?” he asked, on the quiet.

Lu’s sigh made him feel more hopeful than it usually should have. “We were telling George and Mattie before you came” she admitted.

“Wouldn’t you be interested in it?” asked Henry, waggling his eyebrows.

Lu looked harshly at him. “Henry, I’ve told you to stop…” she tried to reprehend.
“Yes, actually, I am” interrupted Alexander, gaining a shocked expression from the Knox marriage.

“Wait, seriously?” asked Henry.

Alexander smiled sheepishly. “You’ve always had a way with words as well, Henry” he complimented.

“Heh, yeah, I know. There was that one time…” he tried to tell.

Lu stopped him abruptly. “Alexander, dear, you know I want to get rid of the house, not to rent it”

“Don’t worry, I won’t pay you any rent” he promised. “I will purchase it. As any other client”

“But you’re not any other client, Alex” Lu reminded him with a severe tone. “If that house passes to you, it won’t be because you paid us. You should inherit it”

“You know I can’t inherit anything from you two” said Alexander, with a sad smile.

“Say whatever you want; you’d always be like a son to me” she nodded, very serious, holding his glare. “I can’t make you pay for something that should be yours”

“You won’t make me, I want to” clarified Alexander. “Lu, I’m not even sure if I’d do it, but if I would, I want you to treat me as any other person” he challenged.

“I wouldn’t test him, Lu” said Henry. “Remember that he learned from you”

Lu looked at him with the corner of her eye and then fixated her glare on Alexander. “Alright” she gave in, after a sigh. “The pupil has overtaken the master” she commented, getting closer to him. After patting him on the arm, she added. “But remember that I taught you everything you know, not everything I know”

“There goes the master Lu” mocked Henry.

Alexander laughed along with the Washington, especially after seeing Lu sticking her tongue out at her husband. The Knox ended up bursting out laughing, while Lu hugged him tightly against her chest. Alright, maybe this party wasn’t such a bad idea, he had been missing the Knox since they moved. A part of him wouldn’t mind having them as neighbours again, and knocking on their door some weekends to have lunch together…

“Okay, everybody!” Eliza said loudly, taking her husband out of his thoughts. “Time for the cake”

“Finally!” said Peggy, sounding desperate.

“Give the fork to Peggy the last” said Angelica, with a cruel smirk.

“Sister, I’m gonna stab you” swore the youngest.

“No stabbing until after we finished sing happy birthday” declared Eliza.

“Please, Betsey, the song is unnecessary” said Alexander, making his way to the table, as the rest of the room.
“The song is never unnecessary” retorted Eliza. “Kids, come to the table!” she called.

“Tell that to John” commented Angelica, looking as her husband came playing chase with their child and dropping themselves on the chairs beside her. “If I dare to even say the title aloud, he’d kill me with the glare”

“It’s just that I don’t understand it” explained John, laughing and gasping for the short race. He ruffled Pip’s hair with affection and then turned his attention to the whole table. “That thing is okay when you’re a kid, but what do you do when you’re an adult? Your only options are singing along like an egotist or waiting uncomfortably until the torture is over” he explained, shrugging and leaning back on the chair.

“We will sing” repeated Eliza, serious.

“Alright, alright, I wasn’t complaining” said John, defensively, while his wife giggled.

Eliza waited until everybody had filled the chairs they liked better and Alexander to be sat in his reserved seat. She looked around, at the corner on her left there was her husband, waiting patiently for her to give them permission to start singing; by Alex’s left, Herc sat, patting him on the back with a smile, while Lafayette smiled affectionately at his friend; Alf took a seat then, seeing the interaction with a funny glare, and Laurens whispered some explanation in his ear that made him giggle. Then, John was with Angelica right beside them, talking in whispers and acting like two lovebirds, levering one of the few moments they could spend together with their child, who was sat right by his aunt Peggy’s left, who was looking at the cake with a watery mouth.

The kids were sat together at the right side of the table, in their own world but paying as much attention to the food as their aunt. Theo bit her bottom lip at something funny Philip had whispered in her ear, and her parents looked at the pair with funny eyes at Eliza’s right, being Theodosia the one who touched her arm for her to see the cute scene. By her left, her parents were, noticeable a bit uncomfortable, but her mother was doing her best to control her father’s nasty comments, and she had succeeded as the afternoon was going as well as she could’ve imagined with Philip Sr in the room.

By her parents’ left, the Washington marriage had sat. Martha with a playful and childish spark in her eyes, just as Henry, sat at her left, both waiting for her to let them sing. Eliza wouldn’t be surprised if the two would startle their respective partners bursting out singing as if this was some kind of contest. Eliza had to smile fondly. Her eyes met Lu’s, who was thinking the same as her – they both always had some kind of mental connection and understood each other without the need of words, and both loved that – and they smiled at each other, especially when Alexander took Lu’s hand to squeeze it, as a ‘thanks for coming’. Lu’s eyes said a clear ‘there’s nothing you have to thank me, silly’. And she peeked him on the cheek.

Eliza knew it was then the perfect moment to make them all start singing.

The nineteen guests started to sign the famous birthday song in unison, being Henry and
Martha the most excited ones, as she had predicted. Lu and her almost looked at each other at the same exact time, and smiled fondly because of their friends. George looked at his wife and embraced her by the shoulders, enjoying her enthusiasm, and, eventually, Lu did the same, taking Henry’s hand and trying to match his volume.

Alexander blushed and scratched his cheek, looking at John Church, who looked at him empathetically, though he never stopped singing in a low tone. Angelica saw that and decided to take her son and husband’s hands and started to move side to side, screaming ‘with more energy, you all!’, provoking Henry and Martha to laugh-sing louder with her. Catherine smiled softly, in juxtaposition with her husband’s eye-roll.

Eliza took her lighter out of her pocket when the song was about to be finished. Something that never happened as, as soon as everybody saw her with the object in her hand, they stopped the singing abruptly.

“NO!” they screamed, almost throwing themselves off their chairs.

Eliza and her parents were startled by that reaction, and she was about to ask what the heck had just happened when Angelica jumped out of her seat, taking the lighter away from her.

“Let me do that” she said, trying to match the object.

Eliza frowned. “No! It’s my husband’s birthday!” she complained.

“And your husband says: let your sister light the candles” said Alexander, with a severe expression.

“Gee, Elizabeth, are you still not over that habit of burning things?” asked her father, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Eliza blushed. “Yes, I am”

“Yeah, of course…” the whole room said, sarcastically.

“I let you invade my house and eat a cake only I paid for, and this is my reward” she said, folding her arms and taking a seat on the only unoccupied chair.

“It’s our reward, actually…” muttered Aaron, and Theodosia nodded, a bit afraid.

They waited patiently, watching Angelica trying to ignite the lighter and muttering curses. She sat again on her chair and shook the metallic object in her hand, moving the tongue inside her mouth with fury. Peggy watched the whole thing with eyes half-closed of tedium, and tapped her fingers on the dark green tablecloth that was covering the two joined tables. Eventually, she hit the table with the palm of her hand, startling her mother.
“Angie, it’s for before Alexander turns 80” she complained.

Angelica clicked her tongue. “This shit is not working” she defended herself.

“Language, young lady” reprehended Philip Sr.

“Whatever, Dad, it’s not gonna make it work” she retorted, shaking the object a few times. “Heeeeeeeell” she cursed, under her breath. “My goodness!”

Angelica got up from her seat abruptly, and threw the lighter against the floor, breaking it. She gasped, being her face totally red, while Eliza screamed, completely heart-broken.

“Nooooooooooo!” she said, running to see the broken lighter with her own eyes. “Monster, you killed him!” she accused, pointing at her sister, who simply ignored her and walked out the room.

“No way!” commented Laurens. “Her lighter was a guy!”

“Betsey is on your team of naming things as if they were persons, Georgie” commented Martha, deathly serious and worried over the woman that was now crying over a broken lighter.

“Say whatever you want, Martha. Lucille has made me happier in the brief period of time she has been part of my life than any of you have” said Washington, just as serious.

Lu and Henry saw the whole thing with eyes wide open. “Who is Lucille?” asked the man.

“Om, his rocking chair” answered Alexander, naturally.

“Gosh, it’s worse than what you told me” muttered Lu in her husband’s ear.

“I didn’t know it was this bad…” Henry defended himself.

Philip Sr. huffed. “Isn’t there someone who is normal in this group of lunatics?” he asked.

“You just contradicted yourself asking for that” commented Church.

“Don’t get involved, John” advised Alexander.

“I didn’t say anything” said Laurens.

“I was meaning my brother-in-law”

“Ah, okay…”

“These name thing is starting to get on my nerves” said Lafayette.

“That’s why in our office we resorted to nicknames” said Laurens. “Surnames were too formal, and some names don’t have abbreviations, or we don’t have enough trust to use them, or feel enough respect to use the surname. Nicknames were a bless” he explained, looking at Alf, who was beyond perplexed.

“I’m not the namesake of anyone, and you all call me names” complained Alexander.
“Alexander, if you’re a gremlin, you’re a gremlin. Accept it”

“…”

“What the hell are you talking about now, mister?” asked Philip Sr., with a frown.

“I don’t have that problem anymore” said Washington. “I call them all ‘my adorable sub-animals’, and problem solved”

Martha looked at him with a flustered face. “I told you you couldn’t say that when we were with normal people”

“What I said” complained Philip Sr. “All are crazy in here… That’s why I didn’t want to come”

“You’re free to leave” muttered Alexander, unable to contain his tongue.

“What did you say?” asked his father-in-law, squinting his eyes dangerously at him.

“… Nothing, I was wondering where Angelica was” he lied.

“Huh”

“Here” Angelica reappeared in the room, with a box of matches in her hand. “Now, now, there we go” she informed.

“Let’s see if that’s true” complained Peggy.

Angelica came back to her spot and took out one match… that she couldn’t ignite either. The faces of the guests were turning more bored as each fail attempt. Church looked at floor at one point, counting seven broken matches. He looked at his son, who was pleading him with the glare to do something. Alexander, on his behalf, was entertaining himself by looking at Eliza, hugging the lighter and ignoring the people at her backs.

“Come ooooon…” complained Angelica, making both Eliza and Alexander to look at her. “Come on, you Devil’s inventioooooon”

“My hair’s gonna turn grey…” complained Alexander.

“Eliza took all the pyromania when she was born” said Angelica, grunting.

“It’s never her fault, have you noticed?” commented John, rubbing his temples.

“What are you trying to say?” asked Angelica, dedicating him a sharp glare.

Peggy clapped her hands, startling her mother once again. “Focus, sis, focus!”

“Do you want help?” proposed Theodosia, with a tender smile.

Angelica looked angrily at her, nonetheless. “No. I can do this on my own!”

And, after saying that, the match finally lit. Everyone cheered, and Eliza got up, sniffing.
Alexander tapped her on the arm, trying to cheer her up, but his wife simply kept her glare on the match with a dangerous unreadable expression, and Alexander decided to focus on the little flame.

Angelica laughed with superiority as she took the flame closer to the two candles with the form of a three and a one, together on the top of the cake. She waited a few seconds for the three to ignite, but once she got the burning match away from it, she saw the candle was intact. She looked at the match with a cocked eyebrow, and repeated the action. Again, nothing. She burnt her fingers when the match became too short.

“Now, can I help you?” asked Theodosia, starting to be impatient.

“No, no, I’ve got the trick” said Angelica, taking another match out.

“What trick? It’s a match” commented Church, under his breath.

They sighed relieved when they saw this time Angelica could ignite the flame in her first try. Smiling, she put the match close to the three again, waiting. Again, nothing happened. Angelica moved her tongue and pressed the match tighter to the candle, while Alexander simply leaned back, arms crossed, lost in thought. He only came back to the real world when Angelica hissed, her fingers burnt once again.

“If Mom doesn’t burn her fingers thrice, at least, on a birthday, it’s not a proper birthday party” joked Pip.

“Angel, please, let me do it” begged Church.

“No!” she complained. She ignited another match and looked at it with rage. “Now, it’s personal”

“Fuck…” he complained, burying his face in his hands.

Philip Sr. moved his toothpick nervously, being watched by a disgusted Catherine, who tried to focus her attention in anything else. Alexander rested his chin on the palm of his hand, seeing with tedium how Angelica had burnt her fingers once again. His sister-in-law ignited another one, her face turning a dangerous tone of red, while Church and Pip exchanged nervous glares. Aaron was matching their disquietude, and whispered a few things with his wife before talking out loud, right after Angelica had once again burnt her fingers.

“Try to match the one first” he proposed.

“Why?” she sharply asked, igniting another match.

Aaron shrugged. “I don’t know… As the one goes before the three, maybe it needs an example to follow?”
Alexander looked at him with eyes half-closed. “He hasn’t talked since we sat down, and now he does it just to say that stupid shit” he complained, looking at everybody.

Aaron frowned at him. “You know? I was feeling bad for not having a present for you, but now I’m glad. Screw you” he said, flipping his workmate off, and making his daughter laugh because of it.

Laurens looked at both of them with a frown. “Gee, is this one of the months when you can’t stand each other?” he asked, with tedium.

“Yes” everyone, but Alexander, Aaron, Eliza and Alf answered.

Alex looked at his wife. “This is why I don’t like having people over”

“Boriiiiiiing” complained Peggy.

“It’s not my fault!” shouted Angelica, burning her fingers once more. “This woman bought deficient candles!”

“The candles are perfect, but as you don’t let me light it…”

“You are not going to get near fire, Eliza” said Alexander, severe.

“Huh, I don’t like saying this because I don’t like him” said Philip Sr.

“Then, don’t say anything” pleaded Catherine.

“But at least one of my daughters married a true man”

“Should I feel insulted?” asked Church, to his wife.

“Nah” said Angelica, looking angrily at the cake.

“Okay”

“That’s what I’m talking about” complained Philip Sr.

“I thought Mommy had the final word?” asked Angie, confused.

“She does” agreed Philip. “Otherwise, we wouldn’t be having this party”

“Even the child knows…” said Alexander, sadly.

Eliza threw daggers at him. “You know? This is the last time I do something for you”

“You made the same promise the day you made me carpool with Aaron, I don’t believe you anymore…”

“Uuuugh” Peggy’s groan silenced her sister’s response. “I’m gonna eat my hand!”

“Let me light it!” said Eliza.

“No, I can do it!” said Angelica, taking out another match.

“One burns the whole house down, and the another one can’t even light a single match” commented Hercules. “Peggy, are you the happy middle?”

“Don’t know…” said the youngest, shrugging.
Philip Sr. laughed with cruelty. “What’s she’s gonna be? She can’t eat meat on her own…”

“It had too much gristle!”

“Gee, Peggy, you’re 29” said Laurens.
Peggy looked daggers at him. “And you’re dating a male prostitute, and I don’t say anything”

“… … … …”

Everyone looked at Peggy, then at Alf, who was looking around like a scared animal. Then, at Peggy again, who was holding glares with Laurens, who, in turn, was looking back, perplexed. Laf looked at them both and he frowned at the youngest Schuyler sister.

“Peggy, how you say it…? Fuck you to hell and back” he spat, clenching his fists.

Laurens turned immediately at him. “Wait, was it true?”

“Wait, you didn’t believe me?” asked Peggy, offended.

“I thought you said stupid things like that because you’re on your period!”

“Gross, we’re eating” complained Philip Sr.

“It’s a natural process we can’t control, Dad” replied Angelica, folding her arms.

“Can’t you stop with your feminist propaganda?” complained the man, eyeing severely at his daughter.

“It’s not propaganda, it’s culture, you caveman” spat Lu.

“I’m not on my period!” shouted Peggy.

“Then why have you been such a nag lately?” asked Laurens.

“Gosh, Laurens, I never pictured you as a sexist guy” said Aaron.

“I am not, but I dated a woman back in college, and she was scary at that time of the month” he shrugged.

“That wasn’t the period or anything like that, John. That was because Martha was a psycho” commented Alexander.

“Yeah, that as well”

“Why were you dating a woman when you’re queer?” asked Catherine.

“Homosexual, mom” Angelica corrected her, gentler.

“That”

“Because his father is homophobic, and he had to pretend to be someone he was not” explained Alexander.
“Poor woman” commented Alf.

“Wait, the gigolo now is a moralist” commented Philip Sr., rolling his eyes.

“Prostitute is the right term” corrected Alf.

“The children are in here, you know…?” said Catherine on the quiet.

“With internet, nothing surprises us anymore, grandma” explained Pip.

“What a generation” said Philip Sr., outraged.

“Better than yours, always criticising someone who is different from you” said Angelica, arms in akimbo.

“Honey, please, let it go” pleaded Church.

Alexander alternated his glare between father and daughter. “Gosh, this is just like being in Jefferson’s house, actually” he commented, impressed.

“When were you going to tell me?” asked Laurens, red from fury, facing Alf.

Alf looked at him for a moment. “Never” he replied, sincerely.

“Excuse me??”

“I’d have told you, but Lafayette told me…”

“Whoa, whoa!” the Frenchman stopped him just there. “Don’t pin the blame on me! You were going to lift his self-esteem, and then you were going to disappear. It was Laurens’ fault for falling for you!” he accused.

“Oh! Excuse me for having feelings!” said Laurens, a hand over his chest.

Hercules scoffed. “You’re asking too much to a cheater”

Lafayette was in shock at first, then turned to his boyfriend. “Now, what on Earth are you talking about?”

Hercules looked at him enraged. He hit the table, startling Catherine. “I don’t know, you tell me!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“You’ve been cheating on me with Peggy!” he accused, pointing at the youngest Schuyler.

“What?” asked Peggy, eyes wide.

“What!” howled her father.

“I am not!” Laf and Peggy said at the same time.

“Gross” commented the girl.

“Thank you so much!” said Lafayette sarcastically.

“This is what happens for dating a pansexual!” complained Hercules, gritting his teeth in fury.

“Everybody warned me!”
“How dare you!” exclaimed Lafayette, offended.

“What is a pansexual?” asked Church, tilting his head to the side.

“He might be attracted to pans, or something” said Catherine, scratching the back of her head, confused.

Philip Sr. groaned in disgust. “They don’t know what to shove up their asses anymore”

“Gosh, I am so ashamed of being part of this family” said Angelica, sitting on her chair again, with her head in her hands.

Lafayette looked at the Schuyler father with a frown. “It means that I fall in love with souls, not with genitalia”

“Oh, what a nice quote. I am gonna make it my own” said Henry, nodding with a smile.

Lafayette then turned to Hercules. “And I haven’t cheated on you” he proclaimed.

“You cheated on Adrienne, and you eventually did the same to me!” accused Hercules, blind by fury.

“I never cheated on her, I broke up with her and told her the truth! I’d never hurt someone I love!” shouted Lafayette, getting up from his seat in pure anger.

“Well, you hurt me, you prick!” Hercules shouted back, also getting up. “And you even had the balls not to hide it! All those calls, all those meetings, all those excuses!”

“What excuses!? Peggy is my friend! Just because you’re an insecure means I’ve got to stop being friends with people!”

“I don’t mind about your friendships, you’re an adult, but I don’t forgive you for lying to me!”

“I haven’t lied!”

“Oh, you haven’t?”

“No! You know I despise the lie!”

“Alright, then” Hercules turned his head to look at the girl. “Peggy, why don’t you wish Alexander for a happy birthday in French?”

“Oh, merde…” complained Lafayette, under his breath.

“Eh?” asked Peggy. She looked desperate to Lafayette, who looked at her with an apologetic look. “Em… Nah, better let it for the next year, now there’s a lot going on…”

“No, no” Hercules shook his head. “As long as Lafayette, patron saint of Sincerity, told me, you’ve been practising”

“… We… Yeah” she lied.

“Then, go ahead, wish him a good fucking birthday”
Peggy felt everybody’s eyes on her, except from Laurens, who had his head between his hands, totally crest-fallen, and she swallowed, nervous. Alexander dedicated her a curious look. She cleared her throat.

“Em… Aléxandré” she began, faking a bad French accent. “Em… Uh… Felichita anniversarié”

“… … … …”

“Thank you, Pegs” nodded Alexander, with a small and forced smile.

Philip Sr. dedicated him a hard glare. “What ‘thank you’? That wasn’t French, I doubt that exist at all”

“It sounded like Italian mix up with Gregorian chants” commented Theodosia.

“… Lafayette is bad at teaching…” she excused herself.

“Join that to how bad he’s at being a friend, then” spat Laurens.

“And at being a boyfriend” added Hercules.

Lafayette was red as a tomato by then. “Alright, that is enough” he shouted. “Laurens, you’ve been sad and down for months! I was trying to make you happy because when you’re sad and down, you embitter everyone around you!”

Laurens gasped exaggeratedly. “How dare you?! But how fucking dare you?!”

“I dare because it’s true!”

Alexander nodded. “Yeah, Jackie, you’re quite dependant. That’s one of the reasons I would’ve broken up with you, no matter if you ended up cheating on me or not”

“You cheated on him?” asked Alf. “That’s not nice, John…”

“They dropped something in my drink!” he defended himself.

“In which one of the 21 you drank that night?” Alexander, Laf and Hercules asked at the same time, with boredom.

Laurens looked at the three with hatred. “I don’t HAVE TO STAND THIS DISRESPECT!” he ended up shouting. “John Laurens is leaving!” he declared, heading to the door.

“Try not to come back” said Hercules, crossing his arms.

“Come on, Johnnie” tried to say Alf.

“Shut up, you liar! We’re through!” said Laurens, at the top of his lungs.

“We never had something in the first place” Alf reminded him, calmly.

“They don’t stop” Laurens shook his head with vehemence. “None of them ever stop stabbing me and throwing salt to my wounds! YOU ALL GO TO HELL!” he cursed, and then spit ten on the ground right before turning around and opening the front door.
“Why does he split now…?” asked Alf, in bewilderment.

“John, get off the stage already!” shouted Alexander, with a frown, receiving the door slamming shut as a response. “He’s such a drama queen…”

Lafayette sighed and faced his boyfriend. “Hercules, please, you’re getting all this wrong” he promised.

“The base for a true and healthy relationship is sincerity, Laf” said Alf, gently.

Hercules threw daggers at him. “Look, you’re inflating my bullocks* already!”

“The children are in here!” said Catherine again, horrified.

“Again, grandma, we’re immune to this” said Philip this time, shrugging.

Meanwhile Catherine looked at her grandchildren with eyes wide open, Hercules had grasped Alf by the shirt and was dragging him out of the living room.

“Get the hell out of here! Get lost! Go eat your cat and then go back to Melmac*, you asshole!” he screamed, opening the front door with vehemence.

“Herc, control your Hulk side!” said Alexander. “Gosh, what a shitty birthday…”

“You haven’t paid me for today yet!” complained Alf, receiving the door closing in his face as a response.

Hercules made his way back to the living room and pointed at Laf. “Now, you, out of the fucking house!”

“What?”

“Not this one. Ours” he clarified.

“Hercules, I am not cheating, I swear” said Laf, desperate.

“It’s true” said Peggy. “He’s just helping me with one thing. They are not French classes, but…”

“With what then?” asked Hercules, arms in akimbo.

Lafayette looked at Alexander and then at the girl’s parents. “Listen, Herc, I can’t tell you now. Just wait until we’re home and…”

“So you can have enough time to come up with a believable lie?” interrupted Hercules. “No, thank you”

“Herc, you have to trust me on this…” tried to plead Lafayette.

“Sweet Lord, what have I done wrong?” wondered Philip Sr. aloud, saddened. “The oldest with a pommy; the middle one with a Caribbean and now the youngest with a Frenchman… It’s like the beginning of a bad joke”
“I just love your visits so much” commented Alexander sarcastically, and Eliza pushed him slightly to tell him to be quiet.

“He’s not cheating, alright? I’m pregnant” blurted out Peggy.

“Peggy!” screamed Lafayette.

“What?!” howled Philip Sr.

“You got her pregnant?!” shouted Hercules.

“No, of course not!” said Lafayette rapidly.

“I wasn’t seeing that coming” commented Henry, in awe.

“I did” said Alexander, shrugging.

“You did? You knew?” asked Eliza.

“The vomit, the mood changes, the craving… I’ve got three children” he said.

“I had them, actually” said Eliza, eyes half-closed.

“And who stood you and went to buy an ice cream at three in the morning after a two hours drive?” asked Alexander rhetorically, looking at his wife with a frown. “No further questions, your honor”

“Who the hell was it?!” inquired Philip Sr., punching the table.

“Yeah, who did you fool?” added Angelica, with a mocking smile.

Peggy dedicated her a hard glare. “Nobody, they wanted this”

“They?” repeated Catherine, completely lost.

“Surrogate mother for a French family, maybe?” guessed Alexander.

“Yes” nodded Peggy.

“Heh, I’m on fire today. Someone take me to a contest on the TV or something” said Alexander with a cocky smile.

“Honey, what were you thinking?” asked Catherine, horrified. “We must take you to the doctor, so they can see you”

“I take her” said Lafayette. “She’s looked after”

“Wait, is that why you’re always with her?” asked Hercules, now blushing from embarrassment.

“Yes” said Lafayette, tired. “We didn’t want to tell any of you until things calmed down a little. Especially to her parents”

“But what about all those texts you sent Adrienne?” he asked.

“How do you…?”

“Laurens”
“Of course” Lafayette rolled his eyes. “She asked me if I knew someone who would do it for her friends, because adoption is hell and the guys wanted to have their own child and trusted her enough. And Peggy offered herself once I mentioned it to her one morning because she saw me worried over something”

“I wanted to do something with my life, and if I can help somebody…” added Peggy.

“I’m gonna pay for this, right?” asked Hercules, after a pause.

“For embarrassing me in front of all these people?” asked Lafayette, rhetorically. “Hell, yes”

“Perfect… I’m gonna kill Laurens” he said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Let me know when you’re gonna do it, so I can help you”

“What do you mean ‘the guys’?” asked Philip Sr., suspicious. “You’re going to sell your child to two homos?” he inquired, disgusted.

“I am not going to sell anyone. People can’t be sold” retorted Peggy, folding her arms upon her chest. “I’m gonna help them have their child, selflessly”

“Leave her alone, Dad” Angelica chimed in, hugging her sister by the shoulder. “She’s being very brave. I support you, sis”

“Me too” said Lu. “If you ever need something…”

“Alright, everybody, just shut up!” shouted Philip Sr., getting up abruptly from his chair. “What do you think, young lady?! Are you crazy?! This is not the education I’ve been giving you!”

“What? Helping two people who can’t have children on their own?” she asked, rhetorically.

“Yes! You’re gonna solve that problem immediately!” he ordered, pointing at her belly.

Peggy frowned. “This child is not a problem that needs to be solved!” she screamed back, feeling the beginning of tears threatening to fall down.

“That child is an abomination!”

“Philip!” said Catherine, horrified.

“If that is so bad” began to question Philip, with a raised eyebrow. “why does Jesus have two Dads and one Mom?”

The silence reigned for a few moments, in which everyone looked at each other, speechless.

“What are you talking about, Philip?” asked Catherine.

“As long as I know, Jesus had two Dads: God, and Joseph, who raised him. And he loved them both the same, and they loved him, and raised him, and Jesus was never confused or traumatized by it. In fact, he was one of the most respectful men in his time period. He helped Magdalene and a lot of women, though his followers didn’t at first”
The adults looked at each other once again. Theo pushed her friend slightly on the arm, smiling with pride, and Angie hugged her brother, saying he was very smart. Even Pip admitted it, by nodding while looking at his smiling parents.

“Kid, you truly are your father’s son” commented Aaron.

“I know, that’s why I call him ‘Dad’, duh” replied Philip, confused.

“I’ve never felt so proud, children” said Alexander.

“Who would’ve thought? They’re turning out fine” added Eliza, with a warm smile.

“I don’t mind, you’re too little to understand” Philip Sr. declared, shaking his head. Looking harshly at his daughter, he added. “I forbid you to keep going with this!”

“It’s my body and my decision!”

“Tell him, sis!” cheered Angelica.

“Your body and your decisions and your whole organism live under my roof and they are gonna follow my rules!” he reminded her.

Alexander frowned at his father-in-law. “She doesn’t need to anymore, ‘cause she’s gonna live with me!” he said without a second thought.

“Excuse me?!”

“Really?” asked Peggy and Eliza at the same time.

“Yes” spat Alexander, challenging Philip Sr. with the glare. He softened it a bit when he looked at Eliza. “Of course, if you agree, it’s our house”

Eliza smiled softly at him. “Of course!” she said, moved. “I knew I chose right!”

Philip Sr. looked daggers at his son-in-law. “I keep saying you should’ve married Elijah, the architect”

Alexander groaned. “It took you long enough to bring up Elijah, the architect!”

Philip Sr. turned to look at his youngest daughter. “You’re not getting away with this so easily, young lady! We’ll talk about this when we’re home!”

“We are not! Because I’m not going back home, I’m gonna live in here if Alex and Eliza let me!” shouted Peggy. “I’ll only go back to collect my things!”

“Put a foot inside my house, and I’ll lock you up” threatened Philip Sr.

“You will not” said Lu, with a frown. “That’s illegal, Philip, don’t do stupid things… Or do them, I wouldn’t complain about getting you in jail” she added, with a smirk.

“Honey, please, don’t make things worse” pleaded Catherine, both hands clasped.
Philip Sr. groaned, feeling powerless. His wife looked at him with pleading eyes, biting her bottom lip anxiously. Angelica frowned at him, hugging her youngest sister closer, and Eliza put a hand on Alex’s shoulder, which grip became tighter once her father’s eyes fell on her husband, burning with fury.

“This is all your fault. You had to come with this witch’s influence to destroy my family, right?” he said darkly, approaching the sitting man.

“Ssssh, eeeeh” said Lu, getting up slowly and putting a protecting hand on Alexander’s other shoulder. “You better back down, Flintstone, or I swear to God I’m not gonna be held responsible for my actions”

“Sit down, Dad, please” said Eliza, hesitant.

Alexander rolled his eyes, and living up to his reputation of not knowing when to bite his tongue, he got up, making Lu and Eliza’s hands to fell on their sides, a frown adorning the women’s features.

“Look, sir, I am not going to apologise for teaching your daughters to stand up for themselves instead of letting a man or anyone else tell them what they’ve got to do or think. You’ve got three daughters who are smart and kind, and you’re crazy if you think I’m going to let any of these three wonderful women waste their potential, which is quite big, by the way”

Lu hugged Eliza by the shoulder when she saw her getting emotional. A sniff called everybody’s attention, and they all looked at George, who was wiping some tears.

“I was thinking he was going to swear or going ballistic” he admitted.

“Me too” Aaron nodded.

“I’ve got my moments…” commented Alexander.

“Yeah, like when you approach my daughter when you learn her surname” spat Philip Sr. with venom. “That really was one of your best moments, right?”

Alexander frowned offended. “How many times will I have to say I didn’t marry Betsey for her money?”

“Exactly” Eliza nodded with vehemence.

“I mean, I did approach her because of that, but then I fell in love with her for real” he added.

“Exac… Wait, what?” said Eliza, getting rigid.

“And here it is: the slip-up” commented Aaron.
“You only wanted to talk to me because I came from a rich family?” asked Eliza, turning her husband around to face him.

“But then I fell in love with you and your good traits” repeated Alexander, slowly, as if talking with a little child.

“Yes, you are so in love that you forgot to ask her for separation of ownership” mocked Philip Sr. Alexander clicked his tongue. “No, I asked her, and she got angry at me and refused to talk to me until I forgot about the idea” he blurted out.

“She did what?!”

“Alexander!” screamed Eliza.

“What? I’m sick of being seen as a materialistic” complained Alexander. He turned to his father-in-law, once again. “Mr. Schuyler, your daughter lives in Wonderland and thinks that the separation of ownership is not, and I quote, romantic”

“But it is not!” argued Eliza.

“She just learned that from your part of the family” said Catherine, rolling her eyes. “All the afternoons talking with that sister of yours, filling her head with fairy tales and princes charming”

Philip Sr. frowned. “Stop saying everything is my sister’s fault! If you had done your job of being a mother fine, I wouldn’t have to let Elizabeth with her”

“I couldn’t do my ‘job of being a mother fine’ because you let me alone with three little girls!” complained Catherine, getting up her seat. “And if Elizabeth wasn’t influenced by your sister’s fairy tales, then she surely got her princess-who-falls-in-love-easily gene from her!”

“How is that possible when she’s adopted?” asked Philip Sr., mockingly.

“What?!” exclaimed Eliza, while her sisters gasped.

“PHILIP!” shouted Catherine, horrified for the fifth time that night.

“Sweet Jesus…” said Aaron, perplexed, while he made the sign of the Cross.

“Am I adopted?” asked Eliza, feeling her legs trembling beneath her.

“Oh, God…” said Philip Sr., pinching the bridge of his nose. “Yes, yes, you are, okay? A rebel nun got pregnant by a missionary and she wanted to get rid of the baby, and so she sold you to us”

“Jesus Christ, so many bad people in the world” commented Theodosia, aghast.

Eliza looked at her father, perplexed. Alexander looked worriedly at her, and tried to put a hand on her shoulder, to try to give her some kind of comfort, but Eliza let out a sob and the ran out of the room, sobbing.

“Betsey!” called Alex, concerned.
Peggy looked at the direction where they all heard a door being slammed shut with a cocked eyebrow and then faced her father. “You bust my chops about how I’m helping two persons, when you illegally adopted my sister?” she condemned, fists clenched.

“Hey, she didn’t want her and I never saw her complaining about her way of living” Philip Sr. defended himself. “Besides, it was her fault” he added, pointing at Angelica.

“What? How is this my fault?!” complained the oldest.

“You wouldn’t stop calling for attention. We let you alone with other children and the nicest thing you’d do would be biting them!”

“Ah, so you take after her?” asked Angie, looking at her brother.

Philip moved uncomfortably in his seat. “It was just once! And it was to Eacker, because he made fun of Theo!”

The little girl blushed slightly and peeked the boy in the cheek, thanking him again in a sheepish manner. Her parents looked at that and Theodosia giggled, elbowing her husband.

“Hehe, all that crap about you wanting to get rid of Alexander, and something tells me you’re going to end up being fathers-in-law of the other’s child”

Aaron stared straight at her. “Theodosia, I’ve told you I don’t like those jokes…”

Angelica’s scream made their conversation impossible to eavesdrop. “You’re not going to blame your amorality on me!”

“Angelica, honey, it’s time you know: you were a fucking scary child”

“She’s a fucking scary woman now… Not a surprise there” commented Lafayette.

“Do you know how many times the day care called us to tell us you had tried to stab a child with a pencil you just sharpened?” kept telling Philip Sr. “Everybody kept telling us you needed a sibling so you’d learn to how fucking share, but your mother, over here, refused to get pregnant again!” And he pointed at his wife accusatory.

“Because the first time was a fucking hell!” shouted Catherine, exploding enraged and letting go of the chains of her shyness. “You left me alone to go play football with your workmates every afternoon! And I had to go to the doctor, to vomit, to cry and to put up with my craving all alone! Never in our whole marriage I saw you getting me yoghurt, or cake, or ice cream when I was craving some! I had to do it myself, you selfish!” she accused, ending up crying.

“Wait” said Peggy, all of a sudden. “If you didn’t want to have more children, why am I here?”

“That was all your father doing”

“Your father doing?” echoed Philip Sr., scowling. “Wouldn’t you mean ‘the champagne which I celebrated that finally I could let my baby daughters with my parents’ fault’?!” he screamed.

“I was a born because you were drunk?!” inquired Peggy.
“No, you were only consummated” corrected Henry.

“Honey, shut up” said Lu, seeing the scene in awe along with Alexander.

“And that’s why prophylactics were invented” said Angelica, rubbing her temples.

“Angelica, our son is in here!” said Church, frowning.

“Like if he is gonna know what we’re talking about. He barely can write his name correctly”

“It was just one time!” Pip said, blushing at her cousins’ laughter.

“Please, we’re talking about me!” said Peggy, enraged. “Stop making everything about you!”

Catherine burst into tears, killing whatever retort Angelica had prepared for her sister. “Your father said he had control!” she accused once again, looking infuriated at her husband.

“Yes, I said it, I said it in the missionary position! You were the one who turned over!”

“Gosh, I could’ve died without knowing that!” said Peggy horrified, clapping her ears.

“You wanted to have answers, well now you have them!” shouted Philip Sr.

“Stop screaming at her, she’s very sensitive!” said Catherine, starting to be dishevelled, her bun falling apart slowly.

“You stop pampering her! That’s why she’s still living in our fucking house!”

“You know pretty damned well why I have to treat her like this!”

“Oh, there we go again!” complained Philip Sr., burying his face in his hands. “I already apologised for that!”

“Apoloising don’t change it!” shouted Catherine at the top of her lungs.

“Alright! She almost drowned in her bathtub while I was the one bathing her when she was barely a few months old, but that doesn’t give her the right to be a complete and total idiot for the rest of her fucking life!”

“I almost what?!” screamed Peggy, her whole body shaking.

“You slipped down my hand while I was trying to clean your hair with shampoo! You just couldn’t be still for one fucking minute!”

“For the love of Christ…” commented Lafayette, sharing a shock expression with his boyfriend.

Peggy took a few shaky breaths and then sit down again, passing a hand through her hair while she shook her head in denial. Philip Sr. looked at her with his nose wrinkled and then looked at his oldest daughter, who was watching Peggy with a sympathetic look.

“And you, patron of contraceptives!” he said, pointing at Angelica. “For your information, there was nothing I’d have wanted more than having a prophylactic 32 years ago! Then, we wouldn’t be
having this fucking scene! I wouldn’t be having to stand to have something to do with these two assholes!” he said pointing at his two sons-in-law.

“Oh, right, like you still have the right to be on my case after all the shit we just heard!” screamed back Alexander.

“That much is true” nodded Aaron. “He ended up being the most normal around here”

“And that’s saying something” added Theodosia.

“And you just made his birthday!” condemned Martha, frowning.

“Now I understand why he never wants to leave the office” commented George. “I wouldn’t want to come here either…”

Catherine looked daggers at her husband. “Well, you know what?” she said.

“What?” he challenged.

Catherine then did something she never thought she would do for real. She walked a few steps closer to her husband, looked him in the eye, grabbed the toothpick the man still had inside his mouth, took it out with vehemence, gaining a shock look from him, and then threw the little and thick object in the air, not bothering in looking at it or where it fell. Their two daughters gasped in surprise.

“Woman, what do you think you’re doing?!” exclaimed Philip Sr., his glare darkening.

“I’ve been standing you and your fucking toothpicks our whole marriage, I am sick of being married to a fucking cowboy with airs” she snapped.

“What the hell did just happen?” asked Henry.

“You’re all fucking crazy in here” said Alexander, rubbing his temples in annoyance. “That is enough everybody. That’s why I hate parties or meetings with the relatives. One way or another someone finds the perfect moment to start throwing past shit in somebody else’s face. Betsey has made a great effort and was very excited for this. I don’t understand why, but she was. And now the poor woman is crying her eyes out because you are all a bunch of selfish brats who refuse to grow up” He sighed. “I am going to make Betsey come back here; she is going to light the candles, and we will have the rest of the fucking night in peace. Alright? No more prostitutes, no more lies, no more suspects of cheating, no more talk about inheritances, no more pregnancies, no more devilish children, no more almost drowned babies, alright?”

They all looked at each other, and nodded slowly.

“Good. Now, if some of you has some more bullshit to share, better talk now or thereafter forever”
Everyone looked at each other, shrugging. John Church was the only one with his glare lowered. Eventually, he cleared his throat and raised his hand, surprising even Alexander slightly.

“Everyone looked at each other, shrugging. John Church was the only one with his glare lowered. Eventually, he cleared his throat and raised his hand, surprising even Alexander slightly.

“Yes, John?” he asked, hesitant.

“Now that we all are coming clear… I’d want to share something that’s been haunting me for a long time” he admitted.

“John, what are you talking about?” asked Angelica, worried.

He sighed. “You know, back at the hospital where Angel gave birth to Pip, they had a TV in the waiting room, and that kid was born just the same day they were passing the final episode of one soap opera I like a lot. And, well, Angel had a few complications after the birth, because the epidural had no effect over her until after the labour, as she was too nervous. And, well, there was nobody else in the hospital with us because nobody was expecting Pip to be born that day. And, well… I was left alone and there was only Pip in that room where they put all the new born babies, and I turned around just a sec to watch the final minutes of the episode, and when I turned around there was another baby, just beside mine, and back then they didn’t quite do well with writing the names clearly for us to understand…”

“Where the fuck do you think you’re going with a suitcase?”

John’s story was abruptly interrupted by Alexander, when he saw his wife walking back in the living room, now dressed up with a coat and a suitcase in her hands. Eliza looked at all her relatives and friends, who were watching her with wide eyes.

“I am going to find my real family” she answered, resentful.

“Excuse me?” muttered Alexander, feeling his blood turning cold.

“Okay, then, just interrupt my story…” complained Church, folding his arms in offense.

“Betsey, are you going to abandon me like my father did to my mother 21 years ago?” he asked, his blood turning hotter as he felt the anger growing up.

“No” she shook her head rapidly. “Your father abandoned your mother forever with two children. I am temporally leaving you with three children”

“You just made it better” commented Theodosia sarcastically.

Eliza went to her husband and peeked him on the cheek. “Just do me one favour?”

“No” replied Alexander sharply.

“Change the children’s name for me?” she pleaded, ignoring his response.

“What? Why?”

“I don’t want my beloved children to be called after those assholes with airs!” she screamed, pointing at her family with fury.
“What did I do now?!?” complained Angelica.

“I am not going to rename anyone, Betsey, they are not dogs!” said Alexander, shocked.

“Alright, I’ll do it, then” she shrugged. “You’ll be called Daisy, and you’ll be called Timothy” she declared, pointing at her children.

“I don’t like that name” complained Philip.

“Shut up, Timothy” she said sharply.

“Hold on, hold on” said Pip, looking angrily at his parents. “Who are my parents then???”

“I pray every night for them to be us” said Church.

Eliza looked boringly at her brother-in-law. “Honey, with the crazy night your wife had during that party she made back at her last year of college, it is a miracle Pip talks instead of barking” she blurted out.

“Eliza!” said Angelica, blushing.

“Goodbye, Manuel” she added, ignoring her sister, peeking Alexander on the cheek once again before heading to the door.

“Why are you changing my name as well? I did nothing!” he complained.

“Because you’ve always had a ‘Manuel’ face” she answered.

“I don’t give two fucks!” shouted Alexander, following her and seeing her opening the door. “Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, if you dare to put a foot outside this house, don’t you ever come…!”

Bang.

“… Did she just close the door in the middle of my sentence?” he asked, looking at everybody on the table.

“Talk less, Alexander, I’ve told you” said Aaron. “That way you’d be interrupted quite less”

Alexander looked at him in annoyance. “Aaron, there are times, when I really want to shoot you” he declared.

“I am saying all this because I love/hate you!” he defended himself.

“They are all crazy in here” commented Henry to his wife. Smiling, he added. “We must come here more often!”

“You can bet your lazy ass we will” promised Lu.

Alexander looked daggers at his political family. “I hope every and each of you are finally happy. Now, my wife is going from Apennines to the Andes* just because you couldn’t shut the hell up and cared more about the money than about your daughter’s feelings!” he condemned his parents-in-law.
“Aw, I love that cartoon” commented Aaron, nostalgic.

“I don’t fucking care I you liked the cartoon or not, Aaron!” Alexander exploded.

“I loved it too” said Lafayette, gaining another dirty look from his friend. “Marco and his little friend Amadeo”

“You should buy Betsey a pet monkey” advised Aaron, looking seriously at Alexander.

“I am not going to buy my wife a pet monkey” said the CFO, enraged.

Aaron shrugged. “Suit yourself. You may not think so, but the pet monkey keeps your company while you’re looking for someone”

“And what do you know? Have you travelled from ocean to ocean in search of someone or what?” asked Theodosia.

“Excuse me, but I had my little adventures when I was child” retorted Aaron.

“What adventures?” inquired Theodosia, with eyes half-closed. “The most exciting adventure you ever lived was when you got lost in Ikea and the shelf Svällna fell on your head”

The front door was opened and closed then, calling the attention of everybody and making the room fell silent. Eliza made her way back to the living room, as if she hadn’t left at all, let the suitcase in a corner and took a seat beside her husband.

“So, are we going to blow the candles or what?” she asked.

“Or what?” echoed Alexander, clenching his teeth. “Girl, didn’t you want to leave?!”

Eliza made a face. “It is too much work. I’ll try to look for them on the Internet, which was invented for something”

“This is surrealist…” said Lu, in awe.

“Huh, and this is nothing in comparison of what could’ve been if this had been a meeting” said George, scaring the woman a bit.

“Come to visit us on a Monday, when we’re rested from the weekend, and you’ll flip out” promised Hercules.

Eliza took out a lighter from her pocket, gaining a suspicious look from her husband, and she ignited the candles. First the one, and then the three. In only one shot. Angelica watched with fury.

“Oh, come on!”

“Told you she has a gift” commented Peggy.
“It just turned out fine after she did as Aaron suggested…” commented Lafayette, impressed.

Aaron showed him a cocky smile while he waggled his eyebrows. Everybody began to sit down, seeing Alexander dedicating his wife a deathly glare. Eliza smiled slightly and moved the cake closer to him.

“Do we sing?” asked Aaron.

Alexander moved the tongue inside his mouth, annoyed. “Aaron, what’s wrong with you today? Were you reading the obituaries before coming and you felt jealous of the people who were there?”

“What does that have to do with what I just said?” he asked, confused.

“I am just warning you that if you keep saying stupid things, I’m gonna stab you in the jugular with the butter knife”

“Jesus, Alexander, calm down” said Eliza.

“You and I are going to talk later” he declared.

“Buf, another one of their one-week long fights” complained Philip.

His grandfather shook his head in disapproval. “You two have the children traumatized”

“Like you’re one to talk” spat Angelica.

Before Philip Sr. could have time to argue back, the door was opened again, and Laurens made his way back into the living room, with a frown of offense and arms in akimbo.

“What? Nobody was going to come after me or what? I’ve been ten minutes waiting outside” he complained.

Lafayette rolled his eyes. “John, sit down and stop being so whimsical”

“I’m not talking to you, liar. You two are dead for me” he declared, pointing at Hercules and Lafayette.

Hercules sighed with relief. “Finally. Maybe now he’d leave us alone”

“Laurens, take a seat, I want to eat the cake already!” complained Peggy, ignoring how red the man’s face was turning.

Laurens threw a few curses under his breath, while he took the chair that was by Lafayette’s side, dragged it to Alex’s right, and sat there, arms crossed. The Frenchman rolled his eyes. Eliza shrugged and smiled at her husband.
“Make a wish, my love. Oh, wait, let me recor…”

Alexander looked at her, still with both irises burning with fury, and blew the candles rapidly. “There. Wish made. Eat” he said, pushing the cake to the centre of the table.

“Thank goodness!” said Peggy.

She took the whole cake and took one piece with her bare hands, shocking everyone around her. Peggy took one bite and began to eat, moaning in satisfaction. Slowly, her features wrinkled due to disgust.

“What the heck is this?” she asked, looking at Eliza.

“Chocolate and coffee” she replied.

Peggy looked at her sister and brother-in-law. She threw the piece and got up from her seat.

“Making me suffer for that crap. I’m going to McDonald’s” she said, heading to the door.

Philip Sr. looked at everyone in the table, “See how her attitude is enough reason to hate her?”

“You won’t believe me” muttered Alexander, calling Eliza’s attention. “But this is still not the worst or craziest birthday I ever lived”

Eliza sealed her lips, not wanting to know what he meant by that.

It had been over a week by the time Peggy had brought all her possessions to their house. Alexander was still a bit cold with Eliza, but she had been too busy helping her sister to even notice or care. She knew he would come back to her eventually. He always did. In all honesty – and though it put Alexander on his nerves – Eliza was right: he had already forgiven her, and he never was truly angry at her. He didn’t know what he would have done in her shoes. But Eliza let him spend a few nights in the office and didn’t push anything when he was angry, and so he decided to stretch on for a little bit longer.

Peggy’s presence was better than he initially thought. The girl had always been quiet and
very well-mannered, and she had good hand with children. It helped a lot that their children loved their aunt with all their might. She skipped work some days, and Washington didn’t mind. Well, actually, he didn’t notice, and neither he or Peggy would say a thing. And those days she took care of little John. Philip Sr. hadn’t talked to them in all that time and didn’t do anything in any of all the trips Peggy made from the Schuyler’s house to theirs.

So, in summary, everything was going great for Alexander and Eliza. Especially for Alexander.

Well, there was that thing with Laurens, who had been sleeping in the office, making use of Peggy’s bed, because he refused to live with Hercules and Lafayette after lying to him. Alexander wasn’t going to get in between that. As long as Laurens talked to him, he didn’t want to know anything about that whole craziness.

And, now that he thought about it, he still had that other thing that had been bothering him lately. He would have to talk to Eliza about it, though she wouldn’t deny and would support him, but still…

“Good morning, Alex” said Peggy, as soon as she entered the kitchen, yawning, interrupting his thoughts.

“Morning, Pegs” he replied, with a smile, as he served himself some just made coffee.

Peggy was still on her yellow gown and with her short curly hair dishevelled. Today she wasn’t going to work either. Alexander made his way to the table to read the newspaper and drink his coffee in peace. He heard Peggy muttering something while she opened all the cupboards and drawers. She finally went to the fridge.

“Alexander, where are the Oreos?”

“Om, I think the kids took the last sleeve to the day care yesterday”

Peggy looked at the back of his head, without him noticing, with the upper lip curved in a disgusted manner. Eventually, she closed the fridge with enough force to make the man jump on his seat.

“And now, what do I eat?” she demanded.

Alexander matched her annoyance in less than a second. “Anything else. The cupboards are full of food”
“But I wanted Oreos”

“Oh, yeah? Then, get dressed and go shopping” he spat, returning his glare to the newspaper.

Peggy stared straight at him. “Alexander, do you think that’s the way you’re supposed to treat your adorable little sister?”

“It’s the proper way to treat my adorable little sister whom I took in after her father threatened to kick her out of their house, though she is 29”

“Alright, we’re in a bitter mood this morning” she commented, nodding. “I’ll give you ten minutes to calm the fuck down and then I want you to go buy me my Oreos”

“Yes, honey, yes, I am going to be late for work for buying you Oreos. Go to sleep if you want to dream, girl” he said.

“I am craving Oreos!”

“That’s not craving, that’s a whim”

Peggy gasped, offended. Eliza entered the kitchen just then, stretching out.

“Fighting so early?” she asked, naturally.

“Betsey, your husband doesn’t want to buy me Oreos!” tattled Peggy.

Eliza shrugged. “You go, then. You’re an adult”

“I’m pregnant, I need to be looked after” she whined.

“Less tall tales, Margaret. I’ve got three children” her sister reminded her.

“She’s got more stories than Walt Disney” commented Alexander.

Peggy shook her head, hurt. “Alright, I see that, in this house, each one have their roles, and mine is being the toilet paper. I am going to cry to my bedroom!” she declared, heading to the door with her chin up in pride.

“Wake up the children, now that you’re going that way” said Eliza, not minding Peggy’s last hateful glare before disappearing from the door. She smiled down at Alex. “How’s my little lion?” she asked, bending down to peek him in the cheek.

Alexander leaned back, making her kiss the air. “Go kiss the front door, you seem to love it more than me” he spat.

Eliza curved her lips just as her youngest sister did a few minutes prior. “Gee, what an attack in the middle of the morning. Screw you, I’m going to have breakfast”

“I’ll call the New York Times to let them know” he deadpanned.
Eliza turned around and flipped him the bird. Alexander let the newspaper aside and sighed as he read the letters he had collected from the mail that morning. One caught his attention quite easily.

“Huh, funny” he commented aloud.

“What?” asked Eliza, curious.

“Your mother sent me a letter” he answered, opening the envelope to read its content.

“Yeah, my parents are medieval souls”

“Oh, sh…” Alexander almost swore.

“What?” asked Eliza once again, turning around. She saw her husband rigid on the chair. “Alex?” she asked, now concern. “Alex, what’s wrong?”

When she received no answer, she got even more worried and walked straight to her husband. Alexander was paler than a sheet, with a hand over his mouth. Eliza felt her heart thumping against her chest.

“What? What is it?” she asked, once again. “Alex, what…?”

Her husband passed him the paper he was reading, and she took it in her free hand, holding a mug of coffee with the other, slightly shaking. Eliza took a moment to calm herself to be able to read clearly the words in front of her.

“Holy cow…” she muttered once she had finished the first reading. Her hold on the mug softened, and it felt to the ground, filling the floor beside her feet with coffee and some broken plastic.

“I am not going to clean that” said Peggy, as soon as she appeared at the door. “The children are being little fuckers who refuse to wake up… What?” she asked when she saw no movement on their part. “What happens?” she asked, walking to Eliza. She took the paper away from her. “What is this?” she asked, reading it in a low voice.

“Mom is giving Alexander half of her half of her part of the common money she has with Dad” explained Eliza, feeling about to faint. “She wants him to have it”

“That’s the half of the half?” asked Alexander, with wide eyes. Eliza nodded. “Holy fuck…”

“In what are we going to spend it first?” asked Eliza, as soon as she had recovered from the shock. Alexander shook his head, being completely aware of his surroundings again. “No, no, we’re going to save it!” he declared, taking the paper away from his sister-in-law.

“Hey!” complained Peggy.
Eliza frowned. “Man, there’s more money there that either of us could spend in one lifetime!” she complained. “Come on! What do you wanna be? The richest man in the cemetery?”

“Better than the poorer man alive” retorted Alexander, walking out the kitchen.

“I’ve been waiting for buying that pair of boots I talked to you about for a very long time, Alexander! I deserve them!” she screamed, and cocked and eyebrow when she saw Peggy running to the counter and opening drawers like crazy. “What are you doing?”

“Looking for the candles. Angelica was right, they had some trick or something”

“What are you talking about?”

“Alex’s wish came true! I want something as well! Maybe I can light them again!” explained Peggy, hopeful.

Eliza half-closed her eyes. “Don’t be an idiot, Pegs. Besides, you can’t know if that’s what Alexander wished for”

Peggy scoffed a laugh. “Huh, and what did he wish for, then? The global peace? That crap only happens in movies, we all are selfish”

“Whatever” Eliza gave in. “But you’re not going to find them. I threw them away”

“Why??”

“Why would I keep them?”

“Because you keep everything!”

“Says the woman that spent five days bringing her possessions from her parents’ house to this one” retorted Eliza rapidly, offended.

“One shitty decision that was!” complained Peggy. “There are no Oreos, there are no magical candles! I hate this!” she whined, running out of the kitchen.

Eliza looked at her leaving and frowned. “Yeah, I really deserve those boots…” she decided.

Chapter End Notes

Some more notes:

Lilith was a female demon. According to her backstory, she was created before Eve, and she questioned why she should be considered inferior to Adam when they were both created the same way. Philip Sr. tried to insult Lu calling her a demon; and Lu turned the insult on her favour talking about that fact.

"It means that I fall in love with souls, not with genitalia”/"Oh, what a nice quote. I am gonna make it my own*: this quote is from the same Spanish sitcom I talked about in the last chapter. I love it too much not to include it :)

"you're inflating my bullocks*: I translated this literally. We say this when we're fed up
about something, of course, it's not very formal XD

"Go eat your cat and then go back to Melmac*: Yes, I just called this guy Alf(red) to make this joke XD!

"Now, my wife is going from Apennines to the Andes*: Alexander is referring to the anime "3000 Leagues in Search of Mother", in which a little boy goes in search of his mother after she has to leave her family to travel to Argentina in order to earn money and send it to her family back in Italy, during a depression period in 1881.

SOME HISTORY, if you're sensitive, skip this: in my country, under Franco's regime, lots of little children were torn apart from their mothers after they gave birth to them (if they were children of Republican parents, that is, who were put in the jail or killed by the Franco supporters. Republican in Spain is not the same as in USA, here we call that to the people who are more inclined to the left, who do not agree with having a monarchy and, of course, want a Republic). We're talking about around 30 000 children torned away from their mothers just for having a different political view, and this part of History is almost not talked about or discussed nowadays, though there are lots of disappeared children who suffered that dictator's opression.

Also, in 2009, in Cadiz, there were a lot of cases in which nuns would steal babies from their mothers in the hospital after them giving birth to them to "sell" them, aka: parents adopted them ilegally. There are, to this day, a lot of families who are going to court and trying to be back together. The nuns would usually lie saying the baby was dead. From 2010 to now, there are around 400 families affected by this, and they're all asking for an order to exhume the tombs, in which they had found rests from other children or the tomb was completely empty.

Eliza's backstory occurred to me after seeing one episode from that Spanish sitcom I've talked about, in which one of the characters discovered he was ilegally adopted because his mother (a nun) got pregnant by a missionary and couldn't keep the baby. Em... Yes, Spanish sitcoms sometimes can be a little... *cough, cough* XD. In summary, I think it would help Eliza's character development for future chapters. I'm sure you all have heard "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story" and you can easily guess what I am referring to.

ALSO... I think it will be only two more chapters (each divided in two parts, for sure...) and then George King will finally arrive. If you think this was crazy, just wait until he arrives XD!

Sursum corda!

Dear diary: I don’t believe I am a good child. You know, I don’t think I’m the best kid, though my sister and father always tell me there’s good in everyone, but I don’t think I deserve this kind of punishment either. And yet, here I am, first day of my first school year.

I look around at all those kids that now I’m surrounded by and with whom I will have to spend five out of the seven days the week for the next nine months, and I can’t help but ask myself: what have I done to deserve this? I wasn’t given a proper explanation more than, ‘you have to start school this year’, and the next thing I know is that I went from spending my afternoons reading, writing and drawing to go from shop to shop to collect the most grey and dullest uniforms and notebooks I ever seen and that would sink Henri Matisse* in the most absolute sadness.

Now, my sister told me that it’s normal to be nervous on the first day, and that I will get the knack after the first week is over. Not that I don’t believe Jane, she’s very smart, though she’s only three years older than me, but she’s also way more outgoing than me. I mean, between us two she was the one who went to kindergarten, and the one who has been at several sleepovers since she turned six while I stayed home with my books. So, on one hand, I’m fine with school because I am going to learn and it got me more books than the ones I currently have; on the other hand… I wish the price for that wouldn’t be to have to share the air with other kids.

Well, I’ve got two options right now: I can hold my breath and count the days that are left till June arrives for the next twelve years or I can listen to Jane’s advise and try this out. Maybe I’m overreacting. Mum says I do that a lot.

Oh, goodness, I just saw two boys laughing over the word ‘snot’. I’m gonna die at the age of six… Maybe at the age of seven if this stupidity doesn’t kill me before April comes…
“Thomas, we’re already here. What are you doing?”

The six-years-old looked up from his book, staring straight into her mother’s dark eyes. Slowly, he closed his diary, making sure the bookmark was now on the last written page of that day.

“Writing” he answered, sheepishly.

Jane sighed after looking up and down at her son. “Come on” she said, stretching her hand to him.

Thomas looked at it and tried to reach his mother’s hand with his own; the diary tightly kept against the right side of his chest. Before he could graze one of his mother’s fingers, Jane took the hand away from him, wrinkling her features.

“What are you doing?”

“… Hold your hand?”

“Is that a question or an answer?”

“An answer?”

Jane sighed once again. “Thomas, I wanted you to give me your book” she explained, with tedium clear in her voice.

“Oh” said the little kid, and he felt his cheeks burning from embarrassment. “Can’t I keep it?” he asked, timidly.

His mother’s glare sharpened considerably. “Thomas…” she began to say, with a severe tone.

“Just for today?” he tried, managing to speak a bit louder.

Jane scrutinized him once again, and he felt his heart hammering against his ribcage, making his ears hurt and his vision to be blurred by the corners of the image in front of his eyes. A thumping sensation was starting to be born in the left side of his forehead, a thing that started to be more common for Thomas since all this ‘school thing’ happened. He wouldn’t be able to put a name to those discomforts until he reached the adolescence.

He wouldn’t know how those things would start to control his life in place of his mother once he was old enough.
“Alright” Jane gave in, clearly displeased. “But just for today”

Thomas nodded.

Jane was glad by it.

Thomas knew he would have to hide the book for the rest of the year since then.

Thomas was, for once, glad that his mother would let Consuelo do all the job of preparing his backpack and driving him to school.

“Go, then” ordered Jane, throwing a rapid glare to the playground.

The playground full of screaming children.

Children who laughed at the word ‘snort’.

Gosh, seriously, what had he done so wrong to deserve this?

“The bell will ring in about ten minutes” commented Jane, folding her arms over her chest. “Come on, you still have some time to talk to someone”

Again, Thomas’ heart pounded against his chest as a caged bird wanting to break free. Talk to someone? As exposing himself to a bunch of strangers? As to open the doors of his world so anyone could judge it?

Oh, no, thank you.

He must have had shaken his head without the real intention to do so, because his mother’s sharp glare worsened, stabbing itself in his eyes as two needles. Jane grabbed him by the wrist with enough force to make him see she was being serious, but without hurting him. At least, physically.
Just a minute ago she refused to hold my hand, thought Thomas. And that made something inside his mind to ignite. A rebel fire consumed his soul. He planted his feet firmly on the ground, refusing to move one inch from the front door of the centre. Some parents came and went with their respective children, all of them dedicating mother and son a curious look that turned into giggles and whispered comments.

Thomas couldn’t care less.

He wasn’t going to move. Not until the bell rang and he was forced to make line with the others.

“Thomas” said his mother, through clenched teeth. “Thomas Jefferson, go with the rest”

Thomas felt his mother’s grip tighter when he shook his head once again.

“Thomas, go socialise like a normal child!”

Jane was starting to lose the patience and the control over her voice. Thomas smirked. He tried not to, but he couldn’t help himself. In some sort of way, it felt good to contradict his mother, to test her patience, to let her see that she was his mother, but not his boss.

Jane noticed his lips curving mischievously, felt her son pushing on his own. This was something she would expect from her daughter, miss rebel, miss ‘but why’; not from her son, the bookworm who would lose track of time and would leave her alone with a good thick book in his hands.

“Thomas, go!” she ordered, finally raising her voice.

“But why?” he asked, imitating his sister.

Of course he was imitating her. Of course he was. Of course he would make things more complicated than they were supposed to be. Jane was going to have a serious chat with her daughter later that day, no matter if she was feeling better or not. Jane refused to raise two sassy children.

“Thomas, I am not going to repeat myself anymore” she began, trying to sound as gentle as possible. Her frown giving her true intentions away completely. “Go talk and play with the rest”
“Don’t repeat yourself anymore, I am not going to do it” challenged Thomas.

Jane clicked her tongue and bent over her son, threatening. “Do you think you’re very smart?”

“Sorta”

“… Look, kid, talk to me with some respect. I am your mother” she said under her breath.

“I am talking just fine” retorted Thomas.

“No, you’re being a little spoiled brat” Jane shook her head. “Thomas, you have to go and play with the rest”

“Why?”

“Because it’s what a normal kid does”

“Being ’normal’ is overrated”

“Listen, brat, do you know how much money your father and I are paying for this school?”

“Thought I wasn’t supposed to ask you about money”

Jane gritted her teeth and pushed the kid closer to her. “It’s a lot, Thomas. This is a very expensive school, because we want you to have the best education. You and your sister. And you two can’t even thank us by acting like proper children”

“Jane has done nothing” Thomas didn’t hesitate in defending his sister.

“Jane today will do nothing because she’s losing time in the bed instead of being here with you”

“She’s sick!”

“Yes, that’s what all say in September. She should be here to stand your bad manners instead of me”

Thomas frowned. “I don’t have bad manners”

“And what do you call what you’re doing right now?” she pointed at him, with her free hand. “You’re making a scene”

Thomas had to literally bite his tongue to prevent himself for telling her that, no, he wasn’t making any scenes. At much, it was she the one making a fuss out of nothing.

“Why won’t you go talk to the other kids?” she asked, seeing her son wasn’t going to answer her. Thomas shrugged and she wrinkled her nose in disgust. “You can’t keep going on like this, Thomas. Do you want people to bully you?”

“What’s ‘bullying’?” he asked, confused.

“It’s when some kid thinks to be better than the rest and spends time alone instead of with his classmates, and so the rest end up hating on them. Do you want that happening to you? Do you
want your new classmates to hate you?”

“...” answered Thomas with tiny voice.

“Then, stop thinking highly of yourself. I don’t want you to come crying to me because you're a know-it-all and everybody evades you”

“... I come to school to learn, not to make friends” he retorted.

“Don’t change that attitude of yours a little bit” complained Jane, wrinkling her nose in disgust. “Don’t listen to me and do as I say. Just keep going this way. Nobody is gonna love you if you don’t change a bit”

“... Dad and Jane love me” he talked back once again, with less conviction than before.

“Of course they do. We are your family, we must love you”

She let go of his hand and Thomas rubbed his wrist against his uniform shirt. Jane looked at him for a couple of minutes and then sighed, burying her face in her hands.

“I really hope you become a father one day and you have a child that talks back and treats you the way you treat me. I think that is what you need: a child as spoiled as you” she complained.

“I am not...” tried to contradict Thomas, under his breath.

“Maybe that way you’d finally understand your mother, you’d understand how it is to have a child so weird” kept talking Jane, not caring about his words at all. She got up and looked down at her son. “Go, Thomas. Consuelo will come for you at one. Wait for her in here”

“Yes, Mom”

Thomas walked into the playground and looked around him. It seemed as if everybody had someone to talk to. Did they know each other for kindergarten? Because their parents were friends? Because they were neighbours? Or had they met just then? And if so, how was that even possible?

A stung in his heart made him stopped after having walked just a couple of steps, and he felt his throat closing slowly. He coughed a couple of times and wheezed. He took a few steps backwards, holding his diary tightly against his chest, as if it were a protector shield. Thomas looked over his shoulder, seeing the bleachers.

It was full of children, either standing or sat down, but there was a small spot under a tree completely deserted. If that spot wasn’t screaming Thomas’ name, he’d be damned.

Jane saw her son walking by strides to the most isolated part of the bleachers. He sat down
and started writing whatever thing he seemed to write on that goddamned book Peter bought him for Christmas. She clicked her tongue and stepped out of the school.

She surely was going to have a chat with that child once he was back home…

He tried not to remember anything about that time. He tried hard. But he also couldn’t just throw that diary away. It was one of the few things he had from his father, it was the first thing where he could say whatever he thought about without being judged and it helped him get through the Primary School. It could have helped him get through the boarding school and college as well, but, sadly, the book had a number of pages that, for Thomas, were always too scant.

The funny part was that he also had two diaries, one for each period, but it was this one Thomas was most attached to. He kept it on the small bookshelf he had inside his room, hardly noticeable for how well he took care of all his possessions, especially when those were books.

Thomas didn’t know what happened that morning. It was like the old diary had put a spell on him. Without thinking he had grabbed it, and read the first pages. Everything had been fine until he reached September. And the rest was just a few flashes inside his brain that made him go back in time and forget he was now 44 and not six. That he was an adult and not a child.

That his mother was long gone.

That his father had left even longer than her.

That his sister had also left him.

That it was the first week of February and his other sister, the younger one, the one that took after their deceased mother the most, hadn’t called him. Though the lease was about to be over for that year.

I just had to read this shit today, he condemned himself inside his mind. With a thump, he closed the book and put it back where he had grabbed it from, and got out of his room, prepared to go to work.
“Dad, you haven’t signed my notice for the planetarium visit” Patsy told him as soon as he had come down the stairs. “It’s this Friday”

“I know, Patsy, but your aunt hasn’t called yet” said Thomas, after a sigh of resignation.

“So?”

“So… They are asking you to pay 30 dollars for going. Plus another 15 for transport’

“You don’t have 45 bucks?” asked Patsy with eyes half-closed.

“Yes, but I don’t want to go spending money when I don’t know how much your aunt would ask for me in the new lease” he explained, bored.

“Like Alex would let Lucy-fer do more injustices” she commented.

Thomas let his briefcase drop on the kitchen island with more force than strictly necessary. It wasn’t enough for him to be begging the immigrant for help, but his daughters had to adore him and get along with him, as well.

“I’ve told you not to call your aunt that while inside the house. I’m sure she’s bugging us” he half-joked, to distract his daughter’s attention from the sudden startle from before. “Besides, Hamilton himself said she could increase the rent when February came” Thomas reminded her.

“Yeah, he also said you shouldn’t pay her until March” retorted Patsy, with a raised eyebrow. “And I doubt he’d let Lucy ask for more than you could afford”

“If we refuse, then we lose the house” said Thomas, frowning.

“She can’t kick you out just like that. That’s another thing Alex said”

“In that case, she’ll sue us, and we’ll be in the streets in Summer, so what? The aftermath would be the same” argued Thomas.

“At least, in Summer we won’t freeze to death” mocked Patsy.

Thomas clicked his tongue. “Look, gal, don’t you think it’s too early to start being a brat? Let me eat breakfast at least before standing your nonsense”

“I’m the one that makes no sense?” she asked, slightly surprised. “Dad, you’re the one making a fuss because I want to go to a school visit. Didn’t you want me to take my studies seriously?”

“Are you going to be an astronomer now?” spat Thomas.

“No, but…”

“Then, you’ll stay home for free, as you’re used to do. At least that day you’d have a sick note from my own writing”

Patsy frowned. “I never forged a sick note!” she shouted, offended.
“You better not” warned Thomas.

“So, you caused an almighty row just because I skipped a few classes, and now you’re going to lie saying I couldn’t go to a school visit because I’m sick?” she insisted. “And then you don’t understand why I call you incoherent…”

“You’re the one who’s incoherent, driving me crazy over going to a visit, and then you fail 9 out of 8 classes” Thomas snapped back.

“… … …”

Patsy was silent for a moment, then jumped off the stool in a rush and made her way to the front door, hoofing.

“Put on a coat, it’s cold” said Thomas, looking how she was only wearing a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.

“If I haven’t fallen ill after living for two weeks without heater, then I won’t fall ill now!” she said, slamming the door shut.

Thomas looked at the door, patiently. It opened, revealing an upset Patsy, who took the first coat she grabbed from the stand. She put it on and then threw an angry glare to her father.

“I’m putting it on because I want to” she clarified, before slamming the door shut once again.

“Yes, whatever you say…” commented Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“Are you already fighting this early?” asked James, walking down the stairs.

Thomas shrugged. “She refuses to listen to reason” he explained.

“What reason?” asked James, with scepticism.

Thomas gave him another shrug while he served himself a mug of milk that put later on the microwave. He could feel his friend’s glare riveting on him, and Thomas decided to focus only on the mug, going in circles inside the object. Eventually, James looked away, and Thomas thanked his littlest daughter for existing and having the habit of greeting everyone in the mornings with a huge smile on her face.

He barely understood what they were talking about, only moving to take the mug out of the microwave and sipping at it slowly. Polly had said good morning to him, and he answered by a nod and a tiny smile. James dedicated him another curious look. Thankfully, it was shorter than the first one, as Polly asked for some of them to help her get something out the cupboard for lunchbreak.
James obliged immediately. Thomas watched without seeing and heard without listening. His eyes moved slowly to the front door.

_I really hope one day you have a child as spoiled as you._

“Hey, Thomas, are you okay?”

Thomas looked down at his friend, seeing they were alone in the kitchen now. Polly had gotten out the house – leaving the door opened, because why would she close it as he was always telling her to do? – and was now walking towards her older sister, who was reading something on her mobile, against the car.

Meanwhile, Madison was waiting patiently for an answer, his brows furrowed in concern. Despite his mental tiredness, the sudden heaviness of his shoulders, and the beginning of the feeling of yet another migraine that was going to annoy him for yet another day… Thomas found his lips moving into a wee smile that he tried to hide by drinking the last sip of his milk.

_February 6th_

_Dear mental diary, I still don’t know what I’ve done to deserve a friend such as James._

“I’m alright” he lied, putting the mug on the sink to wash it later.

James cocked one eyebrow in disbelief. “You sure? You can stay home if you’re not feeling well”

“I’m alright” he repeated, heading anxiously to the door. *Staying home? After that vivid regression? Oh, no, thank you, my head is already hurting enough…*

“Alright, but if you feel worse through the day…” began to say James, gently, as he walked to him. Thomas cut him off by throwing him his jacket at the face. “To feel worse, you have to initially feel bad”

He opened the door, ignoring James’ frown once he had gotten his jacket off his face.

_Don’t change that attitude of yours a little bit._

_Nobody is gonna love you if you don’t change a bit._
Thomas flinched after hearing the clear voice of his mother inside his head, and avoided to make eye contact with James, who, surely, was looking at him with an inquisitive look. James was very observant, and sometimes, it could get on your nerves. But, he also was respectful enough for not to push the issue and just be there, and that compensated it a lot.

Still, Thomas sighed as he locked the door. So, today is gonna be one of those days, he thought, bitterly.

It had been almost a month since Laurens began to sleep on Peggy’s bed and use the office as his new home, refusing to go back to Lafayette and Hercules’ house. The Frenchman had tried to persuade him into coming back, receiving only silence from Laurens’ part. He wasn’t joking when he said those two were dead for him. Alexander was in the middle, though he didn’t want to intervene too much. Let them handle the situation. As long as Laurens hadn’t it for him, everything was fine.

Peggy kept skipping work, which worked out fine for Laurens, actually. The girl didn’t mind him using her bed at all, as long as it was when she wasn’t in the office. Alexander didn’t know what was more worrisome: that or the fact that nobody even blinked an eye about one of their workmates using the office as his personal house.

The toilets had been fixed a few days after they were told. Everybody commented about the tree that was painted on the wall across the restrooms doors. There had been times where Alexander would simply go upstairs and see Aaron there, admiring his work. There were some times, during one of those, when the CFO felt bad for the poor man’s self-esteem.

Washington was starting to spend more and more days inside his office, and, in one of those rare occasions when nobody was fighting, the sound of his rocking chair going forth and back would be the only sound inside the building, sending chills down their spines. It was even scarier when they heard nothing at all, because their boss hadn’t come to work that day, and Angelica couldn’t contact him – or didn’t even want to try – a habit Washington was starting to do more often.

A part of Alexander couldn’t blame the man for not coming into work some days, or spending the whole day locked up inside his office; or Angelica for spending it in the pub across the street. He was close to them and knew what could happen the day they both reached the limits of their patients, which were, thank God, very very big and seemingly endless. Alexander didn’t want to be alive by the time that inglorious day would happen.
Aaron and he had been on good terms. More specifically, since the month started. So, he had to stand a lot of jokes – especially from John – about how Madison was right about the uneven and even months. To some extent, Alexander was starting to fear they were right. He could only wait until March arrived to find out. Right now, they were preparing themselves for when the 23rd arrived.

It was already 12 o’clock by the time Alexander had taken his eyes away from his papers since he arrived that morning, as his phone went off with an alarm. Cocking one eyebrow, he picked it up and read the title of the alarm.

*Reminder of you being a human that needs to eat. Betsey <3*

Alexander blinked, perplexed at first, and then laughed softly. He didn’t know what he had done to deserve someone as Betsey. He remembered their conversation, a few nights ago. He hadn’t even finished talking about the issue that had been bothering him, and she had already nodded in agreement, his hands on hers, a sincere smile on her lips and her eyes shining brightly in the almost dark bedroom.

He decided that, just for that, he could actually listen for her advice for once and take a break.

Taking off his glasses, he got up from his seat, and headed right to the break room. There, he found Aaron, already eating a sandwich with some juice. The lawyer looked in his direction as soon as he appeared at the doorframe and greeted him with a smile, before returning his attention to the book on the table.

“Lafayette and Mulligan went to buy some sweets to the bakery” Aaron told him.

He acknowledged his words with a simple ‘hum’, before heading straight to the coffee machine. By the time Alexander was sitting at the table beside Aaron, Laurens made his way through the door, yawning and stretching out.

“Oh, yes, he also wore his pyjamas as, according to Laurens, ‘why am I going to change into formal clothes when this is basically my new home now?’

“Morning…” said John, after a long yawn, and he sat across Alex.
“Good morning” said Aaron automatically, not raising his glare from his book.

“More like ‘good afternoon’” commented Alex, on the quiet. “Oh, hey, Aaron” he added, all of a sudden. “Today’s your birthday?”

“Hm, yeah” answered the lawyer, not very interested.

“Finally” said Alexander, getting up.

The two men followed him with the glare and, once he was gone, exchanged confused looks. Alexander came back almost immediately, with, what seemed, like a small rectangular box in wrapping paper.

“I was starting to get tired of asking you every day” complained Alex, while handing the present out to him.

“Thank goodness I was born on the sixth, and not on the 28th, then” said Aaron, laughing a bit and taking the wrapped object with a curious raised eyebrow.

“You don’t know true that statement is” commented Laurens, calmly. “If you knew, you wouldn’t have laughed”

Aaron decided to ignore his words in order not to let his imagination go to dangerous places. He focused his whole attention on the present, instead. He put the box on the table and began to unwrap the thing slowly, taking off the adhesive tape. Laurens saw the whole thing with squinted eyes, as if trying to comprehend it, while Alexander moved his tongue inside his mouth, getting annoyed. He finally clicked his tongue, snapping.

“I bought you that for this year, Aaron!”

The birthday boy jumped in his seat and frowned at the man. “I don’t want to tear the paper apart”

“Like he’d care” said Laurens, interrupting Alexander’s response. “That thing was done by Eliza. Can’t you see how well wrapped that is?”

Alex frowned at his friend. “That’s because most of the time I’m in a hurry. This time I took a bit of time in doing it” he explained.

“Really? What kind of life do you have that you can’t spend 10 fucking minutes wrapping a present for your frenemy?”

Aaron leveraged the discussion between the two friends to unwrap the present as he liked it the most, and then gasped when he saw what it was. He took the box in his hand, not believing the name that was written over it, and then opened it, praying this was maybe some old box the Schuyler family had. Maybe Alexander had taken it and decided to use it to put the real present in there.
Maybe it was some kind of joke. He had that kind of strange sense of humour sometimes they shared.

But when Aaron opened the box and saw the pen inside it – with his surname on golden colour on the black cylinder, on top of it all – his heart skipped a bit. He took the cover of the box again, wanting to read the name that was there more carefully. Maybe he had misread it? Nope. The name was right. And so it might be the price whenever Alexander had bought this pen. And he didn’t even want to know how much more it must have cost him to put his surname on it.

“Alexander, I can’t…” he tried to say, but his workmate’s raised hand stopped him.

“You once mentioned how much you wanted that pen” explained Alexander. “So, I took advantage of the date and Angelica and Hercules’ knowledge in Internet research along with Peggy’s nerd habit of knowing all good stores in town”

And Aaron’s mind rewind to one of the conversations Alex and he shared while working together on Augustine’s custody case. He was in the middle of writing a sentence when his pen ran out of ink, and Alexander had to lend him one of his. And a flashback came to his mind that afternoon, making him laugh a bit when he saw the black pen his workmate had let him borrow. Of course, Alexander’s wasn’t as expensive as the one he was now holding, but the CFO had the same habit Aaron’s father used to have of taking pretty good care of his writing utensils.

And without thinking, he shared the memory of one pen his father kept even after it couldn’t be used to write anymore. It wasn’t because of the price, but more for the emotional weight the small thing possessed. His mother had given it to his father on one of their anniversaries and had made sure it had his surname recorded on it. The soft memory had a bitter ending, though, as, after the Burr’s deaths, Aaron couldn’t collect the pen his father kept so close to his heart, as he had to leave in a hurry and wasn’t allowed to put a foot inside his father’s now locked office. According to his uncle, it was rude and disrespectful.

This wasn’t his father’s pen, though it was very similar.

Hell, it succeeded at striking some chord inside Aaron’s allegedly cold heart.

“Alex, this is a nice detail, but let me pay…”

“Presents don’t have to be paid back” interrupted the CFO, with a frown. “Now, take good care of it. That’d be enough”

“Thank you so much” he finally managed to say, smiling sincerely.
“Well, if you didn’t feel bad about not giving him a present before, you should now” commented Laurens.

“Yeah, well, not everybody can be such a good friend as I am” said Alexander, with a shrug.

Slowly, Aaron was starting to feel less moved.

Lafayette and Hercules made their way into the room, holding bags in their hands. Hercules opened one of them, taking out a cupcake and putting it in front of Aaron.

“There you go. For the birthday boy” he explained.

“Thank you, but I don’t…” tried to say Aaron.

“Yeah, we know” interrupted Lafayette, waving one hand. “You didn’t want parties or anything like that. That’s why we bought you this”

“Alright, thank you”

Aaron kept the pen in its box and then put this one inside his pocket, carefully, while ignoring the growing anxiety. That was why he didn’t want to have a party, no matter today was his birthday. At least, they were all behaving.

Lafayette put a few more snacks and sweets on the table for the rest of the staff to eat once they got there, as the lunchtime break was starting. Well, actually, everybody eat and took all the breaks they wanted, so saying it was lunchtime was just pure formality.

Alexander looked at Laurens, who didn’t take his eyes off the food, but said nothing at all. When both Lafayette and Hercules took a seat right beside him, and started eating and chatting, Laurens frowned. He got up from his seat, and dragged the chair to the other side of the room, to the photocopier, and sat there, using the machine as a table. Alexander rolled his eyes while Hercules half-closed his. Aaron decided to simply eat his cupcake in peace, his concentration back to the book.

“Come on, Johnny, don’t be like this” said Lafayette, quite saddened.

As usual, he received no response. Hercules whispered to his boyfriend to let him be, and, reluctantly, the Frenchman agreed.
Alexander was about to take a seat and take something for himself, not one second later, when Laurens got up from his chair and walked to the table. The four pair of eyes were on him as he scanned the food. He took a few sweets and then went back to his spot, eating. Hercules clicked his tongue, in annoyance.

“You are angry at us, but you eat the food we bought, though!” he commented, out loud.

Laurens took his time to swallow, and, then, talked.

“Have you said something, Alex?” he asked, casually.

The CFO was taken aback at first. “No…” he answered, a bit hesitant.

“Ah, it’s just that I thought I heard something like… the voice of a traitorous friend” said Laurens, and took another bite from his amount of food.

“… … You just insulted me as well with that, do you realise that?” asked Alexander, with boredom.

Laurens got up once again, letting the food on the photocopier, and Aaron felt bad for Jefferson and prayed the secretary wasn’t told to photocopy anything today. It had been quite peaceful lately, and Aaron wanted it to last. Laurens went to the fridge, looked up and down a couple of times, and then turned around, arms folded over his chest.

“Where is my orange juice?” he asked, in a demanding tone.

Lafayette lowered his head and try not to respond. Hercules looked at him closely, while eating, having less problem with ignoring their stubborn friend. Alex and Aaron, being across from each other, exchanged a glare of tedium. Meanwhile, Laurens was moving his tongue inside his mouth, and he clicked it, louder than Alexander and Hercules had done previously in that exact same room that day.

“I asked… where is my orange juice?” repeated Laurens, now with clear annoyance in his voice, and his tone a bit more raised.

Hercules inspired through his nostrils and turned to face the CFO. “Alexander, tell Laurens that, if he wants orange juice so badly, he will have to go to the store and buy it himself”

Hamilton looked at his friend, dumbfounded for a few seconds. “Excuse me, what?” he said. Hercules shrugged and Alexander sighed, muttering to himself. “My freaking goodness” He turned to Laurens, who was watching him, expectantly. “What he said” said Hamilton, pointing at Hercules.

Laurens frowned down at his friend. “I am not Melinda Gordon, Alexander, I can’t hear dead
people” he snapped.

Alexander sighed, heavier than before. “Hercules says that, if you want orange juice, you’ll have to go to the supermarket and buy it yourself”

“Oh, so, they lied to me in the face and mocked me behind my backs, and they don’t even bother to buy some orange juice?” asked Laurens, offended. “That’s having some selfish balls…”

“Do you want me to go?” proposed Aaron, out of fear after seeing Hercules’ face turning red and Lafayette’s death glare at that statement, and, especially, because he did not want a confrontation to happen.

“No! You always get the brands mixed up and end up bringing shit!” accused Laurens.

“John, for God’s sake, this is absurd. We should stop acting as if we were in high school!” complained Lafayette. “We’ve got to solve this!”

“Tell that despicable worm that I’ve got nothing to talk with him!” Laurens screamed, pointing at Lafayette but talking to Hamilton.

Alexander obliged, not giving it too much thought. “He says you’re a despicable worm and that he has nothing to talk with you” Alex repeated, even making the same emphasis.

“Look, when you get your shit together, let us know” snapped Hercules, getting up and dragging Lafayette along with him. “We’re gonna get some work done, unlike others” he added, while Lafayette simply shook his head and took a few more snacks.

“They are going to their offices to work” informed Alexander.

Laurens, looking at the wall at his right, his chin up in a childish proud manner, simply replied. “They can go to hell, for all I care!”

“Laf, Herc, go to…”

“We’ve heard him!” exploded Hercules, heading upstairs.

“Mon Dieu, damned the hour! Damned the hour!” complained Lafayette, following his boyfriend and trying to calm him down.

Aaron sighed once they were out of eyeshot. I will never be able to eat in peace in here… he complained.

Maria entered the room just then, each of her two hands busy with paper bags. She arched one eyebrow to the HR manager.

“Well, Jackie, look at you! Already up at noon! You felt like rising early?” she commented, with a soft smile, while putting the bags on the table. “I’ve made the weekly grocery shopping” she declared.

“I keep saying we should do this on Thursdays…” commented Aaron, getting a bit separated from
the table as Laurens launched himself to it, rummaging through the bags.

“We should do this *monthly*, as any other normal company…” remarked Alexander.

Laurens was finishing looking inside the second bag when he threw a moan to the air.

“Maria, where is the orange juice?”

The receptionist just shrugged. “I followed the list”

“What list?”

“The one in which we all write down what you want me to buy…” explained Maria, confused.

“Don’t overthink it” said Alexander, noticing her expression. “John wouldn’t know what a grocery list looks like even if it bites him in the butt” he told her, ignoring the deathly glare John dedicated him, with great ease from experience.

“Alex, language” reprehended Aaron.

“Aaron, I’ve been working here for almost three years, there’s no swearing I haven’t heard” said Maria, with a cocky smile.

“You spoiled her purity” complained Aaron, shaking his head, though the phantom of a smile was dancing in his lips.

“I’m still very pure” said Maria, taking a seat beside him. “I’m a pure soul who swears if necessary”

“Mari, c’mon, go buy some orange juice” begged Laurens.

“I’ve just come back” complained the receptionist.

“Come on…”

“Go yourself, man” she said, sharply.

“That’s not my job” retorted Laurens.

“You know what’s not your job? Sleeping and living in a law firm” Maria threw in his face without hesitation.

“I’m the punching ball of the office” said Laurens, trying to sound pitiful. He stormed off the break room.

“He’s such a nag with that quote…” complained Maria.

“We’ll just have to put up with it until he thinks of another one…” said Hamilton.
Now, really, what had he done to deserve this? He was never the better person, but, for Heaven’s sake, it wasn’t like he deserved of all this crap to happen to him at once, right? Maybe this was some kind of punishment for something he had done in another live? Oh, goodness, he was starting to sound like Laurens. Now, that was sinking very low…

“Thomas”

He raised his head and met his friend’s (worried) glare. Well, what was he now? Some fucking abandoned puppy he must be pitied about? No way in hell. Thomas straightened himself in his chair and cleared his throat, trying to maintain the poor composure he had left. If he had any left, that is…

“Do you want me to tell Hamilton?” asked James, quietly, as if asking a little child if he wanted ice cream after being bullied at the playground.

“No” he answered and flinched at how tiny his voice sounded. Clearing his throat one more time, he added. “I don’t need supervision upon signing a lease”

James arched an eyebrow. “You’re not the one who would be supervised, but your sister”

Thomas lowered his glare again, took his pen, and resumed whatever he was reading. He was still trying to comprehend the first sentence of that goddamned document.

“Hamilton told us to let him know the date” James kept talking, and Thomas felt he hadn’t taken his eyes away from him.

“He told you; I wasn’t present”

It was a vague and weak defence, but all he had to offer. He wished James would take the hint that he didn’t want to discuss it. He could see, with the corner of his eye, that James still had the phone in his hand, and Thomas couldn’t help but throw it a hateful glare, as if the device was to blame for all his woes.

_The phone is not to blame._
_You should have picked up._

Well, his brain was getting better at imitating his mother’s critical tone. And the worst part was that, yes, Thomas should have been the one picking up the phone, especially when he read the
caller ID and saw his sister’s name on the screen. He should have been the one talking and discussing the issue. He should have fought against the lump of his throat, gathered his courage and found his voice to talk to Lucy about when they would meet to sign the new lease.

Instead, he had let James answer.

To be honest, James was the one offering to do so, but Thomas should have still said no and do it himself. He should have hidden his discomfort and anxiety better… It wasn’t like he hadn’t had his whole fucking life to do so, to be able to conceal such trivial things and stop bothering people around.

Always using the poor man for your own benefit.
You better keep the house, no matter how much Lucy asks for you.
It’s not like Madison won’t be able to find somewhere else to live.
And with a better person, for that matter.
You know that, out of the two, he was always the nicest.

“Gosh, shut up already” muttered Thomas, tightening his grip on the pen he had been toying with.

“What?” asked James, stopping whatever he had been talking about.

“Nothing” he said, rapidly. “Look, tell him if you want. I don’t care”

James took a small step backwards and dedicated Thomas another up and down glare. He had felt Thomas was having one of those days, it was pretty clear; but he hadn’t thought it was that bad. Thomas was stubborn as hell. Sometimes, James would spend the whole day talking about something, giving him logical reasoning of why he should listen to him, and still, he would never back down. Gee, whatever triggered this, it must’ve been bad… he thought, feeling his heart aching with concern. That is, if there was anything that triggered this.

There were days when James simply remembered a stupid thing he had done or said during his years as a student, and it wouldn’t leave him be for the rest of the day. He didn’t need to pick an old notebook or to see Patsy studying for an upcoming exam or driving Polly to some classmate’s house for a school project, sometimes it just… happened. And he had to deal with it until the sudden wave of sadness decided to leave him.

But Thomas was also there. It was fair he now was there for him as well.

But, alas, James hadn’t built such tall brick walls around himself, unlike Thomas had…
“I think I heard Maria coming back from the grocery shop” he commented, casually. “Do you want me to pick something to eat?”

“Go yourself, I’ve got work to do” answered Thomas, not even meeting his glare.

“It’s lunch break” James informed, trying not to pressure too much.

“In this office, the whole day is a break” said Thomas, laughing half-heartedly.

“Well, aren’t you hungry?” insisted James. “You didn’t have breakfast this morning, and I haven’t seen you eat anything since last night”

“Not very hungry today” was Thomas’ simple response.

Oh, shoot, this is the point of no return, thought James. One thing was being absent-minded; one thing was to not want to talk; but another very different thing was not eating anything. James had lived this before. But those times were quite different; James would only go to Thomas’ house some days and he’d notice the evasive attitude, the strange demeanour, and the absence at the dining table. Back then, he didn’t mind. They were eight years apart, and James thought Thomas was more than mature enough to know how to take care of himself; and, if he wanted to spend the whole day locked up in his bedroom doing whatever, it was his problem.

Nowadays, friendship changed everything. Even if they hadn’t been living together, James cherished Thomas’ friendship above the rest. They were few, but, among all his friends, James never had a doubt that Thomas was, somehow, the most important, though the newest add-on of the list.

He bit his bottom lip, his hand on the knob and his eyes fixated on his friend. Pressuring Thomas was out of discussion, it would make matters worse; making him eat would end badly as well, and James wasn’t up to do so. If Thomas needed space when he was fine, he needed even more space when he was feeling bad and down. James threw a look at his left hand, seeing the phone still there. He let it on the desk and frowned slightly when Thomas didn’t raise his glare before the small thump.

“I’m gonna grab something to eat” he explained. “Sure you don’t want anything?” he tried one more time.

“Affirmative” answered Thomas, and James felt how his right hand was shaking the pen more than before.

“Not even a mug of coffee?”

“Sure, go ahead…” Thomas obliged.

That was enough for James. “Alright, then. I’ll be back in a few” he promised, before closing the door at his backs.
James was briefly distracted when Laurens stormed off the breaking room, his face red from clear anger, reflected in his irises. James pressed himself against Thomas’ office door and let the HR manager to pass him by, not wanting to be in the middle of whatever had happened now. Once Peggy’s office door was slum shut by Laurens, James let himself breathe a sigh of pure relief.

*Let's keep things cool today.* He thought to himself.

He walked into the break room. Maria and Alexander were talking about something, animatedly, while Aaron read some book. By its side, rested an unwrapped gift-wrap, and it clicked inside James’ brain.

“Ah, Burr, happy birthday” he said immediately.

Aaron was startled at first and, once his mind had adjusted back to reality, he smiled. “Thank you, Madison”

“Sorry I don’t have anything for…”

“Don’t worry” interrupted Aaron.

James would. Both he and Aaron knew.

Madison looked at his right, seeing Alexander and Maria had resumed their conversation as if none interruption happened in the first place. James bit the inside of cheek while staring at Alexander. He had Thomas’ permission, but, due to his emotionally state, James didn’t know if listen to him or wait until his friend felt better…

The date burnt inside his brain and James felt the pressure of time running past him, and he hadn’t had a chance to grab some of it and keep it to himself. Whatever, the sooner, the better.

“Hamilton” he called, interrupting the conversation between the CFO and the receptionist once again. “Can I talk to you for a second?”

Alexander shrugged. “Yes, what is it?”

“In private?” asked Madison, failing at sounding demanding.

“Alright” obliged Hamilton, after a brief pause.

He bid farewell to Maria, who shook her hand with a tiny smile, and focus her whole
attention on one of the sweets Lafayette had bought previously, devouring it with hunger. Aaron lifted his glare a bit, and moved his book a bit away from her, not wanting his book to be stained by some crumb.

Madison then stopped at the doorframe, trying to think rapidly of a place where they could talk in private. The second floor, he thought, immediately. No one goes there, unless is for going to the washroom. And sometimes, they choose the pub instead...

He turned to the staircase and started to go upstairs, startling Hamilton a bit for the sudden movement. He muttered something like an apology, but it didn’t reach Hamilton’s ears as he had intended. When both were on the second floor, they walked until the end of the hallway, where a large window stood a few centimetres from the floor; the restrooms doors at its right and the blank wall at its left.

Well, what used to be a blank wall. Madison and Hamilton both stopped in their tracks to look at the painting of the tree that now adorned that part of the wall. Hamilton squinted his eyes when he noticed a little bird flying to the leaves and a little squirrel at the foot of the trunk. Madison also followed his glare and stared at the drawing with his mind completely blank.

A sigh from Hamilton made him come back to the real world. The CFO was with his back turned to the drawing and with both arms crossed across his chest, waiting patiently. Madison began playing with his hands in a useless attempt to warm them up a bit.

“Do I need to make sure there are not any wires in this hallway or have you done that before leading me here?” joked Hamilton, after seeing his nervousness.

Madison laughed slightly. “Angelica and her mobile are in the pub, so we’re safe” And both laughed at that.

“What happened?” asked Hamilton, when the tension had lifted up considerably.

“Lucy called earlier” James answered, feeling a bit more secure. “Thomas must go to sign the new lease on the ninth” he explained.

“Alright. Good, we have finally a date” commented Hamilton, nodding to himself. “Did she tell where or that information would be delivered on the same day?”

James let out a small laugh. “At her house. I can send you the address later”

“Yes, that’d be nice…”
For a moment, James hesitated about if leaving or staying. There wasn’t more he had to talk about with Hamilton, and now, he was feeling stupid for having lead him all the way there. But, seriously, the gossiping in that company was inhuman. Hamilton had lowered his glare and was worriedly quiet. Yes, time to go.

“Well…” he began, awkwardly. “I’m gonna…”

“Madison” Hamilton interrupted. In fact, James wouldn’t be surprised if he hadn’t heard him talking at all in the first place. “Apologies for sounding too straightforward or rude, but…”

“As if you ever sound as anything but” commented James, before he could be able to stop himself.

He flinched at Hamilton’s raised eyebrow. And James cursed his own name and his damned social ineptitude.

“But” continued Hamilton, thankfully as if he had said nothing at all. “if living with Lucy is such a nightmare, why don’t you try to look for some other place to live?”

James this time couldn’t stop the huff. “Hamilton, if you find someone who wouldn’t mind having two grown-up men in debt and two underage girls as tenants, let us know”

“Checked”

It was supposed to sound like a joke, and, though James was never very good at making jokes thanks to his strange sense of humour, he knew that sentence couldn’t be heard as something serious. Hamilton pushed himself away from the wall and was about to walk away. James hesitated if he should stop him and interrogate him any further or just let him be. Maybe he had misunderstood Hamilton’s sarcasm? Wouldn’t be the first nor the last time.

All of a sudden, a figure emerged from the staircase and ran into the restroom, startling them both. Whatever thing James had planned to ask Hamilton vanished from his brain as soon as he noticed, with his sharp sense of sight, that the person had been Thomas, and, especially, when he heard the rapid gasps that came through the other side of the door.

James didn’t lose a second to immediately grab the knob with the clear intention to get in and help his friend out. A tap on his shoulder was able to stop him.

“If he needs to go home and take a few days off, you know you both can. Washington already said he doesn’t mind you using my free days, and I’m sure he won’t mind if you can’t come until next week. You are ones of the only few who actually get some job done around here”
James nodded at Hamilton’s words, slightly surprised at how calm and serious he had sounded. A gag sound made them both flinch and frown in concern. James was about to excuse himself and rush in, but, again, Hamilton’s harsh tone stopped him and had his complete attention.

“Madison, I promise you both that, as long as I’m in charge of this, Jefferson will not lose his daughters. Less to a woman like Lucy. Alright?”

Again, Madison could do anything but nod.

“Good” said Hamilton, and then walked right in the direction of the staircase, hands inside his pockets. “If he’s not feeling well, drag him home” he said, now with a more mocking tone.

James didn’t give him any mind. He only opened the door and locked it behind his back when he saw Thomas sitting on the floor, back against the wall, hand on the throat and eyes shut closed. He could hear water going down the drain as the tap was on in the first sink out of the four that were lined up at his left.

James would have never thought one of those days could get this bad. And Hamilton’s offer echoed in his brain as he knelt beside his friend to help him get the anxiety and the panic under control.

October 19th, 1987

It had been a month since Peter’s passing and the Jefferson had come back to almost normal. Jennie had to return to college, and the night prior they said their goodbyes. Thomas tried to drown the urge of begging her to stay a bit longer, to stay until tomorrow morning so she could drive him back to the boarding school. But he decided against it. His sister had already enough problems because she refused to go back to college when October arrived and because she was the only one who stood up against their mother’s wishes of making him go back to the boarding school a week after their father’s death.

Who else would have done it, anyways? Lucy, who was five and barely understood why Dad didn’t wake up when everything happened? Anna and Randolph, who were just two and didn’t even know that they would never be able to know their father? Consuelo, who was too busy taking care of
those three children – and of him, as well, what was the point in denying it – despite her advanced age?

Thomas tightened the grip on his backpack and hugged it closer against his chest. No, no, don’t go there… he told himself, repeating the sentence as a mantra when he felt his throat closing slowly, turning the air into a precious commodity. Or rather, reminding him how precious it was to humankind.

No matter how hard he tried, the truth refused to soften his grip around his brain: his father was gone, and, soon, his older sister would leave him as well to live a better live somewhere else, far away from the family’s house. Without them, who was going to stand up for him? Who was he going to turn to? Not his mother, that was for sure. She hadn’t even bothered in being sincere and telling him how his father’s health had gone worse since he left the house in September to join the goddamned boarding school, which silhouette he could distinguish now in the distance. Dammit, Jane hadn’t even called to the school to inform somebody of his father’s condition, she only dared to pick the phone to call and inform of his death, letting some teacher tell him in her place.

If it hadn’t been for Jennie, Thomas would have never left the school to visit his house. He wasn’t there on time to say some last words to his father, or to even attend his funeral, but he could spend some not-so-good time in the house he was raised in, in the house he spent the majority of his good memories with his father. Thomas knew his sister’s intentions were good, but once Thomas put a foot inside that house, he didn’t feel welcome anymore.

The walls loomed over him, each corner of each room possessed some memory that, in its day, was comforting, but now let a bitter taste in his tongue. The silence spoke volumes in each family meal. Jennie was the only one he let inside his room, the only one who he wanted to talk to, along with Consuelo, leveraging the few times she was sent by his mother to let him know he had to get out to eat breakfast, lunch or dinner. Whatever it was. Thomas always had the blinds closed. The darkness helped him to get over his endless headache. He didn’t bother in looking at the clock. Time lost its meaning.

Thomas hadn’t talked to anyone from the boarding school in all that time, either, he now thought about that. Well, who was he going to talk to? It wasn’t like he had a lot of friends who he could turn to or some nice classmate who would inform him about the projects and exams they had or were going to have. His stomach was spinning in circles, and he felt the need to vomit just there, without caring about staining his mother’s backseat. He contained himself, for Consuelo’s sake. The poor woman would be the one cleaning his mess and she would receive a reprimand for not ‘taking good care of him’.

“We’re here, Thomas” said the housekeeper, with a cheerful tone. Another useless attempt to cheer him up.
Would anything cheer him up ever again? Thomas had spent a whole month feeling nothing at all, barely talking or eating. He was starting not to feel human, and that was so scary…

“Everything fine?”

Thomas lifted his eyes and met Consuelo’s dark and tired eyes. For a moment, he wanted to shake his head and say that… No. No. Nothing was fine. And he was afraid nothing would ever be fine again…

“Yeah” he managed to say, while shrugging one shoulder.

Good one, Thomas.

Consuelo smiled sympathetically at him. “Hey, before you even notice, it would be December, and you’ll be home again to celebrate Christmas with the who… With the family” she corrected herself on time.

Thomas looked at her, stared straight at her. Hand prepared to open the door of the car and walked into the large and intimidating building at their rights. Consuelo had good intentions, Thomas could tell by only looking at her and hearing her soothing and motherly tone, that tone he would always associate with his housekeeper instead of his own mother. That was why Thomas literally bit his tongue. He had learned to control himself, but sometimes he still slid and talk without thinking first. He flinched a bit at the pain, but that was better than blurt out that thinking about going back to that house and with those people (sweet and good-hearted Jennie not included) was the last thing that would cheer him up and help him to cope in that stupid boarding school full of preppies.

“Yeah, you’re right” he said instead, and then jumped out the car.

He didn’t dare to turn around for waving goodbye, though he knew he wouldn’t see the woman for almost two months. Thomas didn’t think he had it in him to look at the pain in her eyes.

Don’t change that attitude of yours a little bit.
Nobody is gonna love you if you don’t change a bit.
Yeah? Well, maybe now that I’m dumb inside that won’t affect me that much…

Thomas had walked to the first class he had that morning crest-fallen. Of course, it had to be with her, with his tutor, an annoying and bitter bitch who thought to be always right just because she was upper in the chain of power of the boarding school. But, when you’re a student, everyone is more than you in that stupid chain.

Thomas trotted until he reached the classroom, clicking his tongue when he saw the door closed and all the lights on. He checked his watch. It was only 8.01. They never got in there before 8.05, and they sure as hell had never been prepared for starting the class before 8.15…

He stopped right in front of the door, gasping though he hadn’t run at all. He raised a trembling fist, wanting to knock. He threw a rapid glare through the window at his left, half-opened, hearing the distant chatting of the teenagers that were inside. Thomas stood there, fist up, glaring through the window like an idiot for whatever time until finally someone spotted him. As soon as their eyes locked, the other teenager called the attention of the other two that were sitting with him and pointed at his direction. The three laughed cruelly, trying not to call the attention of the teacher…

Thomas frowned. Idiots, he thought, managing to finally knock on the door. Wait, why are they sitting together? Miss Theresa would never let them do that. He felt his heart pounding harshly against his chest, making him a bit dizzy, all his heat dropping down and letting his hands and whole body completely cold and shaking underneath his coat. He flinched and gasped when the door in front of him swung open, revealing the chubby and short body of his tutor. Her frown was just as he remembered it…

“Well, Jefferson, but if you’re still part of my class!” she commented, sarcastically. “Would’ve fooled me”

Thomas opened his shaking lips, trying to come out with a response, but nothing came out his now pale mouth. Theresa’s frown grew deeper and she moved away, to let him enter.

“Come on, and don’t be late again” she ordered and eyed him with disappointment as he walked in.

“B-But it’s o-only 8.03…” Thomas tried to defend himself, and he cursed himself mentally when he heard his lisping. Not this crap again…

Theresa closed the door while she sighed, exhausted. “We’ve been coming in class at 7.50 on Mondays because of the project, Jefferson”

“Pr-Project?” he repeated, feeling his heart beating too quick for his liking.
“Yes, project. Didn’t you call some classmate to know what we’ve been doing in class while you were gone?” she asked, arms in akimbo, and now facing him.

“Um… I cou-couldn’t… I… I don’t have…”

“The world doesn’t stop moving just because you can’t come to class, Jefferson” Theresa interrupted sharply. “You’re fourteen, you’re old enough to pick up the phone, call someone and take some notes. You’re not going to have special treatment, Jefferson”

She passed him by and went to sit on her desk, concluding their ‘conversation’. Thomas frowned and clenched his now frozen hands. Sure if my mother paid you a few more than the rest in June, you wouldn’t hesitate in giving me ‘special treatment’ despite if I studied and worked hard or not, he thought, bitterly.

Thomas looked around the classroom. Everybody had his own group. They were talking among each other, some trying to contain laughter, some writing what the other was dictating them… Each class had a maximum of 24 or 26 students. In Thomas’ class, there were 25, counting him. He was very surprised at how alone he was able to feel with 24 companions by his side.

Hesitating, he made his way to the teacher’s desk, his cheeks flushing with embarrassment when he realised he had been standing in the middle of the class, watching them all working. Thomas stopped in front of Theresa, who was reading and marking some exams. He waited until she realised him, but he felt the teasing glares of his workmates in the back of his neck. Imaginary or not, he didn’t want to bear it any longer.

“Miss Theresa?” he said, exaggerating the sound of the ‘S’. It was better than the lisping. Put yourself together, man, he told himself. Theresa raised her glare and arched one eyebrow at him. “What?”

“I’m… In which group am I?” he asked, changing his weight from one foot to another, unable to stay still. Theresa half closed her eyes. “Jefferson, the groups were chosen by you” she explained.

I wasn’t here, I didn’t choose a shit… he thought, trying to control himself and not frown in her direction. That would make everything worse.

“I’m sure there is some group who is lacking someone. Go and ask”

Thomas never wanted to hit someone so bad, not matter if they were a woman, a man, older or younger. He just needed to slap her and hope that, with that, her two neurons made contact and...
Thomas made his way to his school desk, completely empty. He wouldn’t risk letting a single book there after the first year he spent there, where everything was stolen from him if he missed one class. He let his backpack there and looked around himself once again. He looked at the platform of the classroom.

It’s easy, he told himself, just go there and asked aloud if some group is incomplete. Yeah, right, that was perfect… except from the ‘asking aloud’ part. Thomas swallowed and hesitated about going there or not. He tried to gather enough courage…

He ended up asking, group by group, in a tiny voice, if they needed someone more in their group. He could hear cruel giggling but tried to pay them no mind. That was, until the mocking sound reached Theresa’s ears.

“Allright, everybody, which group needs someone else?” she asked, out loud.

“We’re all groups of three, teacher” explained one.

Theresa raised one eyebrow. “What?”

“We’re 25 in the class, teacher” the same person explained again.

“Ah, it’s true… That means someone always exceeds” she commented, not impressed or affected by it at all.

And that leftover is always me, thought Thomas. And a brief flashback of their family came to mind. Why was he always the spare wherever he went?

“Allright, then…” said Theresa, after a small pause. “Then, who wants Jefferson in their group?”

Oh, shit, not that…

Thomas hated group projects, but he hated them even more when he couldn’t find someone to work with and the teachers, in their fucking infinite wisdom, decided to ask aloud if someone wanted the poor shy kid who couldn’t fend for himself. Not even when he was fucking fourteen years old…
He didn’t dare to look up, he maintained his glare glued to his feet. He hadn’t had friends in his class. To be honest, he didn’t have friends in the whole building, and he wasn’t even exaggerating there. He spent his days inside the library or in his dorm and didn’t even talk to his roommate, who was way more outgoing than Thomas and didn’t even go to the same class as he did.

“Okay, good. Jefferson, work with them, then” Theresa said, taking him out of his thoughts.

Thomas raised his head, in time to see who had raised their hands. He frowned at first, seeing who it was, but then reminded himself that they were the only ones who accepted him in their group, and he had to be thankful for that.

He went back to his desk, took his chair and walked to the group of three people who were muttering among each other. Thomas couldn’t say he hated them, but he didn’t like them either. Something about those three guys set off red flags inside his mind. But they were also the coolest kids in class and in their year in general, so, Thomas tried to convince himself he was misjudging them because of his damned social anxiety. They had accepted to make him be part of their group at last hour, he owed them.

A fucking shit is what I owed those stuck-ups…

Thomas didn’t know how or when this happened and escalated so quickly, why that memory decided to visit him today. But, again, why wouldn’t it? Everything else had already conspired against him already, it was a matter of time for one of those memories to come back, flashing inside his head like a reminder. A reminder of how stupid I am.

He took the document he was reading, re-starting it for the zillionth time that day. The words were a blur before his eyes, and Thomas had to spend at least one fucking minute trying to focus his vision. When he finally could understand what was written in that piece of paper, it seemed easier to ignore the lump in his throat and the thick air of the room.

Fuck, Thomas, put it together, he condemned himself, gritting his teeth in contained fury and breathing through clenched teeth.

Alright, so… Where was he? Gosh, let’s go back to the beginning. Aha. Aha. Yeah. Yeah,
he kinda remembered reading something like that… Yep, oh, yeah, there it was! The little trigger asshole! The printed word seemed to be looking back at him with mockery, despite how ridiculous that sounded.

*Projector,* that was what was written there. *Pro-jector.* For some kind of messed up joke of the Universe, he had missed the fucking final ‘O’ and ‘R’, and his brain processed the word as ‘project’, sending him thirty years back. Since when a simple word of nine words – well, seven, as he had imagined – could have so much power over him?

*Okay, now, it’s projector. Projector. The projector must be fixed before the next meeting… For a presentation, maybe? What else would we want a projector for? Gosh, why is this room so hot when it’s fucking February? Alright, who cares… Fucking Laurens must be fucking the heater up…*

Thomas grabbed the neck of his shirt and moved it away from his neck, but the suffocating sensation didn’t go away. He dropped the paper and the pen he had been holding, deciding it would be better if he took off his coat. He lowered his head (*Is the room spinning now as well or what?*) and proceeded to unbutton the coat…

*Why the fuck are my hands shaking if I’m hot?* Thomas fought against the first button, groaning when the damned thing rebel against his better efforts to unbutton it. Thomas cursed a few times, and then slammed his hands against the desk, now gasping for air. He looked at the window at his right and got up abruptly to go and open it and maybe breathe some goddamned air…

Thomas stumbled till he reached the window and breathed against the glass, feeling his chest heavy all of a sudden. Goodness, was the room getting smaller? He dared to look up and… For the love of Christ, the ceiling was coming down, and the walls were getting closer… And yet, the solitude of the room was the heaviest weight and the most suffocating sensation. Didn’t James say he would be back in a few with his coffee and some food?

*Where the fuck did he go to collect the coffee? To Colombia?* He cursed, biting his bottom lip and trying to even his breathing through his nose. Nope, not working. He opened his mouth and took in a few rapid and sharp breaths. Now, his legs were trembling beneath him along with his hands, holding him by grabbing the jamb of the window. He lowered his head, in a last attempt to control his breathing and his thoughts and convince himself that the room wasn’t going to crash him.

Again, it only made it worse as a sudden sensation of vomiting took over him. At first, he tried to convince himself that it was just a lump, like all the others he had had all his life, but he couldn’t believe himself when he gagged a few times and had to literally cover his mouth to prevent himself from staining the floor.
Not controlling your childish fears, though you’re 44, is ‘fine’.
But don’t make the rest clean your messes.
You’ve already bothered Madison enough.

Well, the last fucking thing he needed. And the worst part was that his mother, that voice or whatever the fuck that was anyways, was absolutely right.

Not knowing how, Thomas managed to walk to the door, swinging it open and ran upstairs, not seeing his surroundings. The stairs seemed endless until he finally saw firm and steady ground and he sprinted to the end of the hallway, the air caught in his throat, and opened the last door of the hallway. He thought he had seen someone else standing there, maybe two persons, but he couldn’t care less.

He threw the door closed behind his backs and threw himself to the first sink by the door. At first, nothing happened, he just gasped for breath a few more times.

*See? Nothing.*
*Always overreacting.*

That didn’t make the lack of oxygen any better… Thomas knew he was overreacting, thank you very much, he didn’t need some stupid voice to tell him and taunt him because of it.

He tried to lift his head from the sink, to look at his reflection and, maybe, after he saw what a show he was making just for a stupid memory, he would put himself together and go back to work. But, as he was trying to open his eyes to do so, another flash happened inside his mind. He had been in this position. To be more exact, he had suffered something like this at one point, and it was on the same day that stupid project had to be presented in front of the whole class, and he barely had managed to explain himself correctly, being on his own on the platform as the group had kicked him out, with the teacher’s blessing, because…

*Because you’re a fucking useless. You had to do one thing and you couldn’t do it. You know what kind of persons don’t know how to work in a team? The conceited ones. Don’t change that attitude of yours a little bit. Nobody is gonna love you if you don’t change a bit. You’re gonna end up alo…*

His vomiting interrupted his thoughts. And Thomas didn’t know what felt worse. He vomited
a couple of times, not throwing anything out as he hadn’t eaten anything since dinner last night. He
coughed a couple of times, still unable to fill his lungs with enough oxygen. Out of instinct, he turned
the tap on and let the water wash away the odour. He gasped a few more times; his heart rate
increasing, his beating deafening him, his legs shaking until he couldn’t hold himself on his own feet.

Thomas let himself sit on the floor and moved only to have his back against the wall. He
reached one hand to his throat, feeling it closing more and more. He closed his eyes, not wanting to
remember anything anymore, and he would have clapped his ears as well if he wasn’t too busy
cressing his throat with one hand, as if with that he was going to open it again, and placing the other
hand upon his chest, feeling his heart beating against his ribcage.

He didn’t even notice when somebody else entered the restroom, locking the door behind
their back. He didn’t mind if they had knelt beside him, and he thought he heard their voice in the
distant, but he couldn’t care less about what they were telling him. Couldn’t he panic in peace, gosh?

He felt the person grabbing the hand he had on his throat and placing it against their chest.
Faintly, Thomas could feel them breathing exaggeratedly calmly, and he, feeling a bit envious of
such calmness, tried his best to imitate it.

“Yes, that is, you’re doing great” a soothing voice congratulated him. “Come on. In… Out…
There…”

It took him a couple more of in and out breaths to finally recognise the voice as James’. Well,
better than solitude, that’s for sure… Thomas felt James rubbing his back in an attempt to give him
some kind of physical comfort along with his encouraging words.

“Can you hear me?” asked James

And the concern of his voice was so clear it hurt. Now, Thomas wished his heartbeat kept deafening
him. It was better than knowing he was bothering one of the only two persons who put up with him
for reasons he didn’t even understand.

“Thomas? You don’t need to talk if you don’t want to, but nod or shake your head, can you do that
for me?”

Thomas nodded.
“Good. Can you hear me?” he repeated.

Thomas let out a long sigh before answering. “I wouldn’t have nodded if I wasn’t able to”

“Well, you are being sarcastic. You’re fine” tried to joke James, but Thomas felt how forced he had sounded.

*You don’t only bother him but are also unable to show some gratitude.*

*My goodness, take a break, annoying piece of…* he tried to curse, feeling his heartbeat increasing and his breath catching in his throat. *Fuck, Thomas, put it together, you’re a grown man!*

“Thomas… Thomas, breathe…”

*Easier saying it than doing it…* He coughed a couple of times, thinking maybe that would help him. He must have rolled his eyes or let out a groan of complaint, because he felt James putting him a bit closer.

“Can you feel my heartbeat?” he asked, gently.

Thomas tried to focus on his right hand, on the top of the left side of James’ chest. He felt the calm rhythm of his friend’s heart and nodded.

“Good. Try to match it with your breath. Alright?”

James took in and out a few breaths slowly and exaggeratedly again, and Thomas imitated him, following his heartbeat as some kind of light guide in a dark tunnel.

Finally, he reached the end, and Thomas could open his eyes again, seeing a bit of clarity after what felt like an eternity. He inspired and sighed a few times; moved his fingers and looked around until his vision had adjusted completely to the restroom. He took his hand away from James’ shirt – now completely wrinkled – and placed it on his lap while he buried the left one in his curly hair. He began to feel the thumping sensation of a headache on the left side of his forehead. Just what he needed right now.

He threw a hateful glare to the sink, still with the tap on and the water running down the
drain. James got up immediately, and turned it off, sinking the room into silence. And right now, that was the worst sound of all for Thomas’ ears. He dared to look in James’ direction with his peripherical, seeing his friend was looking at the floor with a thoughtful expression.

*Probably he’s wondering why he’s still standing your nonsense.*

Unwillingly, Thomas had to admit the voice was right. He had been thinking that for a long time now, without the need of that stupid voice telling him.

“Can you stand up?” asked James, looking down at him.

Thomas took a moment, rethinking everything that happened and that led him to this position, to this moment. He just misread one fucking word. For the love of God, how messed up was he?

“Thomas?”

James jumped a bit afraid in his spot when Thomas stretched out his left arm to grab the sink and got to his feet. *Bad idea.* The sudden movement made him a bit dizzy for a moment, and he had to press his back against the wall again. James was at his side in less than a second, hands prepared to catch him if he fell or stumble.

“Geez, Thomas, are you okay?” he asked, worried. “Don’t get up like that! You were hyperventilating a minute ago!”

“Don’t say, I barely noticed it…” snapped Thomas, taking his right arm away from his reach.

*Yes, push him away.
As you have so many people to turn to…
Why taking care of the only one who still bears you presence?*

“Thomas, I’m trying to help” said James, and Thomas could tell he was frowning at him. He was too scared to face him right now to confirm if he was right. “Are you feeling better? Do you wanna sit down again?”

“No” he answered. “No, I just want to go back to my office and…”

“There’s no way in hell I’m gonna let you spend the rest of the day locked in an office, Thomas” interrupted James, sharply.
“Didn’t know I needed your permission” commented Thomas, mockingly.

James’ eyes shone with lighting of rage, then. “Well, if you’re not gonna take care of yourself, somebody will have to”

“I’m alright, James…”

“What triggered it?”

It was very direct, and it shouldn’t have surprised Thomas the way it did. He used to be that straightforward when it happened to James. But still, he flinched, and he felt his cheeks slowly heating up. He didn’t want to say it aloud. Dammit, he didn’t want to even think of this anymore. He just wanted this day to end already.

“Nothing” he mumbled. “Let’s go home” he added, not giving his friend time to interrogate him any further.

James’ eyebrows raised as much as they could. “Are you going home for real?” he asked, incredulously.

Thomas shrugged. “You weren’t going to stop until I obliged, were you?”

“Well, no, but…”

“Then, take it” he interrupted sharply.

He pushed himself away from the wall and walked to the door…

Don’t say ‘thank you’ or anything like that, what for?

…unlocked it and opening it more violently than necessary. He thought he saw James flinching a bit at his mannerisms but paid him no mind as he exited the room and went directly down the hall. James soon followed him, after closing the door gently.

Why would you apologise to anyone?
You’ve always been very spoiled.
There is a reason why everyone ends up leaving you.

Hamilton was already prepared to write a written proof that they left for justifiable reasons and were going to take the day off. Not a good sign. For what Thomas was starting to remember, there were two persons when he ran into the restroom as a loose bull. If Hamilton was already waiting for them to excuse themselves for the day, it meant that he was the other person standing at
the end of the hallway with James.

Just his luck.

Now all the people in the office would have a few laughs at his cost.

And he was going to think about it all day, imagining what they could be saying in his absence.

Nothing pretty.

I know...

As if you deserved any better.

I know...

Thomas didn’t look at James on the way back home. He didn’t dare to look at the bother and annoyance in his eyes. He tried to avoid eye contact all day. He locked himself in his workroom and then, inside his bedroom, trying to erase the constant nag of looking in the direction of his first diary.

He didn’t leave the room even when it was dinnertime. James would make an excuse for his daughters; surely, something about him being busy with work or something among those lines.

If you’re not going to spend time with your two only daughters, at least go and tell them yourself.
And then you complain about me...
You’re just like me, like it or not.

Thomas closed the book he was trying to read, turned off his lamp and went to sleep at nine. He spent the whole night sleeping and waking up every couple of hours, feeling more tired each time.

He just wanted to drift away and not think about how true that last statement was…
“This is odd”

“What is it?”

“There’s money missing”


The next morning, Thomas woke up and saw James on the dining table, writing and reading some documents. Some tension had left. Or, at least, Thomas felt it that way. He held to that to not going back. He had woken up tired but feeling a bit better than yesterday.

He hadn’t heard his mother’s voice criticising every move he made, so that was a good sign. Right?

“What do you mean?” asked Thomas, while pouring some milk in a mug, as he did all mornings.

“The numbers do not add up as they are supposed to” explained James, frowning at the paper. 

“Maybe you did one operation wrong?” he tried to suggest.

“No, no, I even took Peggy’s bed into account”

“But didn’t Peggy buy that bed the last month?”

“Yeah, these are the accounts from January”

“… We’re 7th, James…”

“So? Adams gives his things two months late, at least, and nobody complains”

“We all do”

“Yeah, but behind his backs. I, as long as I don’t hear the critic, am happy”

“… … Whatever”

James sighed and ordered the papers. “I’ll talk it with Hamilton today during the meeting”

Ah, true, it was Wednesday. Thomas’ stomach turned. Normally, he could handle the meetings. He was more than used to them, there weren’t too many people in the company and it was easier to act secure in front of his workmates, no matter if they were gathered or not. But after the shame of his actions from yesterday, he didn’t think he could handle the weekly meeting, no matter how much tea he would drink.
He was back to the real world when he saw James waiting patiently in front of him, briefcase in hand.

“Excuse me, what?” he said, shaking his head.

“I asked if you had anything to give or to talk about today” James repeated, calmly.

“I…”

He felt a lump going up his throat. Really? Just for remembering the word?

“Thom…”

“The papers I was reading yesterday” he interrupted, with a sharper tone than he intended. “They talked about some items that needed to be fixed or purchased for the improvement of personnel’s comfort” he explained.

“Ah, alright” nodded James, blinking and eyeing him carefully. “Are those documents here or did you leave them on your desk?”

“I think I didn’t take them with me” And I didn’t finish reading them, actually…

Alright, then, I’ll take care of it, then”

“What?”

“You’re not going to work today” informed James, serious.

“James, I’m fine already. It was a one-off moment…” he tried to argue.

“One hell of a one-off moment, if you ask me” his friend interrupted him. “Thomas, you were sick and unable to breathe”

It wasn’t said with malice. Not that James would ever say it with such bad intention. But the reminder burnt in Thomas’ brain and stung as a slap in his infamous pride.

“Take the day off” proceeded James, unaware of his discomfort.

It isn’t like they won’t be able to get some work done without you.

Well, hello, there, did you oversleep, little nagger? Fuck, it was going to be one of those
damn days today as well, for what it seemed. One shameful day was enough…

“Oh, okay” he obliged, shrugging, and took a sip of his now cold milk.

James looked at him for a moment. “Do you want me to stay with you?” he asked.

“No, go to work. I don’t want you to miss work for me, thank you, he wanted to say. “No” he said, instead, sounding totally uninterested.

A frown spread across James’ forehead.

_The day has just started, and you already offended him._
_Why are you so disagreeable?_

“Alright, then” said James, coughing uncomfortably. “I’ll take the girls to school”

“Okay”

Thomas watched as his friend made his way to the staircase, throwing a few glares in his direction. Thomas did his best to ignore them.

He greeted his daughters once they were prepared to leave and had gone down to take something to eat on their way to school. Patsy was oddly quiet, and looked in his direction a couple of times, observing him. Polly seemed to do the same, and Thomas would have sworn his youngest daughter was acting strange, without her natural morning joy.

_You’re making them uncomfortable because of your problems._
_Grow up already, Thomas._

He almost missed James’ goodbye as he and the girls walked to the door, talking among themselves quietly. He waved one hand in their direction, and Polly smiled sheepishly at him before stepping out.

“Call me if you need anything” James said, before hesitating if leaving without another word or not.

“Will do” said Thomas, automatically.

“Good…”
Awkwardly, James closed the door.

Thomas heard the car driving away from the house.

Well, he now had a few things to torment his mind with.

Another happy day.

For some kind of heavenly mercy, Thomas managed to spend the day busy with other things that weren’t his pestering thoughts. He entertained his mind reading the texts that he received from Angelica. All were audios from the meeting, in which Thomas could distinguish some words among all the screaming, along with Washington’s rocking chair in the background. Angelica’s contained laugh was also very noticeable when the CEO slammed his hands against the table, silencing the whole room.

He spent the afternoon reading some books, cautiously choosing them, in case they talked or were about something that would trigger his memories. His first diary still caught his attention, and Thomas had to drown his urges to grab it and read whatever he had written in there more than a decade ago.

Miraculously, he managed to sleep when the silence and the printed words began to overwhelm him, and a headache appeared. No nightmares or some repressed memory visited him during that time, and his mother’s critics didn’t bother him for the rest of the day until James finally arrived home with his daughters and the house was filled with noise and chatting.

Patsy spent the whole afternoon inside her bedroom, ‘doing homework’ (actually talking and reading on her phone), as well as Polly (actually drawing). Thomas pretended to be asleep a couple of hours more, not wanting to feel that tension again. Slowly, his headache began to return, and Thomas felt forced to leave the bed and get out his bedroom, before his mother could reprimand him for ignoring his two (remaining) daughters.

Thomas didn’t think he could handle that. Not after the two days he had lived. Not ever.
He walked down the stairs, and a smell of soup filled his nostrils as soon as he was in his midway.

“Good evening” greeted James, when he entered the kitchen. “How are you feeling?”
“Fine” he answered, automatically. “What about you? Did a murder finally occur?”
James laughed. “No. But I feared today was gonna be the day. How do you…?”
“Angelica”

“Why am I not surprised” James rolled his eyes. “Adams said one thing and then everything got out of control”

Thomas grimaced when he heard the name of his once-friend. If he wasn’t glad to have missed work today, now he surely was. He would say ‘God bless James and his exceptional sixth sense’ if he believed in anything of the sorts.

“It was kind impressive” kept retelling James, serving one plate of soup. “When I saw Hamilton didn’t come to work today, I thought we were going to have a calm morning. But it seems that building has some curse or something”

Thomas arched one eyebrow. “Hamilton didn’t show up to work today?”
“I didn’t believe at first either” agreed James, walking to the dining table and setting the plate there. “But it seems he has something to do today, and asked for this day off”
“But if the only thing Hamilton has to do is work” tried to joke Thomas.
“That’s what I thought”

After a few nasty comments between he and Patsy, Thomas felt calmer. Maybe he hadn’t messed it up with their daughters that much if Patsy still tried to put up a fight with him and Polly added her two cents from time to time. Things felt like normal again, and the fact that this time Thomas hadn’t heard any critics inside his brain after a few slips-ups helped a lot. Finally, those kinds of days seemed to have reached the end.

Thomas offered to stay the night up with James, helping him with his work, and prepared a few mugs of coffee to help them get through the night. Well, more James than himself, as he had
slept all afternoon and wasn’t feeling sleepy in the slightest.

When Thomas had to tap his friend on the shoulder for the fifth time, he decided it was time to call it a night.

“Why don’t you go to sleep? You can always let these on Hamilton’s paperwork. He’d barely notice if it is his part of the work or not, as long as it keeps him busy” he commented.

James shrugged. “I’m already two weeks late to deliver this, for a couple of days more, nothing will happen”

Thomas got up and went to wash the two mugs before going to sleep himself. Maybe he could get to fall asleep while reading something more. A small bang made him look back, hearing his friend cursing under his breath as he knelt to collect the items and papers he had dropped accidentally.

Thomas turned the tap off and went to his aid. “I was thinking how odd it was for you not to drop something in all day” he joked.

“How funny” said James, upset. He looked at one black pen with a raised eyebrow. “Where did this come from?” he asked, aloud.

“The most probable is that it came from one Staples”

“We’re comical tonight, huh?” said James, eyes half-closed. “Oh, it’s Burr’s” he said, after reading the surname on the pen. “I helped him with a few things before leaving. I must’ve taken it by accident”

Thomas had finished taking the papers and a few pencils that lay on the floor when he finally looked at the pen his friend put on the table, carefully. His eyes grew wide.

“Huh, the man must be having a heart attack right now” he commented.

“Why?”

“That pen costs a leg and an eye”

“Really?” asked James, watching the utensil with some kind of confusion. “I’d never understand why somebody would think a pen must cost more than two dollars, at much” he commented.

“Put it on a separated case or pocket” advised Thomas.

“Yeah…”
“Do it now, James. You won’t want to forget this here tomorrow”

“I won’t…”

“You don’t forget your own head here basically because you have it attached to your neck” insisted Thomas.

James took the pen with vehemence, his face flustered, and went directly to his hung coat by the door. He put the pen inside one of his pockets and turned on his heels.

“Happy now?”

“Yes, very much” nodded Thomas, mockingly.

“I prefer you when you’re quiet” he spat, walking upstairs.

Thomas shrugged. “Well, I prefer you when you’re caring and not overdramatic. So we’re even…”

Thomas didn’t think about the whole thing in all night. Yes, it was finally over. Thank goodness…

Chapter End Notes

NOTES:

Henri Matisse: an artist from the Fauvism, a 20th century art that used strong colours.

Consuelo: a Latin name that means "She who comforts". "Consuelo" is also a Spanish word, that means "comfort".
“Congratulations, Jefferson, you invented a new kind of stupid” Angelica told him, with both arms in akimbo. “A ‘damage you can never undo’ kind of stupid; an ‘open all the cages in the zoo’ kind of stupid…” she began to count with her fingers, making Thomas flinch at each sentence she said.

“A ‘truly, you didn't think this through?’ kind of stupid…” added Eliza.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, Hamilton rambling.

DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first thing both friends saw when they arrived at their workplace the following morning was Burr standing nervously at Hamilton’s closed door. Aaron raised his fist a few times, cold sweat streaming down his face. James gave his college friend a sympathetic look and hurried to take the pen out of his pocket and walked to the trembling man.

“Make the poor man happy before he has to enter the lion’s den” Thomas had said.

And, both knew that, with Hamilton, that idiom of ‘the lion’s den’ was more than accurate. There was a reason why Lafayette had nicknamed the immigrant ’petit lion’, anyways.

“Burr” called James.

“Good morning, Madison” said Aaron, after a first startle. “Jefferson, are you feeling better?” he asked, once he noticed the secretary’s presence.

“Yes” he said, automatically.

“Burr, here” said Madison, handing the lawyer his pen. “Sorry, I must’ve taken it after…” he tried to explain, but Aaron relieved sigh made him stop.

Aaron took the pen from his hand and watched it as if it was some kind of treasure. “Thank God” he breathed out, the colour coming back to his pale face. “I’ve been standing here for only God knows how long, and spent the whole night before practicing apologies and excuses for Hamilton. Madison,
“you’re a bless”

“Yeah, I’ve been told” said the shortest man out of the three, with a little giggle.

Thomas rolled his eyes and then fixed his glare on Aaron. “Why would you have to fear what Hamilton has to say about you losing your things?” he inquired.

“Well… This was his birthday gift for me. I thought being honest about the problem was the best thing to do” admitted Aaron, with a slight frown.

Thomas’ eyes grew wide, not expecting that answer at all. “Hamilton bought you that?”

“Gee, it’s so clear February arrived” mocked Madison, with a sided smile.

“Stop it with that… Though I’m kinda grateful I was born in February…” said Aaron. “It almost made me feel bad about not having bought him anything for his birthday”

“You can always make him something hand-made” advised Madison.

“I said ‘almost’” clarified Aaron.

“…”

“Well, thank you for bringing me this back” said the lawyer heading back to his own office.

“You’re welcome. Sorry for the bad time”

“Nothing”

As soon as Aaron closed the door, James talked again. “Huh, never thought Hamilton could be that thoughtful”

Thomas narrowed his eyes at the CFO’s door. “It’s easy to be it when you are not spending your own money” he commented on the quiet.

“What do you mean?” asked James, heading to the secretary’s office.

“How much money was missing on the papers you said you did wrong?” he inquired, making air quotes at the last statement.

James frowned. “Come on, Thomas…” he hissed.

“I knew there had to be a reason why he was being so generous all of a sudden”

“You don’t know if I did the operations wrong or not”

James was lowering his tone more and more as he talked, not wanting for Hamilton to hear them, as the secretary and the CFO worked wall against wall, and the walls in that building had ears.

Maria, apple juice in hand, made her way down the hallway, stopping only when she saw Madison was accompanied by his friend.
“Hey, Jefferson, you’re feeling better?” she asked.

“Yes” he answered automatically again, starting to be annoyed.

“Good” she said, smiling at him. Her eyes drifted to the entrance, and showed a surprise expression. “Oh, hi, Peggy, were you feeling like coming to work today?” she asked, while slurping some of her juice.

Both men turned around, seeing the youngest Schuyler sister making her way into the building, wearing a huge brown coat that covered her from neck to ankles.

“Nah, Eliza is being a nuisance, complaining about everything, and I decided to come sleep here” she explained.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Wonder why Mrs. Hamilton is so pissed off about…”

“Who knows” said Peggy. “Hey, Jefferson, are you feeling better?”

Thomas tried not to frown. Even Peggy, who was starting to match Adams’ missing days, knew about the whole thing? Goddamnit…

“Yes” he answered, this time not able to cover his annoyance. James threw him a glare he tried to ignore.

“Good” said Peggy, unaware of everything. “Hey, Mari, nice necklace!” she complimented.

Maria touched her necklace with his free hand. A ruby shaped as a heart in a silver chain. She flushed a bit and giggled.

“Thanks, it was a present from Eli. To apologise for almost burning my hair back at Christmas” she explained. “I love your coat!” she complimented back.

“Yeah, Eliza and I went shopping yesterday and we went a bit crazy” admitted Peggy. “But, meh, it’s not like we can’t afford it. Besides, she has been wanting those boots and I, this coat since forever. It would’ve been a sin not going to the shop”

“Yep” nodded Maria.

Both women made their way to Peggy’s office, in which Laurens was sleeping, Thomas and James heard a bit of a fight about Laurens refusing to leave the bed because it was an ungodly hour to wake him up and Peggy decided to lie beside him and talk to Maria until it was lunchbreak.
“That doesn’t prove anything” he said, heading straight into the office.

“Whatever you say… Those things are expensive” retorted Thomas, taking a seat behind his desk.

James frowned. “And how do you know that if you can’t afford those things anymore? Do you spend your free time reading magazines for rich or something?” he spat. “Is something wrong with your life, do you need to talk?” he asked, eyes half-closed from tedium.

“Everything’s wrong with my life. I guess we let that clear a long time ago” answered Thomas, shrugging.

“Yeah, well, if you don’t want it to get even worse, you won’t say a thing. Even if it’s true or not, he’s working for us for free” warned James.

“You are the one who’s gonna have to tell him something when you give him those accounts” said Thomas.

“… When do you think he’d leave his office to drink his zillionth mug of coffee?”

“I don’t know. What am I now?”

“The secretary” spat James.

“Not his secretary. If I don’t know Washington’s schedule, just imagine how much I want to know about Hamilton’s” retorted Thomas, a bit offended. “Why would you want to know, anyways?”

“Because I’m gonna put those documents in his stack of paperwork”

“Where have I heard that idea before?” Thomas wondered out loud.

James looked at the closed door with sad eyes. “We need a peephole in here” he commented.

“James, please…” begged Thomas, with tiredness.

“What?”

“How am I going to put a peephole in my office door? Don’t say stupid things” he condemned his friend.

“What? Laurens lives here, Washington rocks in his chair all day, and now Hamilton has forgotten about his ‘principles’ and is stealing money. My idea sounds normal enough in comparison” James defended himself.

“Not peepholes” ordered Thomas, pointing at him with his pen in a warning manner.

“Alright. I won’t put a peephole if you don’t say anything that could endanger Hamilton’s job. He’s barely forgiven us for the first time we tried to convince Washington to fire him”

“He hasn’t…”
“Just my point” James looked at the door and shrugged. “Oh, well, I’ll have to press my ear and listen”

Thomas shook his head and sigh when he saw James dragging his chair to sit beside the door and pressed an ear against the wood. There was a moment when, between reading, correcting and writing, Thomas began to pay attention in his little breaks, and heard Washington rocking chair, echoing through the suspiciously silent building.

_Fuck, will there ever be some normal person working in here or what?

November 16th, 1990

_Thomas left his dorm right after making sure Adams had taken his meds for the sudden and suspicious cold he had caught the night before. The night before the day they had to present a project in front of the whole class for the first time that year. And, of course, Thomas couldn’t count on Jay, either, the man had been sick all week and Thomas wasn’t expecting him to come today to class.

That left just him. In a sense, he was feeling relieved. Speaking in public wasn’t one of his favourite things to do, and if he could delay the nightmare a few more days, he was glad. It wasn’t like he didn’t know his part of the project, he had been reading and practicing the whole thing inside his head since he had finished his part of the work. Well, honestly, after he had finished his part, Jay’s part and Adams’ half of his part. Thomas wouldn’t say they were the most hardworking persons in his class, but still he liked the guys. They were the only persons in the whole college who didn’t treat him strangely because of his surname, and he was glad for that.

Thomas had had a great quarrel with his mother about coming to this university. Needless to say, Jane Jefferson couldn’t even comprehend why a child of her would ever want to go to a public college to ‘mingle with the scum’. What Thomas Jefferson wouldn’t have stood was a lot of conceited brats who looked down at every other living thing that crossed their ways. He had had enough for that crap since he was six, and he had decided he wanted something more normal, down-to-earth…

Thomas had really thought the people here would be better, more opened and not as superficial. After two months living there, Thomas was starting to wonder if he had made the right choice. At least, in the private college his mother wanted to send him, and Jane had gone to, he
wouldn’t have been laid into for his money.

Trying not to think about it, because the last thing he needed today was to be pissed off when he was the only one who could tell the teacher that his two classmates couldn’t come today for the presentation, Thomas made his way into the classroom, where a few students were already, chatting among each other, some frantically, finishing some things at last hour.

He looked in front of him as he closed the door at his backs. Mr. Callender was already sat at his desk, reading the newspaper while glancing at the watch every two seconds, clearly impatient for starting the class so he could count the minutes he had left until it was finally over. Thomas wrinkled his nose in disgust. Callender had to be one of the most incompetent teachers in that college teaching Laws. He was only good at gossiping. Thomas never understood why he taught Laws instead of Journalism. Why did he always get the most assholes teachers to be his tutors? And why those assholes had to start his timetable once a week?

He was pushed slightly when some girl tried to enter the classroom. Thomas got separated from the door, feeling embarrassed for having stayed there. The person, a girl with short and dyed in pink hair that used to always wear dark tones in winter and clearer ones in summer, but whose name he was never able to remember, looked at him with a bit of surprise and then apologised rapidly, before trotting to her group of friends, who received her with in-jokes.

Thomas looked at her with a bit of jealousy. He was almost eighteen and he hadn’t learned to be that natural around people. Well, at least his lisping hadn’t bothered him since he was fourteen. That had to be a success, right?

He shook his head when a faint echo of his mother’s voice said ‘no’ inside his brain and walked straight to the teacher’s desk.

“Excuse me, Mr. Callender?” he said, as loudly as he could.

The teacher, thank goodness, heard him. “Good morning, Jefferson” he said, barely raising his eyes from the newspaper. “Are you prepared to show your project to the class?”

“Um, no, sir, you see…”

This time, Callender did raised his glare and Thomas felt his whole body turning rigid. For being a useless, the man was kinda scary when he looked right into your soul with those eyes.

“What do you mean?” he asked, sharply. “We all agreed your group would go first”
Agreed? Thought Thomas, trying hard not to roll his eyes. Excuse me, teacher, but choosing the turns by writing a number in a piece of paper, putting those pieces of papers inside a hat, and then taking them out and being in the position that paper tells you is not choosing, for me. But, of course, Thomas would never have it in him to condemn anybody in such a manner.

“Um, yes, I know, but… Jay’s been sick all week and Adams also caught a cold yesterday and…” he tried to explain, in a hurry.

Callender waved one hand, nonchalantly. “Bah, don’t worry, they can expose on Monday. You do your part now that you’re here, so you don’t have to wait to next week”

Can’t you see I fucking want to wait and delay this shit as much as it’s possible? He wanted to snap.

“Now, go sit somewhere and prepare your part. The class is about to start”

Fucking marvellous. Thomas could handle to talk in front of the class if he was accompanied – the only ‘almost good part’ of working in groups for him nowadays – but he couldn’t talk alone. No, he needed a lot of mental preparation for that. You know it, he tried to encourage himself, you can do this. You’ve studied it, you know it by heart.

The class started, and it took everybody ten minutes to decide they would let Callender start the class because now they were prepared. Callender called his name and he made his way to the platform, cards and notes in his shaking hands. Thomas focused on his feet, because he knew it would be a terrible idea to lift up his eyes and see all the faces that might have been looking at him, expectantly.

You can do this, he kept saying in his mind, as a mantra. You can do it, you know it, you’ve studied it, you can do it. Come on. You can do it.

He couldn’t do it. Damn, that didn’t even start to describe it correctly. It was total disaster after total disaster. He didn’t calculate the height of the platform correctly, and he made his way to the middle of it by stumbling, and it was a miracle he didn’t fall against his nose just there. He had tried to ignore the fainted giggles that his clumsiness provoked, but once he looked a bit up, the sound seemed to intensify.

Thomas didn’t know how long it took him, but it was a hell for him to start talking. And it
didn’t help that, every two minutes, some classmate would raise his hand to complain to the teacher. “Mr. Callender, he’s talking too low”. “Mr. Callender, we can’t hear him”. “Mr. Callender, what did he say? Could he speak a bit louder?”

It was after the seventh interruption when Thomas tried to change his note from another one and all his notes fell and spread on the floor. He cursed under his breath and knelt, trying to collect his writings as quickly as possible. He heard a few mutters and contained laughter, and Thomas really wanted the ground to swallow him just there.

By the time he had the damned notes in his hands, he cursed his name once again because he didn’t know the correct order and didn’t have enough time or mental peace to do it there and then.

“Don’t you know it by heart?” asked Callender, with an arched eyebrow.

“Y-Yes, but…”

“Then, why are you reading?”

Because I don’t want to look at anyone, damnit. Instead of cursing on everyone’s families there and then, Thomas decided to lower his hands and raised his glare. And if he hadn’t made a fool of himself before, now he truly was breaking some records in being a complete idiot. When he didn’t stutter, he talked with that stupid lisp. When the lisp took a break, he stuttered. There was a moment when the two had decided to become allies and Thomas literally bite his tongue for the shaking fit he found himself performing in the middle of the class, under the judgemental glares of the whole classroom.

After what felt like an eternity, he finished his speech. If what he had done could be even called that. Mr. Callender called the next group and, of course, he, having it for him for a reason Thomas didn’t know, since they knew each other that year, decided to add the icing of the cake.

“You know I am not killing anyone here, right?”

And the whole class, in unison, answered with a loud ‘Noooo’, that would echo inside Thomas’ brain for the rest of the fucking day…

Oh, who was he kidding, it would resound for the rest of the year…
Thomas had made it until the end of the day without needing to excuse himself and miss one class for a headache. He was having a migraine, but, sure enough, ignored it and could keep going with the day.

But one thing was that and, another very different thing was to want to go back to his dorm. He didn’t want to talk about what had happened in Callender’s class with Adams, and, seriously, that guy wasn’t as sick as he had claimed. Thomas was starting to be used to that.

So, the only place he would find a bit of peace was the library. Godspeed the libraries. All books, peace and silence. Just what Thomas needed. He headed directly to the first place he had memorized the path to in his first week there and entered through the big wooden doors.

Thomas made his way to one of the tables at the end of the room, where he could see the doors and the librarian in the distance, and then sat down, letting his backpack gently on the chair beside and prepared to take out some notebook and get ahead some homework.

“Oh, hello, Jefferson, wasn’t expecting you to see you here”

Thomas contained the urge to click his tongue. Seriously, who had he wronged to deserve this? He only wanted to make some homework, read and forget about the fucking world. But, instead, the damned world had decided to let the two persons he despised the most in his class to find him in his favourite spot in the library. Because, why not?

“Good afternoon” he greeted, courteously.

“Are you doing homework already?” asked the other person, and Jefferson felt his glare on him as a predator.

“Well, after today’s presentation, it’s clear the guy needs some studying” joked the first boy who had noticed him.

“Even Mr. Callender had to scold him, and that man doesn’t give a shit about any of us” agreed his friend, who laughed.

“Well, look it on the bright side, Jefferson, if you never learn how to talk properly, you can always ask you Dad to hire somebody else to do it for you”
somehow, didn’t know about his father, because, if they did, that would have been a very cruel and low blow.

After a few more comments Thomas didn’t acknowledge – his intelligence was too precious to pollute it with such level of idiocy – they left. And Thomas resumed his studies. A bit more difficult now that he had their taunting inside his brain. Another thing to conceal from his memory, another reason for his migraines to attack him.

_Fucking stupid hung-ups with airs…_

He had tried to keep it cool. He really had. To follow James’ advice and just keep things calm, especially before tomorrow arrived. But, was Thomas to blame if Hamilton was a fucking stupid hung-up with airs who refused to be wrong for just once?

And, maybe it was the insult that had trigged that memory; maybe it was Gil’s remark, the one he did after Thomas had told the story to him after almost having a breakdown during his trip to France, while working with Gilbert; maybe the comment Gilbert had said that day made it even worse than it was on its own: _Thomas, don’t you think you just hate Hamilton because he reminds you of the bad persons you knew back in college and not because you actually know him and decided his personality is despicable?_ Gilbert had asked him, after a moment of glaring at him with an unreadable expression.

_Fucking therapist-friends, always being right…_

Thomas didn’t even know why they had started fighting, or who had ignited the flame – Thomas would swear it was Hamilton, meanwhile Alexander would swear it was Jefferson –, but, before they even realised, they were at each other’s throats, throwing insults and taunts. The whole staff gathered behind Hamilton, who was standing at the doorframe of the breakroom, while Thomas was inside said room. Both men separated only by the table that was in the middle of the place.

Angelica had phoned Eliza, and both sisters were trying to contain their laughter while hearing the row – and, sometimes, failing and letting small giggles escape their shaking lips –; Maria was knelt on the floor, separated from everybody but still close enough, as she wrote down everything she heard; Peggy had woken up from the noise and was making her way to the crowd, yawning and with her eyes slowly opening and her brain processing where she was and what was happening; Aaron had gotten out his office and had his head stuck out the corner of the door;
Madison was by his side, throwing his friend warning glares that Thomas decided to ignore; Washington ended up getting out his office, opening the door to reveal he had been dragging Lucille to the entrance to see the whole thing while rocking; Lafayette and Hercules alternated their glares between their boss, and their friend and secretary, starting to feel slightly concerned and, especially, scared.

The Frenchman was the first one noticing Laurens was nowhere near, and he cocked an eyebrow at his boyfriend, after whispering his astonishment. Hercules simply shrugged, though began to look around, being suspicious of the absence of his nosy friend. Dang it, even Adams had walked down the stairs to see what the heck was happening, and was listening to all from a prudent distance, fearing Hamilton might see him and decided to go from Jefferson to him without a second thought.

Aaron felt Madison shaking his hands in a nervous habit the lawyer knew too well. After too much thinking, he put a hand on his shoulder, and Madison jumped a bit afraid at the sudden touch. He looked up at Aaron and smiled thankfully at him. Burr didn’t like physical contact very much; it must’ve cost him hell to finally decide to do that for make him feel a bit better.

On their behalf, the CFO and the secretary kept focus on their fight, not even noticing they were being watched by the whole personnel. Hamilton was already red, gesticulating with his arms in the air and screaming like a mad man who had just run away from a mental asylum. Jefferson, though more composed, began to raise his voice as well, feeling his blood boiling through his veins. He had started alternating his responses between being quiet and hearing some key word that might escape from Hamilton’s mouth to, immediately, take it down. But Alexander Hamilton was the best at putting people on their nerves. Gosh, that man could even exasperate Saint Maria*

Sweet goodness, he can’t even knock it down a damn notch though he’s spending the company’s money on his own whims! He thought exasperated, and – should he say it? – very infuriated. Thomas was sure that if he was the one doing that, he would’ve been discovered within the first day and fired not one minute after. But, alas, he wasn’t the boss’ pet, the perfect Alexander Hamilton who could do no wrong – though he spent his fucking life doing it all wrong and without consequences – and who Washington looked at as if he had hung the fucking moon, the stars and the sun…

Wait, was he able to think about all that without problem? Thomas realised then that Hamilton was quiet. Looking at him with a shocked expression and he had taken a step backwards. But quiet. And that set off alarms inside his brain. Intuitively, he looked at James, who had his hand against his forehead, eyes closed in a clear pose of ‘you messed up’. Just then, Thomas really realised how silent everything (not just Hamilton) had went. Washington wasn’t even rocking himself. Jeez, what happened?

“What are you talking about?”
Hamilton broke the silence, because, when didn’t he? Though, this time, Thomas was even
glad that the man couldn’t stay quiet for more than one minute straight, any shock he might be
feeling be damned.

“What?” he asked, hoping to know what he had said to develop this unusual silence.

Hamilton’s face turned redder than a tomato. “I have never stolen anything to anybody!” he
screamed, the offense sprouting from his pores. His furious expression changed from a thoughtful
one. “Well, maybe back in Nevis, but it was only books…”

“He was the Caribbean Liesel Meminger” joked Eliza, on Angelica’s phone. The vice president and
Aaron had to bite their bottom lips not to laugh just there.

Hamilton had kept talking, not minding anyone else. “…and basic things for survival, so it doesn’t
count! And that’s already unprosecutable!” he ended up screaming enraged again.

Oh, so he had blurted out that out loud and not only in his head… Oh, shit… Well, in for a penny, in for a pound.

“And how would you explain the money missing Madison needed to talk to you about yesterday?”
said Thomas, calmly.

“Leave me out of this” said James immediately, and raising his hands in a defensive manner when he
felt all eyes on him.

“What money?” inquired Hamilton, finally turning around and acknowledging the rest of the people
working with him. He crossed his arms.

“Nothing. I don’t know” said James in a hurry. “I may have done the operations wrong”

“You’ve never done an operation wrong, James” commented Thomas.

“There’s a first time for everything” snapped the shorter man, throwing daggers at his friend. “Maybe
one day you’d know when to shut the hell up and all”

“But have you taken Peggy’s bed into the account?” asked Hercules.

The youngest Schuyler sister frowned at him. “Man, leave me alone!”

“What?” spat Hercules. “If you had bought that with your own money you wouldn’t be in the middle
of this”

“Screw you, man. Your ex-squatter is sleeping on that bed. So, it’s actually being used by the staff,
not only by me. I won’t purchase a bed with my money if anybody could use it”

“Can you please focus on the main matter here?” asked Alexander, rolling his eyes.

“Always drifting away…” complained Washington, under his breath.
“Yes, let’s talk about how odd it is that you decided to miss work just yesterday, a Wednesday” chimed in Thomas.

“Thomas, please…” begged James.

Hamilton whipped around, his eyes burning with fury. “I’ll miss as many days as I fucking want to!”

“You never want to miss one day of work” emphasised Thomas, with eyes half-closed.

Alexander clicked his tongue in annoyance. “But who do you think you are to condemn anyone in here for that?!”

“I am somebody who doesn’t use the company’s money to buy gifts to my workmates to keep them happy” spat Thomas without second thought after feeling that comment as a bullet directed to his pride.

“Thomas!” said James, pleadingly.

“Look, one: I’ll buy my friends whatever presents I want to; two: everything I ever buy for whomever is bought with my own money. The one I worked hard to get” said Hamilton, clenching his fists in pure rage.

“I’ll give you that: it must be a hard work to take the money without no one noticing… Wonder if that was why you had to stop practising” commented Thomas, not stopping the smirk.

“My God, that was it…” complained James, burying his face in his hands.

Hamilton’s face couldn’t be much redder even if he threw himself inside a hot bathtub, neither would he feel his blood boiling a bit more. Gee, he wouldn’t be surprised if he had smoke coming out his ears as an old cartoon.

Aaron looked at his boss with a worried look, and Washington locked eyes with him, sharing his concern. They had agreed on not spending the money into fixing the crack on the wall upstairs. But Aaron always knew that was a stupid illusion. There was no way in hell they could conceal that problem much longer, or to fix it without having to take money from the company. It would be a chaos when the rest of the staff would be told they would have to earn a bit less of money; that, or to work harder. Which, let’s be real, wasn’t going to be done in that company. There were only four persons who really worked hard in the law firm.

And, right now, one of them was being accused by another one about taking advantage of his position.

Now, Alexander could be infuriating, that much, Aaron knew, was beyond true. He was loudmouthed, workaholic, rude even when he didn’t want to be, and took things too seriously sometimes. But he was honest. It could be exasperating for his enemies, but it was the gospel truth. Hamilton valued his work more than anything in his life. Sometimes, Aaron feared he valued it more than his own health. He wouldn’t risk all he had fought for achieving just like that.
That was reason one why he believed and pitied Alexander right now. The reason two was… that Theodosia told him yesterday about the huge amount of money Alex’s mother-in-law had given to him just to piss her husband off. Aaron bit his bottom lip, feeling guilt making a knot in his stomach. And one of the few things Alexander had spent that money on was on his birthday present.

“Alright, I’ve got something to say”

Aaron, without noticing as he had been lost in thought and unaware of the world surrounding him, had stopped one of Alexander’s rambling and Jefferson’s remarks, gaining a questioning look from everybody. He glanced at his boss, and Washington, as if he had read his mind, immediately shook his head. Aaron didn’t know if he was saying 'don’t say a thing' or ‘that wasn’t me’, but he would risk it, anyways. They would find out about the crack eventually. It was a miracle that with Laurens working and now living there they didn’t know already…

“Hey, what’s all this commotion?”

Thinking of the devil…

Laurens walked downstairs, wrapped in a grey robe and with his loose hair wet. Hercules half-closed his eyes at the image and Lafayette looked away, blushing as he felt embarrassed by his friend.

“Are you fighting so early?” asked Laurens, looking at them with a cocked eyebrow.

“It’s 4 pm, man” spat Hercules.

“Laurens, why are you wet?” asked Washington, looking at his HR manager with an unreadable and unsettling expression.

“’Cause I like to take a shower in the mornings” he answered, in a matter-of-a-fact way.

“4 pm…” repeated Hercules, pinching the bridge of his nose in annoyance.

“Let him be…” pleaded Lafayette.

“Where did you take a shower in here?” asked Maria, still on the floor, with a shocked expression.

“In one of the sinks”

Hercules huffed. “Huh, I wouldn’t want to see the bill now that nobody cuts you the water…”
It was a comment made for the sake of bothering Laurens, nothing new. But that time, it fell on Thomas’ shoulders as a bag full of bricks and dry cement. James hissed, realising the same and simply put his back against the wall, burying his flushed face in his hands even more, if that was possible. Aaron took a step backwards, looking, as everyone else, at Alexander, who had his back turned on him. Washington was the only one who still moved and kept his eyes on the HR manager.

“Laurens… Have you, by chance, spent the company’s money in something else, apart from your showers and wetting the floor?”

“And not bothering in cleaning right after” chimed in Hercules.

“Arrête!” ordered Lafayette, frowning at him.

“Oh, yes!” said Laurens, hitting himself slightly on the forehead. He scanned the whole group until he spotted Alexander, suspiciously quiet and still. “Alex, I forgot to tell you I’ve been taking some little money”

Alexander looked at him, serious. “Okay” he said, calmly.

“Little?” repeated Madison.

Hercules looked at him. “See how he spends too much?”

“What for?” asked Angelica.

“You know… Food, power, water…”

“Food? What kind of food?”

“My God, now that is not his money, I don’t wanna know where he had called or gone…” commented Lafayette, feeling his cheeks burning from embarrassment. “Johnny, what were you thinking?”

“What?” he spat, looking nastily at him. “It’s my salary raise”

“Salary raise for what?” asked Angelica, enraged.

Everybody felt shivers going down their spines when they heard Washington rocking himself in the chair, with a grim face. Laurens didn’t give him any mind and looked at the vice president just as upset.

“For the favour I’m doing you all by living in here”

“John, really, you distort reality with such an ease it’s scary…” said Hercules.

“What?!” he spat, once again. “I’m at risk here all nights, with that damned hole Burr has in his office” He pointed accusatory at the lawyer. “It is a miracle I haven’t been robbed or kidnapped yet!”

“Burr, do you still have that thing uncovered?” asked Washington, tired.
“I’ll put a glass later…” promised the lawyer.

“You’ve been saying that for two months now” condemned Madison.

“So?” said Aaron, defensively. “Nobody in here does anything on date”

“So true it hurts…” commented Washington, sad.

“Besides, who was gonna want to kidnap you?” Hercules asked, looking at Laurens while he laughed.

“Anyone” said Laurens, offended.

“It could be good for us” commented Hercules, still laughing. “We’ll ask for a ransom”

“That’s the other way around” said Lafayette.

“No, no. Either they give us all we ask them, or they’ll keep him” and he burst out in laughter.

“And that’s why you’re dead for me” said Laurens, with venom.

Peggy joined Hercules in his fit of laughter. “Oh, gee, oh, man, you just made your best friend live the worst time of his life” she explained, between giggles.

“What are you talking about?” asked Laurens, confused.

“Jefferson thought I was the one taking that money and spending it on… How did you say it?” Hamilton turned around, and the calmness in his manners made Thomas – and a few other workmates – flinch. “Ah, yes… On my whims. Seems he’s an expert on the matter. Not now, but being rich must be like riding a bike: once you learn it, you’ll never forget it”

Madison looked worriedly at his friend, who was, understandably, anxious, as he watched the CFO walking straight to his office.

“Gosh, Alex, sorry!” said Laurens, feeling terribly bad. “I swear I was gonna tell you, but I didn’t hear the alarm yesterday morning!”

“Odd…” commented Hercules, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t worry, Jackie. Erring is human” said Alexander, stopping just in front of his door. “Madison, at what hour was the meeting with Mrs. Lewis?”

“Em… 9.30” he answered, feeling uneasy.

“Alright. Sir, do you mind if Mr. Jefferson, Madison and I are excused tomorrow morning around that hour?” he asked, now addressing Washington.

The CEO took a moment to respond, watching Angelica’s fearful expression. When Angelica Schuyler was afraid, the whole world should be extremely terrified.
“No, not at all, it’s alright” said Washington, slowly, cautiously, as somebody who is trying to deactivate a bomb about to explode.

“Good. Thank you, sir”

“You’re welcome, s… Alexander”

Everyone sighed relieved, Washington included, when their boss could correct himself on time.

“Jefferson?” said Alexander once again, now looking straight at the secretary.

“… Yes?” said Thomas, taking a small step backwards, though they were several meters apart.

“Do you mind if I go over your house this afternoon to talk a few things out?”

“… No…”

“Around seven sounds fine?”

“Yes…” Thomas threw a scared look to Madison, who reciprocated his feeling.

“Good” Alexander nodded. “See you later, then”

Everyone trembled in their spots when they heard Alexander closing the door quietly. Well, everyone but Peggy, who burst out laughing. All of them looked at her with wide eyes of shock, as she bent over herself, with tears streaming down her eyes. She turned around and looked at the discouraged secretary.

“Gosh, Jefferson, you better start writing your will” she advised, between giggles. “Sweet Lord, I’m gonna go with you tomorrow, though it has nothing to do with me, just to see what he’s gonna do!”

And then she started cackling again, walking slowly to the wall across her to put a hand there to maintain her balance. When she had calmed down considerably, Angelica looked at the secretary, with a sharp glare.

“Congratulations, Jefferson, you invented a new kind of stupid” she told him, with both arms in akimbo. “A ‘damage you can never undo’ kind of stupid; an ‘open all the cages in the zoo’ kind of stupid…” she began to count with her fingers, making Thomas flinch at each sentence she said.

“A ‘truly, you didn’t think this through?’ kind of stupid…” added Eliza, through her older sister’s phone, just with the same venom.
Angelica jumped in her spot and took her phone out of her pants. “Gee, Betsey, you scared me! I didn’t remember you were still there!”

“Sorry”

“But you’re right” she added, again dedicating a hateful glare to Thomas, who cringed. “How could you think Alexander would do anything like that?”

“It was a very risky connection, actually…” explained Madison, in his friend’s behalf.

“The money he’s been spending on some of you is from my mother” explained Eliza through the phone, and everyone could clearly picture her with a frown and a glare of fury that could match – or even beat – her older sister’s. “She gave it to him to piss my father off!”

Lafayette raised his hand, sheepishly, though Eliza couldn’t see any of them. “I don’t want to play as the Devil’s advocate, but… who in their right mind could have ever imagined something like that?”

“Really, Gilbert?” said George, calmly. “After all the shit we’ve lived in the last three years do you really think that’s strange?”

“And who in their right mind would’ve thought Alexander would do something like that?” countered Angelica.

“Exactly!” exclaimed Eliza.

“Alexander is a little piece of shit with honour and values”

“Exact... Wait, what?” exclaimed the younger.

“Betsey, dear, I’m sorry but your husband is the kind of loser who would lay down his life for another one’s”

Aaron felt a shiver he didn’t understand going down his spine at that statement. He turned around, seeing the curtain that covered his hole/window was still. Odd, he thought, aching one eyebrow. He shrugged it off and returned his attention to the conversation that was happening in the hallway.

“That much is true” Peggy added her two cents as soon as she had her laughter under control. “Good things only happen to bad people in the real world”

“That’s why I always tell you both that you need a bit more of hatred and malice” nodded Angelica.

“I’m not a good person and nothing good ever happens to me” said Adams, frowning with disappointment.

“And he says it as if that’s something to be proud of…” commented Hercules, shaking his head.

Washington pinched the bridge of his nose once again, feeling mentally exhausted all of a sudden. Madison and Jefferson exchanged a look of worry right after they had been looking at Hamilton’s quiet office.
Thomas had tried to keep himself busy all afternoon since he came back from work. By the time James and he left, Hamilton was still locked up in his office, only the sound of the pen scratching on the paper and sheets moving frantically could be heard from the other side. They left without wanting to know what he could be doing in there. They said goodbye to Maria, who was also writing non-stop, taking advantage of the quarrel. James tried to peer something, but Maria covered the paper with one arm, and Madison pretended to be uninterested.

Thomas looked up from the documents he had tried to order and have prepared for when Hamilton arrived. The clock hung above the door of his workroom said it was already 7.08. He swallowed, a bit uneasy. Hamilton had a lot of flaws, too many, if he was asked, but being late was never one of them. On the contrary, he was, somehow, always a bit earlier. If he was ever late, it was because some of his relatives had held him up or something had happened on his way to the meeting place. Thomas got up from his swivel chair and exited the room, turning to go downstairs, with the hope that maybe he had missed James opening the door.

Nothing.

In the living room, there was only James, watching the mute TV in a way to entertain his brain until the attorney arrived. Thomas threw a quick glare upstairs, hoping that his daughters wouldn’t come out of their bedrooms before Hamilton was long gone. Something in his gut told him the calmness with which Hamilton had acted earlier that day couldn’t be anything good.

The sound of the doorbell startled them both. James turned off the TV as fast as it was humanly possible and jumped afraid when he turned around and saw Thomas standing there. The older man gestured, asking if he should open, but Madison shook his head quickly and went to do it himself. Though their relationship didn’t end on best terms, Hamilton always was more easy-going with Madison for some reason.

*Damn, he must be still doing this just for the acquaintance they once shared.*

*Sweet goodness, not now.* Thomas cleared his throat and walked upstairs to calm his thoughts before having to talk to Hamilton. It was just a minute later when Madison was knocking on his workroom door and the two men entered. James threw him a worried glare, that he dismissed by waving one hand in the air. Thomas kept his concentration busy on the documents he had prepared three times, trying to evade eye contact as much as possible.
“Good evening” he said, trying to be civil. It was always the best option.

“Good evening” he was glad to hear back.

And, right after, a stack of papers was dropped in the middle of the desk, and Thomas was fast enough to remove his hands away on time. James was now by his right, watching Hamilton, who was taking a seat on the chair Thomas had across himself, carefully.

“What is this?” asked Thomas, hesitant if he should read those right then.

“Those are all the accounts I’ve been doing since Washington hired me” explained Hamilton, with that foreign calmness that could more easily set fear on anyone than a screamed threat. “I even included drafts, and the notes I used to write before Madison was eventually assigned as the accountant”

“…Alright” Thomas said slowly, glaring at James, who was just as puzzled as he was. “What do you want us to do with this?”

“This is for you” clarified Hamilton, looking him straight in the eyes. “As far as I know, it was you the one who doubts about my skills and professionalism when it comes to me doing my job”

Thomas almost choke while trying to swallow. “I don’t…” he tried to justify.

“Make sure to read this” kept going Hamilton, as if he was waiting for him to talk so he could interrupt him. “Don’t spend three years to do so, as it happened with the financial plan… Did you ever read that?”

“Yes” he said immediately.

“Ah, good to know” Hamilton nodded, sounding almost surprised. “Well, just try to read this within a year. It’s not like you have better things to do”

Thomas frowned, starting to feel enraged. “How would you know?” he challenged.

“I don’t” admitted Hamilton. “But as your job consists in photocopy things others have written, write the grocery list or memos informing that the toilets are broken, I just assumed it”

“…Look, Hamilton…”

“I can do all that hard stuff while you read those” the immigrant interrupted him once again, pointing at the stack with his chin. “I mean, I’ve been doing that the days you miss work. Me, Aaron, Angelica… Don’t fool yourself, Jefferson, we all know how to use the photocopier and to redact memos; it’s just that the 98% of the staff is lazy. Maybe because of that your friend didn’t realise all the money that was slowly being missing in a whole month”

“Leave James out of this” snapped Thomas.

“Excuse me, but if the person that reports directly to me does his job bad or not as good as expected, I am in the right to berate them. Or am I wrong?” he asked, looking at Madison.
“No…” admitted the accountant. “Sorry”

“Don’t worry, you’re still one of the few who gives me and Washington things on time” Hamilton softened the tone a bit. “Which reminds me…” His tone sharpened a bit once again when he addressed it to Jefferson. “Have you already prepared all the accounts I asked for you?”

“Yes” nodded Thomas, handing him some papers.

“Good” said Hamilton, taking the documents and keeping them inside his briefcase.

“Aren’t you going to read them?” asked Madison, arching one eyebrow.

Hamilton shrugged. “I’ll maybe read it when I have one of those moments when there’s, literally, nothing else to do”

Both men flinched at his words, as they remembered those were the exact words Thomas had told Hamilton back in 2015. Such memory only for what he wants it to have it. Thought Thomas, bitterly.

“Have you already figured out where I was yesterday?” asked Hamilton, out of the blue.

“Excuse me?” said Thomas, a bit taken aback.

Hamilton shrugged once again. “No, it’s just that I see that you’re very concerned about why I miss work or not. You didn’t seem to mind that much when you were still Adams’ friend, though… I suppose that’s why you both can recognise favourable treatment once you see it: you are expert in the matter” Hamilton clicked his tongue. “I didn’t see either of you complaining that much when Washington didn’t say a thing about such a crazy thing as trading or lending free days…”

Thomas frowned. “I never asked you for that”

“True. That was all my doing. It’s something that happens to you when you were raised with not a dime to your name: you simply get used to lend your things or to give them, to the ones who would need them the most. You don’t think about it, just do it. Can’t blame you if you don’t understand it”

“I…”

Hamilton raised one hand, frowning with tedium. “No, just a minute. I think you said enough for one day. For the rest of the month, I’d dare to say…” He made himself more comfortable in his seat.

“Just let me say what I’ve got to say, and then, when I turn my back to you, you can say whatever you want about me. It seems that’s the only way you find your voice…”

Madison moved uncomfortably in his spot while Thomas clicked his tongue in annoyance.

“Have you ever heard of Lucy Flucker Knox?” asked Hamilton, a bit curious.

Thomas threw his friend a confused look and then spoke. “You mean the lawyer?”
“No, the baker around the corner of the street…” spat Alexander, with a poisonous mockery.

“Yes, yes, I do” answered Thomas, trying to control an eye-roll.

“Well, you maybe know her for being one of the most famous and best lawyers in New York City, as almost everybody else. But, for me, she will always be my foster mother”

Thomas felt his blood turning cold then. Yes, he knew Lucy Knox. His mother and she never got along but always knew how to act civil while in court. For Jane Jefferson, Mrs. Knox was a huckster who liked to think of the world as her own big utopia. And yet, even his mother admitted, though through clenched teeth, that Mrs. Knox was one hell of a lawyer. Time proved it. Whatever case she took, she won it. And, when she finally reached certain age, she decided to found her own law firm, being unable of being away from courts, from people in need, from injustices that needed to be corrected.

A shiver when down Thomas’ spine when he realised that Mrs. Knox and Hamilton shared the same burning passion within, the same ease with which they could move crowds, make everyone around to pay attention to their words and nod in agreement, falling under the spell of their rhetoric. That comparative was really scary, especially if Hamilton really knew Mrs. Knox and, to make matters worse, they were close. Very, very close…

Thomas could only hope Hamilton wasn’t implying what he was thinking.

“Her husband maybe is not as well known, but he’s also such a good person as hers. They’re made for each other” kept talking Hamilton, looking for something inside his briefcase. Eventually, he took out two stapled sheets. “They took me in after helping me to get out from the foster home I was sent to when I arrived at America. You know, back in Nevis, I remembered everybody kept telling me that in America I’d be a new man, I’d have more and better opportunities to achieve my dreams or whatever… Needless to say, that home I was sent to was far from being a dream come true. I won’t bore you with details, nor that I’d want to share them with you… Let’s just say I was hoping here things would be a bit different, because back in the island I didn’t have the best luck when it came to foster homes”

Hamilton skimmed the paper in his hands, maybe as a way to not drift away too much and go back in time completely. A way to maintain both his body and his mind there, in the present world, but able to retell the story.

“To summarize, I ran away, because, and this won’t surprise you in the slightest, I was always a very rebel kid. If you told me not to do something, I would do that and a little bit more just to piss you off”

He smirked a bit, but the smile didn’t reach his eyes. Madison looked at him with some sort
of sympathy Hamilton tried not to pay attention to, as he hated it, and Jefferson moved uncomfortably in his seat for a second time, feeling the tension growing inside the room.

“But I’m also a bit of a nerd. So, instead of running away to some pub or anything like that, I decided to go to a bookshop. Hint: Lu’s husband, Henry, is a bookseller. One thing led to another and before I realised what was happening, I was living with the Knox and those two bastards were in jail for child abuse”

Madison trembled a bit at that. Not only for the words used, but for the way Hamilton spoke them, with such an ease and normality.

“I went to college with a scholarship because I refused them to pay me anything. I wanted to earn things myself, with my effort. I studied Laws because Lu inspired me, I didn’t even know what I wanted to do with my life before knowing her. Jefferson,”

The mention of his name made him flinch slightly.

“I don’t even know if you’re realising how lucky you are of having asking me for this ‘favour’ right now, in this stage of my life” Hamilton shook his head, as if to emphasize his point. “Listen, when you go out with Laf, between insult and taunt directed at me, ask him how I used to be. Tell him you’re asking on my part, and he will tell you. He will tell you how I used to be working on five or more cases at once. He will tell you how I would spend more sleepless night working than the ones I spend now. I used to be one of the best and more requested attorneys in New York, without the need to use Lu’s last name. All my defendants got acquitted”

There was a pause that felt eternal, in which Thomas could finally breathe because Hamilton had lowered his glare to the floor. Lips pressed and a thoughtful expression, maybe thinking how to word his next sentence as well as possible.

“That was until Maria Reynolds came into my life” he finally said, moving in his chair with discomfort. “Her case was easy. She asked for two attorneys, and Burr and I ended up working together on it. I knew Burr, we didn’t get too much along by that time, but we could handle ourselves. He was quiet, collected; I was loud and non-stop. Mr. Reynolds was going to lose. He didn’t have that much money to hire a good attorney, and Maria had a lot of evidence against him and two good attorneys. Don’t say Aaron I said this, but he is quite the lawyer. As far as I know, he’s never lost a case. In fact, the only case he almost lose was this one, one of the easiest in his whole career.

“Don’t ask me what happened, I don’t know. Angelica insists it was destined to happen, because
when you force a machine to work and work and overwork itself, it ends up blowing up” A deep sigh. “Long story short: I had a breakdown”

Madison and Jefferson exchanged a glare. They associated Hamilton with a proud and unbreakable man, trying to imagine him near vulnerability made them cringe. It felt so wrong in so many levels, though it shouldn’t be that way…

“Aaron did all within his power to delay the trial, so I could get better. But it was no use, because each time I tried to put a foot in there I panicked. I couldn’t even think about practising in any other case anymore. I had to tell both Maria and Aaron to do it without me, because if we kept making excuses, it could be seen as if something fishy was going on, and Maria deserved to win, she just had to after all the shit that man put her through. Her daughter deserved to have a normal and healthy childhood.

“You know the rest, Aaron helped her win, Reynolds was sent to jail, Maria divorced him and is living happily and safely with Susan. Aaron talked about her to Washington, who hired her, and her life is going as well as it could be. I apologised to her several times, and she said she had nothing to forgive, that she was grateful for the help I gave her. She even cared about if I was doing okay. God bless her, she deserves all the good stuff that’s been happening to her and more.

“But, either way, there has never been a day when I don’t think ‘I could have ruined her life’. If I learnt something as working as an attorney is that, sometimes, Justice is not very just. That it will depend on who you had on your side. And just thinking and remembering that I could have been the reason that a dangerous man could’ve been still free, making Maria’s and Susan’s lives miserable is really unsettling” He looked up at both men, especially at Jefferson. “That is why I had to stop practising. I never stole from anybody, I never took advantage of someone’s misery… I could’ve been the reason why some innocent woman and girl’s lives would have been ruined, though. So, I think the story still has a satisfactory ending for you two”

“No, Hamilton, that’s not…” tried to say James, taking a few steps forwards.

“Look, I haven’t told you the first part of my biography because I want you to pity me. I don’t want that from anybody, and less from people like you” he spat, in a very clear derogatory manner, but they were too shock and confused to even take it into account or feel offended. “I’m telling you this so you take this without thinking strange things, or imagining conspiracy theories”

Alexander handed Jefferson the papers he had taken out his briefcase while telling the story. Thomas took it and James got closer to also read what that was.

It was a lease. 800 dollars per month. With the option to purchase the dwelling.
“Hamilton…” said Jefferson, after reading the paper for the second time.

“Lu wanted to get rid of the house” he interrupted for the zillionth time that evening. “I was raised there. They lived next door from Betsey and I for the first years of our marriage. ‘Overprotection’ at its best, I suppose” he laughed half-heartedly. “I missed work yesterday because I wanted to have everything more than prepared and under control before Friday. Your sister wasn’t going to be nice, and Madison told me that if you’d find somewhere else to live for a good price, you’d take it without second thought” He looked at the shorter man. “Have you changed your mind about it?”

“No, no…” said James, shaking his head.

“Is it the price reasonable for you?”

“Yes”

“Look, Jefferson”

The secretary dared to look Hamilton in the eyes and felt slightly scared when he saw no trace of fury or anger in them. Nothing at all.

“On my birthday, things went out of hand. Nothing new or shocking, taking into account all of the shit we can do in one hour meeting. I married a rich woman. I’m sure you know because, believe it or not, I’ve heard one or two comments from you commenting about it, not in a very nice way, but, meh. I’m used to it, I’m not going to convince anyone anymore. Have your own theories of my personal life, if with that you feel better about yours…”

Another sigh, this one more tired than the one before.

“Anyways, all started because Angelica couldn’t light a candle, and then some things were said, some were offended, some had had enough… Like my mother-in-law who, if nothing had changed in the last 24 hours, had abandoned my father-in-law, who is desperate and about to go crazy… But before Catherine had decided to imitate my father’s way of solving family problems, she wanted to take revenge for all the shit my father-in-law had put her through a whole unhappy marriage. And so, she decided to give me the half of the half of the money she shares with my father-in-law, as they’re married under the community of property.

“Right now, gentleman, I’ve got more money than I can spend. That’s why I could give Aaron the present he wanted the most; that’s why Peggy had gone shopping with Betsey without caring too much about the price; that’s why Maria was given that nice necklace; that’s why I could buy this house without a lot of problems in my daily life… Look, Jefferson, you now live until the age of 100, die, are reborn, live for another 100 years, die again, are reborn once again and die at the age of 200, and I’d still have more money that I could spend.
“Well, I think that’s because I always respected money. You like to call me materialistic, right? You can bet anything you want – if you still have anything of some value – that you’re right about that. I like to keep money safe, I like to spend it wisely. If I want to spend it on whims, for me or my friends, I will do. If my Betsey want to buy the whole Macy’s, she can do it. Because that’s our money, our life, and we have to give explanations to nobody. Alright?”

Jefferson nodded slowly, pressing his lips and the hold on the lease in his left hand.

“Good” snapped Alexander, his voice now resounding with that force they were used to hear in him. He put one elbow on the armrest of the chair and then rested his chin on his fist. “You liked to read, right?” he asked, all of a sudden, eyeing him with curiosity.

“Yes” answered Thomas, arching one eyebrow in suspicion.

“Tell me, Jefferson, were you ever told the fable of ‘The frog and the scorpion’?”

By then, Hamilton had decided to finally forget about the calmness he had kept during the whole conversation (monologue) and had come back to his sharp and cold tone, his scrutinizing eyes of a predator prepared to launch and kill its prey. He felt James hunching over himself, trying to be unnoticed by the pissed off attorney, while Thomas refused to let Hamilton see him flinch one more time that day.

“No” he answered, trying to sound uninterested, altering his glare between the man and the papers he was still holding.

“The story goes like this…”

Of course he is going to tell me… He thought, seeing Hamilton taking a more comfortable position on the chair.

“There once was a frog that helped other littler animals to cross to the other side of a river. And, one day, a scorpion got closer to her and asked if she could help him get to the other side as well. The frog, who had some experience, hesitated and, in the end, denied to do so, alleging that, if she did, the scorpion would sting her. To which, the scorpion replied that he would do her no harm, because if he stung her, they would both drown. The frog thought about it and came to the conclusion that that was very much true and decided to trust the scorpion and help him get to the other side. But, midway, the scorpion broke his promise and stung the frog, causing her harm and the inability to keep swimming, and so, dooming them both. The frog, before dying, asked the scorpion: ‘Why did you do something like that? Now, we both will die’. And the scorpion replied: ‘I could not help myself. It is in my nature’” Hamilton made
another pause, in which he looked at Jefferson right in the eyes, with the same unreadable expression. “You’re just like the scorpion: you were so obsessed with getting me out of the way, that you didn’t even stop to think about that, this time, if I fell, you were going to fall and drown with me.

“You were going to tattle to Washington on Monday or Saturday, right after the whole lease thing would’ve been over. Don’t bother in denying it. I know you would have. You didn’t think about yourself, you didn’t think about your best friend, you didn’t think about your own daughters. You only cared about taking me down. At all costs. But, thank goodness, I am a smarter frog”

“And who am I?” asked James.

Alexander eyed him for a moment. “You’re the annoying fly that kept pestering, flying beside my ear, trying to convince to help him”

“I didn’t hear anything about a fly in the fable…”

“Because I just made her up, so you could be happy” spat Alex.

“Alright, thanks” said James, satisfied.

Alexander sighed for the third time. “Look, Jefferson, despite what you might think about me, I am not a bad person and I never wished harm on you. Really, I never have” he promised. “No, on the contrary. I really wish you get better” he added, getting up from his seat and walking until he was against the wooden desk. Thomas leaned back on his chair, for pure instinct. “I really wish you overcome your anxiety and the depression you refuse to admit you have, so that way, while being healthy and completely aware of the world around you, you can think about what happened today, about how you preferred to drown instead of ending things on good note. I’m gonna be clear to you: I never pitied you. I don’t feel bad for you, never did. For me, you’re just one conceited and spoiled kid who grew up and didn’t know how to handle things on his own, maybe because of some bad parenting, I’m guessing for the relationship you currently have with your younger sister, and now, when he sees what life is truly about and sees he was left alone because he didn’t actually have any good traits to balance up his bad ones, he wants to act all humble and like he has learnt a good life lesson.

“Well, honestly, I’ve never swallowed it. You and I know that, were our roles reversed, you wouldn’t have done half of what I’ve done for you in exchanged of nothing. Damn, you wouldn’t even have bat an eye. We both know that if, for some kind of non-deserve miracle, you were the possessor of the money I now have in my hands, you would go back to be the same selfish asshole who thinks the Earth revolves around himself instead of the sun and who has no time to lose in worrying about other people’s necessities. Maybe you and your sister have more in common that you dare to admit.

“You know why I chose to work on family cases, especially the ones revolving children? Because I know what it’s like to have no one to turn to when your legal tutor or foster parents don’t give a damn about you and mistreat you as if you were less human, their possession just because you are underage. I never decided to go against Lucy because I pitied you or think you deserve a bit of mental peace, I did it because you have two daughters who are smart, wonderful and with a lot of aptitude to do whatever they want with their lives without the need of using your surname or
inherited money.

“I would’ve never let Lucy get near them to destroy that spirit and light, but you can bet I would have not hesitated in taking her side if she was a decent human being who once a week thinks about the people surrounding her instead of inflating her ego. In fact, I bet there has to be one decent person in this family, there’s always one black sheep in every flock. I may not be the best father, not in a million years, if we were talking about Betsey I would say otherwise, but me? I’m not. But I know how it is like to have an egotistical father who’d rather put his pride and own happiness before his children’s. Maybe Lafayette was right and I kinda despised you because you remind of him: a selfish prick unable to love anyone but himself.

“Listen to me, I am not a good father, but I was a very decent son. And even decent children have limits once their parents cross the line. A day will come in which you’re going find yourself alone because your daughters would be in college, working or married and with their own families; because your best friend would find someone better to spend the time with – not a very difficult task – and because, for what I’m seeing, your biological and political family don’t want to know very much about you. And I rarely get these kinds of things wrong”

James threw a glare to Thomas, who refused to raise his glare from the papers spread across his desk. He could easily see, though, that the papers he was holding were shaking slightly. *Enough was enough.*

“Hamilton…”

“I don’t want to know anything more about you” spat Alexander, without hesitation. James stopped in his tracks, and Thomas finally met his glare. “I refuse to keep working for you. I can let slide the fact that you went after me when we met, I can let slide that you claimed I am where I am because Washington favoured me and not because I worked hard my whole life to get what I’ve got; I can let slide that you are stuck in thinking I love Betsey’s money more than her golden heart and well-meaning nature. I let a lot of things slide because we’ve never been friends, because we can’t tolerate each other, and we had it for each other for some reason I don’t understand. But I truly thought that you would calm down while I was doing a favour to you.

“And, instead of that, I was able to do my job only because your daughters and Madison talked to me. They don’t know a lot, because it seems that nobody can know about your life, though you want to know about everyone else’s, but they knew hints, little things, details I could use *to help you.* You haven’t wanted to talk to me about *anything.* In all this time, did you realise, at some damn point, that I was working for *you*?” He leaned dangerously over the table. “I will not forgive what you did today. To forgive something like this, you’d have to be a very good friend, or to show me it was unintentional. But I just know you’d have just go to Washington and kept the information to yourself until it best suited you. That’s some cold planning there.
“And, hey, don’t take this on the bad side. I’m almost impressed. You impressed me today. Not everybody can do such a thing with me. I never knew there could be such people in the world. You really let me speechless with your level of malice. Congratulations. Now, I think it’s fair that I pay you with the same coin. And, honestly, there’s nobody in this world that would want me as their enemy instead of their ally. Sometimes, I get afraid of myself when I’m too angry. Seriously. You are used to pusillanimous like Adams or Jay, and I don’t think you know who you’d pushed to the limit today”

In a blink of an eye, Hamilton got separated from the desk – Thomas sighed relieved from that and James put a comforting hand on his shoulder, fear taking over him at the last statement – and he closed his briefcase with a thump, walking towards the door.

“Good luck with your sister tomorrow” he said, before slamming the door shut at his backs.

“Let me talk to him” said James, hurrying to the door.

“James, let him be…” advised Thomas.

“No, no, he already rambled, now maybe he’d listen” he said, hopeful, before running downstairs.

“If he’d been wrong about something, maybe…” muttered Thomas.

He read the lease Hamilton had given to him for the fourth time. It was better than anybody would offer him, especially Lucy, and, for a moment, he hesitated with his left hand, shaking the pen. He held it upon the dotted line, before dropping it to the side and set the lease aside.

I always called you selfish for a reason.

James could manage to stop Hamilton just in the doorframe, knob in hand. He had wanted to calm him down, but, to his surprise, the CFO was very calm, especially after the roast he had dedicated his friend upstairs. Though some things had hurt him deeply – and James didn’t want to know how Thomas must’ve felt – he still wanted to be a bit logical and knew Hamilton would be the only one who could beat Lucy in her own game. The monologue of before being more than enough proof.

“Please, Hamilton, I know we’re not friends, but let’s cool down and talk this out peacefully”

James felt himself going back in time, three months ago, when he had tried to convince Hamilton to help them for the first time. It enraged James how they were back to the beginning for
“I think I talked more than enough” replied Hamilton, shrugging.

“Yeah, I think that too” said James, raising one eyebrow. “I understand your point, alright? Now, try to understand his…”

“That’s very difficult” interrupted Alexander. “He refused to talk to me even when I approached on good terms”

“Yes, true, but…”

“Madison, I am not going to work for him. I’m out”

“Please, at least be out after tomorrow”

“No. Why?”

*Well, at least he’s asking and waiting for an answer.* “Because you’re the only one who managed to shut Lucy up. Though she never fixed what she had to fix, she never showed up without invitation, she maintained distances and let us breathe for more than a month” he explained, honestly. He sighed when he saw Hamilton’s stoic expression didn’t change one bit. “Look, we… we can sort this out. We can repay you, maybe not at once, but we can agree on…”

“You don’t understand either, do you?” interrupted Alexander, shaking his head with tedium.

“Excuse me?” asked James, confused.

“I’m not angry because I spent money on you. I’m not even that angry that Jefferson hasn’t talked to me or explained me the problem himself. It’s not the first time a client of mine has problems on that matter. I’m angry because I’ve been working for someone who was waiting for me to turn around to stab me in the back”

“Hamilton…” tried to excuse James.

“I’d have understood it if we were against each other, alright?” interrupted Hamilton. “But we were not. The only thing you owe me is honesty, and, I’m sorry, but that makes anything else you may do or any excuses you’d prepare not to count” He opened the door and turned around. He looked over his shoulder one last time. “I’m sorry, James”

It might’ve been the seriousness, the sincerity of the words or the use of his first name after two years of cold-shouldering, or maybe a mix of the two, but it was enough to make James see that trying would be useless.
uncomfortable thing here, please), Thomas finally knew why he had done to deserve to be like this: explaining the case for the zillionth time to John Jay, in his kitchen, at 9.00. Or, at least, Hamilton knew and let him clear.

Thomas would never admit it aloud, but one of the only few things he would always give Hamilton was the fact that, with the man, there was never a tension feeling after some quarrel or disagreement. Hamilton could be at someone’s throat during a meeting and, once this was over, he’d help or do something for the person he had fought with. It was kind of impressive, Thomas admitted that. And he had got used to it quite easily.

Because if there was one thing he always hated was to be in tension with someone. He could debate, argue, counter, discuss, but if there was going to be a tension in the aftermath, Thomas would not cope. He hated to live in a toxic environment, it exhausted him mentally and it gave him more migraines that he’d have already with his anxious thoughts and repressed feelings. He always tried to stay away from anything like that.

There was a reason why he left his family home.

“So, your friend’s aunt wants to buy his house?”

Thomas rolled his eyes while James sighed in frustration. The fourth time, goddamnit. The fourth time already… And they had to be at Lucy’s house in thirty minutes.

“No…” said James, with enviable calmness. “My friend’s sister has made a new lease as the year has already ended…”

“I thought the year ended in December?” asked Jay, confused.

“Yes, it does. I was talking about the year our lease ends” explained James, slowly.

“What lease?”

“The one we’re going to sign today”

“And why would you sign a lease that ends today?”

“No, the lease that ends today is another one”

“And when will this one be up?”

“On February of 2019, I suppose…”

“Ah, but we’ve still got a lot of time to discuss this!”
“No, we don’t! We have to go sign it today!”

“But, didn’t you say it was up on 2019?”

“Well, yes, but we've got to sign this one, so we can still live in here!”

“Don’t you think so. I once lived on a rented house for six more months than my lease allowed me to… Well, the fact that the landlord died, and his brother was out of town and didn’t realise this helped a bit, but…”

“But that’s not gonna be our case” interrupted James.

“If only…” muttered Thomas. “Jay, we only need you to help us to convince Lucy not to increase the rent, alright?” he explained.

“Who?” asked the attorney, confused.

“My sister”

“The landlady” added James.

“Don’t confuse him any further…” complained Thomas.

“But wasn’t your sister’s name Anna?” inquired Jay.

“No”

“Well, your other sister’s name is Anna” commented James, casually.

“I told you not to confuse him any further!” condemned Thomas.

“And which one is the purchaser?” asked Jay.

“What purchaser?” asked Thomas.

“The one who is going to buy you the house”

“None! This is not our house!”

“Uf, try not to put that on the contract, I think that’s not very legal” advised Jay.

“Oh, sweet goodness…” muttered Thomas, burying his face in his hands.

“Jay, we’re not selling the house. We want to rent it” said James, staying calm.

“Then, do it” said Jay, shrugging.

“No, we can’t. Because Lucy is going to increase the rent and we’re not going to be able to keep going like this” explained James.

“Who??” asked Jay, with a confused look.

“My sister!” exploded Thomas.

“Where?! Where?!” screamed Jay, terrified, while looking around him.
His sudden and violent movements almost made him fall from the stool, if James hadn’t grabbed him on time.

“No one’s coming!” James tried to calm the attorney down.

“Oh, good” said Jay, relaxing considerably. “I don’t like surprise visits”

“Me neither” agreed Thomas, enaged.

“Look, Jay” said James, keeping calm from his friend’s sake. “His sister has made a new lease, and we are afraid that she will take advantage of this to ask for more money than she knows we can pay her. Alright? And we need you there to help us get to a fair compromise”

“Alright” nodded Jay.

“Yes. Good” smiled James.

“And what about the dogs?”

“… What dogs?” asked James, puzzled.

“The ones she wanted to keep”

Thomas was red in the face in within seconds. “She didn’t want any dogs! She wanted the custody of my daughters!”

“Ah, it’s true, sorry” said Jay. “The triplets, right?”

“No!”

“The twins, then?”

“No! They are not twins!”

“The oldest is sixteen and the little, ten” explained James, wanting to keep things cool.

“Ah, and you want them to live with you?”

“They already live with us!” said Thomas, indignant.

“And what do you want then?”

“To keep them with me!”

“That’s not very healthy. Children must fly away from the nest one day” said Jay.

“But they don’t want to fly from the nest, she is trying to take them away from me” explained Thomas, trying to control his anger.

“She who?”

“My sister!”

“Which one? The nice or the mean one?”
“None of them are nice” said James, shrugging.

“The only nice sister I ever had, died” added Thomas, rubbing his temples.

“Gee, Thomas…” muttered James, feeling how dark he had turned the conversation to.

Jay threw him a sympathetic look. “Oh, I’m so sorry, are you okay?”

Thomas looked confusedly at him. “Yes, I am. She left twenty-two years ago” he clarified.

“And why do you bring her up, then?” inquired Jay.

“Because you’re asking stupid questions” he blurted out.

“Thomas…” warned James.

“Listen, man, don’t take it out on me” complained Jay, frowning. “After all the effort I’m doing here, listening and solving your problems even though you never apologised to me”

“Excuse me?” said Thomas, shocked. “I have to apologise to you??”

“Of course, you threw me out and insulted me. You hurt me very badly” said Jay, as a matter-of-fact. “Other people wouldn’t even come back. I think I deserve an apology and a thank you”

“But what the hell? Are you on drugs?” said Thomas, feeling his cheeks burning from anger once again.

Jay squinted his eyes and leaned back on his seat, James preparing to catch him if he stumbled from the seat again. “What are you? A cop?”

“For fuck’s sake…” mumbled Thomas, clenching and unclenching his fists in an attempt to contain his rage. “This is completely useless”

“Excuse me, but you’re the one who needs a lawyer because you can’t sign a lease on your own” spat Jay.

“It’s not about signing the lease!” exploded Thomas for the second time, this time slapping his hands on the kitchen island.

“Thomas, calm yourself!” pleaded James.

“This man puts me on my nerves!” he excused himself.

“As if you were any easier to talk to” countered Jay. “I’ve been here for an hour, and I still don’t know what the hell is wrong”

“What’s wrong is that somebody let you graduate as a lawyer”

“Oi, oi, oi, Thomas, with all due respect, you’re bitter, huh?” said Jay, looking at his college friend up and down. “I think your main problem is that you have something internal that prevents you to be happy”

“That’s what I’m always telling him!” agreed James, patting Jay on the arm. He turned to his friend. “See how I’m not the only one who sees it?”

“Go to a therapist” advised Jay. “That’s from some childhood trauma”
“Buf, it’s just that his family is a nightmare come true” commented James.


Thomas threw them both a nasty glare. “Could you, at least, not gossip about my personal life right in front of me?” he asked, indignant. “The only thing you had to do was listening and helping, and you’re doing everything but”

James looked bad at him. “If you’re stressed, you only have to sign Hamilton’s lease”

“I won’t sign that lease”

“Really, Thomas, what do I need to…?”

“Wait” interrupted Jay, with a frantic look. “Hamilton? As Alexander Hamilton?” he asked, eyeing them both.

“Yes” nodded Thomas, sharing a confused look with James.

Jay looked at Thomas for a moment, straight in the eye, and then, he let out a: “Uuuuuuh” and began to collect his things, putting all of his papers inside his briefcase, in a disorganised way.

“No, no, no, no…” he muttered, and leaped from his seat, walking to the front door. He stopped and looked over his shoulder. “No, no, no” he repeated, shaking his head in denial.

“Where are you going?” asked Thomas.

“No, no, no. You have already lost” said Jay. “I’m sorry, but it’s not use to even try anything if Hamilton is your sister-in-law’s attorney”

“My sister” corrected Thomas. “And he’s not”

“He was his” chimed James, moving his tongue inside his mouth, in annoyance.

Jay looked at Thomas with wide eyes. “And you fired him for me?” he asked, pointing at himself. “Look, Thomas, with a simple ‘sorry’ I’d have had enough. You didn’t need to do such an imbecility”

“But what the hell is this now?” asked Thomas, annoyed. “A fucking joke?”

“I hope so. I really don’t want to be against that man. If he was a savage around his twenties, he must be a trial monster nowadays” said Jay, serious.

“You tell him, because he doesn’t want to listen to me” added James, looking harshly at his friend.

“Really, James?” asked Thomas, clicking his tongue.

“Just two months” kept saying James, with venom. “You messed up in two months”

“Do you really have to talk about it now? Can’t you go to bed one day without putting me on blast?”

“You’re one to talk! You put me on blast just yesterday!” accused James. “I won’t be able to look
Hamilton in the eye now when I cross him in the hallway!”

“You haven’t talked to him in months, and now all of a sudden you care about what he thinks?”

“Just because you don’t give a damn about things, means I’ve gotta do the same!”

“I do care!”

“I was trying to do things fine and you had to come and destroy it because of your fucking pride!”

Thomas punched the kitchen island with rage. “IT WASN’T BECAUSE OF THAT!”

Knock, knock, knock.

The fight died down as they heard the knock on the front door. Jay turned around and opened the door.

“Yes, open the door, you’re in your house” commented Thomas, sarcastically.

James sighed and patted his friend on the arm, trying to keep things cool. He tightened his grip on Thomas’ arm as he tensed when he heard the voice at the other side of the door.

“Well, Jay, long time no see” greeted Lucy, with clear surprise in her voice.

“Yes… Who are you?” asked the man, eyeing the woman with confusion.

Lucy took one step back. “Thomas’ sister”

“Ah, you must be Delilah, then” said Jay, cheerful, taking her hand freely and shaking it.

“Who is Delilah?” muttered James.

Thomas simply shook his head in defeat and buried his face in his hands.

“Well, it was nice to meet you, miss” said Jay, letting go of her hand.

“We’ve met before…” she said, with a cocked eyebrow. She took out one paper towel and cleaned her hand with it.

“But I need to go to Thomas’ cousin’s house to purchase a house” he explained, exiting the place.

“Bye!” he said, walking down street.

Lucy looked at him. “Sweet Lord, that joint he smoked back in the nineties really messed up with his
“Brain…” she commented, shaking her head.

“He was born like that, actually” commented Thomas, on the quiet. He walked to the door. “What are you doing here, Lucy? I thought we agreed on meeting at your house”

Lucy raised one eyebrow. “Well, you’re one to talk, after the ambush you made me live this morning!” she condemned.

Thomas stopped in his tracks. “Beg your pardon?” he asked, confused, tilting his head to the side.

“That new Digimon you got came to my house this morning, waking me up at the ungodly hour of 8 am, to tell me I should break the lease because you had somewhere else to live”

Thomas felt numb all of a sudden, almost able to ignore his sister’s presence if it weren’t for Lucy’s sharp glare. It was the only thing that let him see she was burning with fury inside, though her passive-aggressive tone showed she had control over the situation. Nothing further from reality.

“I don’t know from which pound you took that chihuahua” continued Lucy, bitterly. “But please, train him so he won’t bother people at their homes”

James frowned at her. “He came from a college after studying and make something out of his life” he snapped.

Lucy threw daggers at him, and James tried not to flinch just there. “Train your Yorkshire as well” she spat.

Thomas frowned. “I’d rather train the poodle I’ve got in front of me right now and that Mum spoiled” he retorted.

Lucy’s eyes squinted dangerously. “So cocky” she commented. “Don’t think that just because your…”

“Hamilton” interrupted James, sharply.

Lucy looked at him with the corner of her eye, disgusted. “Just because Mr. Hamilton has found you some place to live and has given you the money that, according to him, I owed you, you…”

“What?” interrupted Thomas, tensing considerably,

Lucy arched her eyebrow even more. Then, with a smirk, she added. “Hasn’t he told you?”

“We haven’t seen him yet’ spat James, gathering enough courage to walk to her.

She huffed. “Alright, whatever…” she forced a smile. “I’m only here to inform you you’d have two weeks to leave the house. Take all your things to wherever”

“Alright” nodded Thomas.

“Two weeks for real or two weeks until you change your mind?” asked James, bitterly.

Lucy wrinkled her nose. “Two weeks” she repeated. “That’s what your attorney has told me” She turned around. “Make sure to not leave one thing here” she warned.
“Will do” promised Thomas.

“Make you sure to keep your word” retorted James, receiving an elbow from his friend.

Lucy stopped right in front of the door and turned her head to her brother. “Tell the girls their aunt said hello”

And Thomas clenched his fists, feeling his blood boiling uncontrollably inside. He wouldn’t be surprised if his face was becoming redder.

“Actually” he said, walking directly to the door. “I don’t think they’d want to know” he said, taking his sister’s hand away from the knob. “And I don’t think I want them to know anything more about you, if I can avoid it” he added, opening the door from his now startled sister.

Lucy frowned at him, her indifferent façade completely forgotten. “You just won one battle; but I’m going to win the war” she swore, stepping out of the house.

“We’ll see” retorted Thomas, following her with a narrowed glare.

Lucy whipped around. “I always play to win”

“So do I” he talked back once again. “Oh, Lucy? Tell the poor soul you fooled into marriage that his brother-in-law sends him his most sincere condolences”

And with that, he closed the door in her noses. James huffed at his back, and Thomas let out a sigh he didn’t know he had been holding.

“Well” began James, once he turned around. “now you must sign the lease…”

“I know…” nodded Thomas, a bit uneasy. “That and that I’m gonna regret this…” he added, pointing at the door at his backs.

_Knock, knock._

“Well, that was fast” commented Thomas. “Alright, Lucy, I’m…” he began to apologise, realising it was always better to be civil. He stopped mid-sentence when he saw John Jay, with a lost expression, at the other side.

“Thomas, you forgot to tell me where your cousin lives” he said. “Let’s see if we focus a little b…”

Thomas closed the door in his noses, as well.
“I’m sure you didn’t regret that” joked James.

“No, not in the slightest” admitted Thomas, totally serious.

Thomas and James went to work later that day, after re-reading the lease and making sure nothing was odd. They signed it and drove to work. They didn’t need to enter the building to hear the fight that was happening inside. They heard the screams while parking and took their time to mentally prepare themselves before entering the war field.

When they came in, they saw Adams red in the face, arguing with Angelica about something they didn’t understand, as the two persons were talking above the other, trying to scream louder. Maria was writing it all while Laurens recorded it in his mobile. If they sharpened their hearing a bit, they could hear Washington rocking in his chair, locked up in his office.

The normal in their law firm.

They passed in front of Hamilton’s closed door to go to their office, as usual, but this time, James elbowed his friend and directed his glare to the wooden door. Thomas clenched his jaw and shook his head. James’ glare exerted more pression than any words could have.

Sighing, Thomas turned around and looked at the door. He tried to hear if the CFO was there, but the vice president’s screaming was piercing his ears. God brings them up and, eventually, they get together*, Thomas guessed…

Thomas jumped in his spot when he heard three knocks on the door, and looked down, seeing James hunched down and doing the action in his behalf. His friend threw him an encouraging smile, gave him the signed lease and then walked to their shared office, not closing the door behind him.

“Come in” said Hamilton, from the other side.

Entering the lion’s den had never felt so accurate until that moment, Thomas realised. He had only joked about it while saying it, but now it felt real enough to make him doubt if he should open
the door or simply turn around, ignore James and get his own work done.

Easier saying it than doing it, especially now, that Hamilton was his landlord. Thomas was still questioning if that was the best thing that could had happened to him, or the worst.

The door swung open, making him jump in his spot for the second time that morning. Hamilton stood at the other side, his confused frowned turning into a cocked eyebrow. He looked up and down at him, and if there was some disregard vibe in his expression, Thomas did his best not to acknowledge it.

“Did you need something?” asked the CFO, standing at the doorframe.

“I…” He looked down and decided to simply hand him the paper.

Alexander took it and read it. “I’ll make you a photocopy of it” he said, shrugging. “I’ve got to give you something”

Hamilton turned around, and Thomas tried to walk in. Tried, as Hamilton threw him a questioning look.

“What are you doing?”

“You said you had to give me something” explained Thomas, a bit taken aback.

“Yes, I never said you could come in” clarified Alexander, walking to his desk.

“Excuse me?” he asked, a bit lost.

“In any other normal company, the secretary waits until their superior gives them permission to enter a room”

And, if there was some derogatory tone when Hamilton said the word ‘secretary’, Thomas did his best to ignore it.

“I recall you telling me to come in” he retorted, frowning upset. He did his best, was he to blame if Hamilton was being more unbearable than usual?

“Yes, and you stood there until I opened the door. Now, I’m telling you I don’t want you to come in my office” countered Hamilton, calmly.

“You…”
“Didn’t you like social ladders and contradictions that much?” spat Hamilton, as he turned around with a wad of cash. “Then, don’t worry, that I’m going to give you two full plates of it*” he promised, tossing the money to him. “Here you go. All the money your sister owed you, discounting the one I made you keep back in December”

Thomas took the money with hesitant hands. “Alright…” was all he managed to say.

“Count it” said Hamilton, crossing both arms across his chest.

“Excuse me?”

“Count it” he repeated, now supporting his right side by the doorframe. “Do you know the total number?”

“Yes”

“Then, count it. Wouldn’t want any of that missing, right?”

Just then, Thomas realised the whole building was silent. He didn’t even hear Washington’s chair anymore. With the corner of his eye, he saw Adams and Angelica (both with red faces but with calmer expressions) had stopped fighting, and were now watching Hamilton and him, as the rest of the office. Aaron had stuck his head out of his office, James was watching the whole ordeal with a worried expression directed at him. Looking sideways to his left, he saw Maria leaning on her counter and Laurens alternating his glare between the two, not comprehending what was happening.

Because that wasn’t one of Hamilton-Jefferson’s fights they all got used to. This one had venom, resentment and a lot of tension. Just the perfect beverage to make Thomas hesitate at every thought and movement. Hamilton kept waiting for him to do as he was told, patiently, and not giving any mind to their witnesses.

_The sooner you start, the sooner this will end_, he told himself. And counted the money as fast as he could. In fact, there wasn’t anything missing. And something inside his stomach turned, because deep down, he’d have loved that Hamilton had done something wrong and was giving him less (or even more) than he was supposed to. Of course, he wasn’t that lucky.

“So?” inquired Hamilton.

“It’s alright” he admitted.

Hamilton nodded. “Good. Seems like my untrustworthy nature didn’t kick in. Must be asleep or something” he snapped.

He stretched out his hand, still with his eyes locked in Jefferson’s.
“And this?” asked the secretary, arching one eyebrow.

“You signed the lease, right?” asked Hamilton.

“Yes…” he answered, a bit unsure.

“Do you remember how much I asked for you?”

_Oh, God, no… “… Yes”_

“Well, I’m waiting” stated Hamilton, as if he was stupid. “Don’t worry, there are witnesses around, I can’t deny you didn’t pay this February”

“I wasn’t…”

“Weren’t you pissed at the fact that I never asked you for money?” interrupted Hamilton, with total calmness and fake innocence. “Then, worry no more, because I’m going to finally give you some mental peace”

Thomas inspired through his nostrils. He took 800 dollars separated from the wad and gave them to Hamilton, who took the money with the aggressiveness he was concealing under his superficial calmness.

“Did you need anything else, Mr. Secretary?”

“No” he answered, cuttingly.

“Good. Have a good day, then”

Hamilton nodded and closed the door quietly. A few whispers were heard, and Thomas couldn’t control his anger any longer.

“Don’t you have work to do?” he spat, walking in his office.

“Huh, these sub-animals don’t know what that word even means!” criticised Washington from behind his closed door.

“This man is learning” commented Angelica. “He hears all the shit from the safeness of his closed office”

Lafayette cared a lot about his friends. He had been a bit down worrying about how Laurens might be doing on his own lately, and the quarrel (_serious_ quarrel) Jefferson and Alex had didn’t
That was why Hercules decided to go out dinner that night, to spend time together and talk about anything and forget about their problems from a couple of hours. It worked. They both laughed, dined and talked about everything and nothing at the same time, just enjoying the moment.

A joy that ended as soon as they returned home and saw the door wasn’t locked. Hercules at first wanted to be rational and think maybe he had forgotten to turn the key a second time to lock the door, but when he opened the door and saw the whole living room upside down, he thought he was going to have a heart attack. Lafayette grabbed his arm, while he scrutinized the disorganized house. Cocking an eyebrow, he looked in the direction of the bathroom door, where they heard some noise coming from the other side.

Both partners looked at each other, confused, and Hercules walked slowly towards the door, while Lafayette stayed behind by his own command. Hercules waited a few moments, pressed his ear against the door, and threw his boyfriend a puzzled look when he heard what sounded like the hairdryer and a faint voice humming. Suddenly, the sound stopped and the whole house fell in the silence, and both men were frozen in their spot, waiting for something to happen.

The door was swung open, revealing a dressed-up Laurens. The freckled man jumped backwards, afraid as he wasn’t expecting anyone standing behind the door. He frowned at his friend.

“Hercules, man, don’t stand there like a weirdo!” he condemned, walking to his bedroom.

“A weirdo…?” repeated Hercules, shaking his head as if trying to get out of some trance. “Laurens, what are you doing in here?”

“I live here, duh…” answered Laurens, while choosing what jacket he was going to wear.

Lafayette smiled brightly. “You are coming back?”

“Why?” asked Hercules, more disappointed than his boyfriend.

Laurens got out from his bedroom and looked at them. “Listen, I just realised that it’s not healthy to live with resent…”

“He said, though he had a folder in his computer titled ‘List of persons who haven’t thanked me in 2017’ narrated Hercules, mockingly.

Laurens threw him a glare. “That’s because I like to be organized, and to know who is worthy of my awesome personality”

“Awesome personality?” echoed Hercules.

“Yeah. I just met with Alf the other day and we talked, and he made me see I am worthy”
“He’s such a good man” complimented Lafayette, nodding with a smile.

“Let’s review…” said Hercules, pinching the bridge of his nose. “You bittered and pestered us about how badly your life was going, you made a fuss because Laf tried to help you – paying a huge amount of money that was never returned to us, by the way – you ignored us for almost a month, and now, you come here and tell us that you met with Alf and that now you’re besties and that you are coming back here without consulting it with anyone?”

Laurens looked at him with tedium. “Yeah…” he simply said. Turning to Lafayette, he added. “Really, have a chat with him about his annoying habit of narrating and stating things we all are aware of”

“Okay” said Laf, shrugging.

Hercules clicked his tongue. “And Washington scolding you and kicking you out of the building didn’t have anything to do with this?” he asked.

“It had a lot to do with my final decision, actually” nodded Laurens.

“And where are you going now?” asked Hercules, upset.

“Out” answered John, simply, going to the front door.

“Out, where is ‘out’?” insisted Hercules.

“To whenever the wind leads me, I don’t know” said Laurens, annoyed.

“Let’s see if the wind leads you to your own house, one of these days”

“Hercules, please, he just came back!” complained Lafayette.

“You’re bitter, man, that’s why you almost have no friends” spat Laurens, looking at his reflection on the mirror by the front door. He took one of the keys he found on the table beneath the mirror. “Don’t wait up for me” he said, opening the door.

“Wasn’t planning to” retorted Hercules.

“Be careful!” said Lafayette, receiving the door closing as an answer.

“And who is gonna clean this?” asked Hercules, pointing at the mess in the living room.

“He’ll clean it tomorrow…” suggested Laf.

“What is that phenomenon gonna clean?” spat Hercules, annoyed. “Look, look at the bathroom! All full of puddles! One of these days, Lafayette, the downstairs neighbour is gonna knock on this door because they’re gonna have a leak! And that day, I swear to Heaven above, will be the day I’LL GET THE HELL OUTTA HERE!”

Lafayette sighed and rolled his eyes. He took his phone and scrolled down his contacts until he found the person he was looking for. He began to text him, while Hercules kept screaming promises and swears he was not going to fulfil.
From Laf:

Bonsoir, Alex

You busy?

From petit lion:

Hi there, Laf.

Not much. Why?

From Laf:

Wanna go to the pub to get blank drunk?

From petit lion:

Hell, yeah

Lafayette smiled. He was glad to have such a good friend as Alexander. He went to fetch his jacket.

Hercules had been talking all that time, not noticing a thing.

“Or no, better, I’ll grab him by the ponytail, I’ll make him go in circles in the air, and then I’ll kick him out. To the hell. Out of here! If he wants to be here, he must do something, dammit! What is this? What does he think this is? A fucking hostel? No, hostels get paid… Where the hell is the fucking tape of the toothpaste now…? Fuck, he’s only arrived and he’s already dropping them down the goddamned drain?! This one was fucking new, I bought it yester…!”

Bang.

Hercules was frozen for a moment. He went out of the bathroom, seeing the house completely empty. He clicked his tongue in annoyance and threw the toothpaste he was holding to the sink.

“To the hell” he said, slamming the bathroom door shut. “To the fucking hell”
He looked at all the clothes that were spread across the living room, as well as a wet towel that lay on the couch.

“There. When this fucking pigsty is infested by rats, I don’t want to know a damn. Let’s them clean the shit!”

He walked to the front door, took his keys from the bowl and locked the door, leaving the key in the hole. He went to sleep after silencing his phone and putting earplugs. Before falling asleep, he declared to himself:

“I fucking swear I’m going to have a peaceful night”

Chapter End Notes

NOTES:

"To exasperate Saint Maria": there is an idiom in Spanish that goes "Desesperas a María Santísima", and it means that one person is so annoying that they could end with the patience of a saint.

"God brings them up and, eventually, they get together": this is the literal translation of the idiom that in English goes as "Birds of a feather, flock together".

"I'm gonna give two full plates of it": Don't know if in English there's something like this... When you love a meal, you can eat two plates of it. Hamilton is saying that, if Jefferson likes to difference themselves and treat each other depending on their social class, Hamilton's going to give him 'two plates of it', aka: he's going to do that and even going a bit further to 'please him'. From where I am, we can also use this expression as 'You don't like it? Well, then have a full plate of it'. As if saying, 'You hate that I do this? Then I'll do it all the time for the sake of making you mad'.

ONE LAST THING... (Please read?)

This chapter was kind of personal to me. If some of you felt indentified with the critcal voice or anything like that, let me tell you: do not listen to it. I know it's hard, I know it may seem impossible, I still struggle with it, but you have to understand that each of us are special in our own way and nobody must let you think badly about yourselves. Love yourselves first, fight for what you think it's right, keep being original and doing things in your own way. You deserve to be happy. Don't let a voice guide you if it only can say nasty things about you, nobody is perfect, but in our imperfections there is a beautiful and original perfection we all must use.

PS: And let's just clarify that I used Jefferson basically because the real one had anxiety and social anxiety and I think it worked better with him. I like the character but the irl
Thomas Jefferson... I don't even want to say what I think of that "human"... Nothing pretty.

The fable of "The frog and the scorpion" teaches us a kind of dark moral: if you help those who only want to see you hurt, you'd end up damaged, not matter how honourable the act might have been. It can also mean that, sometimes, if you don't stop aiming for more and more, your pride and ambition will be your downfall. Which is quite ironic, because that is what happened to Hamilton at some point in the musical and in real life.

"Look for a friend that will shelter you when storms hit;
If what I owe is honesty,
then the rest stops counting" -

Verse from the song of the Spanish version of Laura Pausini's song "Non è detto (Nadie ha dicho - Nobody said)", which helped me write this chapter.

Sursum corda!
The one and (hopefully) last time

Chapter Summary

It was just destined to happen. Whoever saw what a meeting was like in that law firm would have joked wondering how it didn’t happen yet; some of the staff started to make jokes about the idea, as well.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

****This chapter is not the next chapter****

Let me explain. I was writing the next chapter when I got stuck at some point because writer's block is just that friendly, and likes to come uninvented. So, I just did what I do best: procrastinating. And in one of those procrastination days, I was reading the 'series' I write in Spanish with 'The Avengers' characters (because I'm that self-centered, ya know...?) and I was reading one little special I made about a whole week with Loki as a teacher. And, between the plot of the next chapter and the plot of that 'special-episode', a light bulb lit up inside my head. I thought 'Wouldn't it be funny to try to write a chapter in my 'Hamilton' nonsense... I mean, fanfic, in which Alexander is in charge for, at least, one meeting?' And this little messy thing was born.

As usual, I failed at making it shorter than an average chapter. I think that is a lost battle by now. If you're wondering, this might take place a week after the last chapter.

So, here you've got this little filler until the actual next chapter is done.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was just destined to happen. Whoever saw what a meeting was like in that law firm would have joked wondering how it didn’t happen yet; some of the staff started to make jokes about the idea, as well. Needless to say, those were feeling genuinely awful right now, though it was not their fault.

Someone should have guessed something was going to end wrong or, at least, differently, that day. It wasn’t very usual for them to have a meeting on a Tuesday. Even if the whole building would be falling down, everyone in there was either too slaphappy or tired of everybody’s shit to bring the weekly meeting forwards. But, maybe it was because of those reasons why nobody had said anything and simply went on with it. The sooner it started, the sooner it would end.

It had started being a weekly meeting just as any other.
“If I come from the grocery shop and some of you ask me why I haven’t bought X thing again, I am going to hit whoever it was with the bag of frozen nuggets. And that shit is hard as a rock” threatened Maria, looking at each member of the staff.

Peaceful.

“Burr, either you cover that goddamned wall already or I won’t be held for my actions!” complained Jefferson, throwing daggers in the lawyer’s direction.

“Know what? I’d like to see you come over here and show me what you’ve got” challenged Burr.

“Madison, son, when are you going to give me the accounts of this month? Or the last one, for that matter…” asked Hamilton, trying not to raise his voice.

“I can’t until Adams gives me his part” was James’ defence.

“Where the fuck is that man anyways?” complained Angelica. “Since I told him he had to have those done, he disappeared. And that was two weeks ago” Laurens scoffed. “That man works less than Tarzan’s tailor”

“At least he doesn’t bother anyone with his useless presence” commented Hercules, sharply.

Laurens dedicated his friend a death glare. “It didn’t take you that long to insult me! Damned you to hell!” he complained, getting irritated in less than a second, and kicking the table leg he had at his left, shaking the whole table.

“Careful, Pikachu!” complained Thomas, grabbing, along with Maria, the closest mugs before they fell and broke.

“STOP CALLING ME THAT!” screamed Laurens.

“John, calm yourself!” pleaded Lafayette, with an anxious expression. With a hand against his forehead, he added, under his breath. “Oh, Seigneur, prendre moi tôt”

“If he doesn’t make a fuss, he is not happy” commented Peggy.

“You shut up, the only thing you do in here is sleeping” retorted Laurens.

“And still, I’m more productive than you!” argued the therapist back.

“Can we focus on the main matter here?” asked Hamilton, after a tired sigh.

“What was it? I don’t remember” admitted Lafayette.

“The toilets are broken” answered Peggy.

“No, it was about the salaries” corrected Hercules, with a frown. “It turns out there’s money for a rocking chair, but none to pay us”
“Herc, I’m sorry to say this, but the job most of you do here is not worth your salaries” said Angelica, serious.

“Am I to blame if some idiots don’t do their job fine??”

“Peggy, what is that about the toilets being broken?” asked Alexander, leaning on his chair to look at her.

“Mari and I went before the meeting, I flushed and then the whole floor was flooded” she explained.

“Marvellous” complained Alex, writing something down.

“But didn’t Mr. Washington call someone to fix them the other day?” asked Madison.

“In this day care, it is a miracle that the toilets had only broken twice in three years” said Jefferson, massaging his temples.

“Lemongrab, you’re the life of the party…” said Maria, sarcastically.

“And what reasons do I have to be happy, especially in here?” spat Thomas, looking up at her.

Madison shook his head in the receptionist’s direction. “He has something internal than prevents to be happy”

“There he goes again…”

“Yeah, it’s called his personality” commented Alexander, with venom.

Thomas frowned at him. “If you don’t talk to me, don’t throw me digs either!”

“Mr. Jefferson, when you have a say in here, tell me what I can do” argued Alexander, passive-aggressive.

“Please, don’t start…” begged Lafayette, biting his bottom lip in worry.

“Wait a minute” said Angelica, all of a sudden, raising one hand. “Did you clean the mess before coming?” she asked, alternating her glare between Maria and her sister.

“Yeah, what are we now, the maids?” scoffed Peggy.

“Talking about that… what happens with the cleaning?” asked Aaron.

“Maria, have you done the colour calendar for the following months?” asked James.

“I haven’t had time” admitted the girl.

“What else do you have to do?” asked Thomas, mockingly.

Maria wrinkled her nose. “Man, you disgust me so much I’m starting to doubt if it’s even legal”

“The feeling is mutual, believe me” spat Thomas, curving his lips in disgust.

Maria talked in the middle of his sentence. “Go whoring, let’s see if with that you finally get rid of that vinegar face, Lemongrab!”

“MARIA!” shouted Thomas, blushing.
“Oh, that reminds me… Alf is going to come to dinner tonight” informed Laurens, looking at his two flatmates.

Hercules looked at him for a moment. “And that is, right?”

“That is what?”

“You just drop the issue and then we have to agree yes or yes”

“Now that one of my friends come to dinner is a problem?” asked John, dumbfounded.

“Doing it without telling us is”

“And what have I just done?”

“Telling us at last hour!”

“Last hour?! It’s eight am! You have enough time to come up with something!”

“But why must I change my whole plan just because you are always doing what you want?”

“And what am I supposed to do? Doing whatever you want? I’m thirty, if I can’t do whatever I want now, when will I?”

“When you have your own house”

“Always coming back to that!”

“Stop you two!” begged Lafayette, when he saw Laurens’ face turning red.

At the same time the quarrel between the three friends took place, Angelica was having her own with her sister.

“Now, I’ll have to clean your mess…” complained Angelica.

“It was just a bit of water!” said Peggy.

“A bit, no. You said flooded”

“I also say you look pretty when we go out, and you believe it as well?”

“Peggy, girl, really…” complained Alexander, passing a hand through his face.

“What??”

“Look, little brat, now you’re going to clean your mess!” screamed Angelica, enraged.

“No!” screamed Peggy, getting up from the chair. “That mess is not my fault!”

“You flushed, you clean!”

“I am pregnant, I can’t make efforts!”
“You are two months along, Peggy, stop being such a victim!”

“I am not!”

“Let Maria clean it, she was there as well, and she is the receptionist” spat Thomas, with venom. Maria frowned at him. “Lemongrab, I am the receptionist, not the cleaner. In all honesty, you should be the one cleaning”

“Excuse me?”

“You are always cleaning the photocopier and your office. Now, do the same to the restrooms”

“I am not going to clean the water of a toilet” he sentenced, with his nose wrinkled in disgust.

“There goes his nibs…” commented Alexander.

“I’m not seeing you volunteering for going!” said Thomas.

“Excuse me, mister, but cleaning’s never been beneath my dignity. I think you’re confusing us again”

“I’ve never seen you clean anything in here”

“Tha’s because I don’t have an imperative need of letting the world know what I’ve done right each day”

“But if you take whatever chance you get to remind us how the building hasn’t fallen down because of you”

“Am I lying?”

“You…”

“No, wait” interrupted Alexander. “According to you, I am incapable of sincerity. Sorry, I forgot”

“I don’t…”

“Thieves think everyone is like them” interrupted the CFO, sharper than before.

“Gee, Alex…” muttered Aaron, with a frown of worry.

“Hamilton…” said Madison, at the same time, cautiously.

Thomas clicked his tongue. “I sound off your whole family tree, fucking resentful gremlin!” he exploded, punching the table.

“Thomas!” said James, with a frown.

“Leave him” said Hamilton, looking at the accountant seriously. “The feeling is beyond mutual. Sure he shares my opinion concerning his family, for a change” he added, with a smirk.

“Alex!” hissed Aaron.

The only reason why Thomas hadn’t gotten up to strangle the immigrant right there was
because James was fast enough to grab his arm in order to hold him back. Thomas and Alexander went to do what they knew best, screaming at each other, barely listening to what the other was saying.

“You’ve been talking shit about his roots since you came, now don’t complain!” Maria defended the CFO.

“Maria, don’t make it worse!” complained James, his face flustered for strain.

“He can talk about everyone, but nobody can say anything about him!” agreed Hamilton, finally raising his voice.

“Look who’s talking, the untouchable of the office” complained Thomas, throwing his voice volume control out of the window.

“Please, calm down!” said Aaron, also holding Alexander back in his seat.

That was how the whole table went from one complaining person to the whole staff screaming profanities and insulting each other, hitting the table or kicking the floor, or throwing the nearest object.

It wasn’t an unusual sight, and his ears were used to it, but, for some reason, George Washington was starting to feel something was odd that day. His head was thumping; his blood was boiling; his cheeks were burning and there was something being born inside his chest that slowly made its way up to his throat.

And, as the screaming was getting louder, the sensation burned in the roof of his mouth. Not even rocking was doing him any good this time, and that made George worry enormously. Eventually, it happened what he feared the most: he lost his temperance and his patience reached its limit.

George jumped from his seat, making the rocker fall on the floor with a loud thump, but what really made the whole room silent was the punch he gave the table and that made both the glasses on and the people surrounding it tremble.

“THAT IS ENOUGH!” screamed the CEO, his deep voice resounding through the walls. “I think it’s already enough, each of you, with your tantrums and behaviour proper of three-year-old kids!” He looked at each employee in the eye, receiving evasive or shameful glares. “I am sick of living the same all Wednesdays. I am sick of always hearing the same problems but not a single solution. The colour calendar, something broken, some personal stuff that has nothing to do with the issues we’re living in this building… I am sick that you are more worried about taking the other, a workmate, down. I am sick that none of you know the true meaning of respect or team spirit. No one in here is indispensable. Any of you could be fired right now and I wouldn’t have any problems in hiring
another person, maybe a more respectful and decent person who, not only would do their job fine and on time, but who also would know how to coexist with other human beings. I am sick of the lack of humility I have to endure while working in here, of how much condescendence you all talk with!"

As the speech went by, a new member of the staff looked at the ground, until everybody had their glare down, ashamed and thoughtful. George, on his behalf, was red in the face and raising his voice to volumes even he didn’t know he could reach.

“If one of you disrespect another fellow worker you’d be fired! And this is not an empty threat, I will do it! Compassion doesn’t make money! Hasn’t helped me get respected! All of you blow everything I tell you off, and I’m fed up! I won’t tolerate it anymore! Things are going to change in here! I swear to God that things a…!”

And then, it happened. What outsiders didn’t understand how it hadn’t happened yet. What some of them had been joking about lately. What really made that meeting different from any others.

George was cut off in the middle of his promise, hand on the left side of his chest, and groaned, hunching over himself. The staff’s glares were up again, looking in confusion at the CEO. The surprise turned into a mix of fear and worry when Washington fell on his knees, still with his hand upon the chest. Alexander was the first one to react, jumping from his seat and kneeling in front of his boss and friend.

“George, are you okay?” he asked, alarmed.

“What’s wrong, honey?” asked Angelica, imitating her brother-in-law’s action and taking out her protective nature.

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Maria, covering her mouth.

Lafayette was the next to get up and ran to his boss’ side. “Ça devait arriver un jour ou l’autre!” he complained, on his way.

“It looks like a heart attack” commented Madison, calmer than the rest.

“Someone call a goddamned ambulance already!” urged Hamilton, putting a comforting hand in George’s shoulder.

“Sweet Lord…” muttered Aaron, dialling the number of the nearest hospital. “Hello, yes? I’m calling from Washington and Co., please, send us an ambulance, our boss might be having a heart attack” he explained, maintaining a calm attitude as best as he could.

“That ‘might’ is unnecessary” said Madison.

“Don’t start again” warned Thomas, through clenched teeth.
“Yes, the address is… Oh, yes, yes. Okay” he hung up and looked at the phone with a confused expression.

“What happens?” asked Hercules, worried.

Aaron looked at his workmates, surprised. “They told me they know the address by heart”

“Normal, we spend more time there than in here…” said Laurens, shaking his head.

“I’ve told you so, I’ve told you so: don’t accumulate, George, scream at your employees when you need it, George. But did you ever listen to me? No!”

“Gee, Martha, I’m supposed to be resting”

“You should’ve rested before any of this happened! A heart attack, George!”

“It was not a heart attack, it was an angina”

“Same thing!”

“No, it’s not”

Angelica, Eliza and Alexander watched the marital quarrel as if it were a tennis match. They had come from the hospital an hour ago, and Martha’s angst had turned into anger as soon as she was told George was fine. And she never stopped talking and reprimanding his husband for the poor self-care he had. It was in that moment when the three companions understood where George had learnt to deal with a motormouth like Alexander.

Eliza was called by Angelica when she realised Alex was about to have to be hospitalized as well for a panic attack. Alexander denied it several times: while waiting for the ambulance, while getting in the ambulance, while being taken to the hospital, while waiting for some nurse to come and give them some news… But even a stranger would have seen Alexander was about to lose it. Luckily, Eliza arrived as soon as she heard, and hugged and comforted her husband until the man was able to breathe properly and stop thinking the worst could happen.

Angelica made a mental note to herself about what had happened. If any her co-workers dared to mention this incident to make even more fun of Alexander and the relationship ‘father-son’ like he shared with Washington, that person would pay. A whole eternity in Hell would be seen as a relaxing vacation in comparison of what she could do to them if that happened in the slightest.

“Are you feeling better, sir?”
Alexander asked when Martha finally stopped talking for more than one minute straight. He was at the other side of the bed, across from Martha, who was holding her husband’s hand as if her life depended on it. In fact, Eliza thought the woman must have been feeling like that. She tried to ignore the chills that went up her spine at the thought of losing Alexander. She still remembered how scared she felt when Angelica sent a text to her telling her she had to go to the hospital because something had happened to Alex. She didn’t want to repeat that experience ever again. She walked to her husband and held one of his hands, tightly. Alexander didn’t hesitate in returning the squeeze.

“I’m fine, son, it was little scare” reassured George, smiling weakly.

“Little…” huffed Martha. “You are not going to work until I say so” she swore, in a louder tone.

“Martha, I can’t take a break now, there’s a lot going on” tried to argue George.

“No. Let other handle it. What about Lee?” she asked, stubbornly.

“Missing in action” answered Angelica, bitterly. “Since he abandoned us in that cabin, we haven’t heard of him”

“What happened…?” tried to ask Eliza.

“Nothing” George, Angelica and Alexander said at the same time, deathly serious.

Eliza frowned at the three of them. “Alright, then” she complained.

“I feel you, I haven’t been able to find out… yet” said Martha, throwing a sideways glare to George. “Who is second in command in that law firm?”

“Hm, Alexander” said Angelica.

The immigrant half-closed his eyes. “No, no, no. You are the vice president”

“But you’re closer to him” retorted Angelica.

“No…! Well, that much it’s true, but…”

“Ha! I left you without arguments!” said Angelica, triumphant.

“Honey, the person able to leave me without arguments has not been born yet” scoffed Alexander.

“Chill, show off…” said Eliza, rolling her eyes.

“Actually, Alexander, I was about to choose you to have everything under control until I can go back” interrupted George, looking at the CFO straight in the eye.

“Excuse me?” said Alexander, blinking dumbfounded.

Eliza had to bite her bottom lip to not burst out laughing just there. Her sister, on the contrary, didn’t hold back.
“Hahahahaha! Take that!” said Angelica, taking out her phone from her pocket. “I am going to text this on the group chat! I need to see the people’s response!” she informed, while typing.

“No, Angelica, don’t!”

Eliza couldn’t help the giggle then when she saw her husband and sister running around the room. Alexander was trying to take Angelica’s phone, while the woman laughed while running and – surprisingly – not bumping over anything.

“You can’t catch me with those tiny legs!” taunted Angelica. “Sent!” she proclaimed, raising the phone above her head.

“Treason” complained Alexander, gasping for air.

“You’re in a very bad shape, honey, I’ve told you” commented Eliza, her voice shaking with giggles.

“Double treason” said Alexander, throwing daggers at his wife.

“You’ll be fine, Alex. I’ll try to come as soon as I can” promised George.

“After the approval of his wife” said Martha, throwing a warning glare to the man.

“Yes, yes…” nodded Washington, resigned.

“Sir, seriously, rethink this” pleaded Alexander.

“I already did”

“When?”

“While coming here. I rethink around… five times”

“How could you do that? I barely heard my thinking” asked Eliza, impressed.

“Twenty-eight years of marriage” he answered.

“And when did you start to be able to do that? I mean… Look who I married…”

“Triple treason” said Alexander, frowning at his wife again.

“Come on, Alex, the worst has passed” tried to comfort Angelica. “We’re not having more meetings until the next week”

“True…” nodded Alex.

George frowned in their direction. “No, no. Tomorrow is Wednesday, and you’d take care of it for me”

“Why?!?” exclaimed Alexander, living up to his fame of short-tempered. “We have the meeting today!”
“We didn’t agree on or fix anything today”

“So? We never do!”

“That’s why I chose you” revealed George. “In order not to hear you, they will do what they must”

Angelica started laughing loudly again. “George, you’re killing me today!”

“Angel, don’t say that after his situation!” reprehended Eliza, arms in akimbo and the same tone she used to reprimand her children.

“Bah, he survived and is fine. It’d be wrong if he were dead”

“This woman and her strange sense of humour…” commented Eliza, shaking her head.

“Here comes the puritan” complained/joked Angelica.

“Of course, she’s the bastard daughter of a rebel nun” commented Martha.

Both women laughed while the men contained themselves. Eliza’s face turned redder than a tomato.

“It’s not funny!” she said.

“It is a bit, honey” commented Alexander, with a tiny smirk.

Eliza threw daggers at him. “Tonight, you will have burnt beef”

Alex’s smirk dropped immediately. “Shit…”

Angelica clapped a hand on his back. “You must not anger the woman that feeds you. My husband learnt that the same way as well”

Alexander looked at her fearfully. “I don’t want to know what you did…”

“Yes, you surely don’t”

Eliza read to Alex the texts everybody had sent through the group chat the following morning, while he was getting ready for work. Alexander never thought there would be a day when he’d hate to go to work, but Eliza and her sisters always liked to make the impossible possible.

Peggy was laughing alongside Eliza, while she read Laurens’ witty comments about the whole thing. For someone who claimed to be unable to move with agility, she was marching as fast as Eliza, who was imitating his speed in order to follow him around, wanting to read him all before
he left.

“And then they say smoking weed is bad for the brain” commented Peggy, wiping one tear of laughter away. “That man gets more clever with every day that passes”

“Cleverer” corrected Alexander, making sure he had everything he would need for that day.

“Remember to remind Angelica she has to record today’s meeting” said Peggy, reading the few texts that were left.

Eliza cocked one eyebrow. “You remind her. You’re going to see her today”

“Nah, I already went yesterday. I’ve done my part” she said, shrugging.

“No way, José. You are going to come to work today” said Hamilton, frowning.

“My head hurts” complained Peggy.

“Take a pill and problem solved” deadpanned Alexander.

“I am pregnant, I can’t take strange things”

“Strange things, a pill for the headache…”?

“They’re chemicals!”

“Stop with the tall tales, Peggy!” complained Alexander, hitting the kitchen table with his briefcase. “I’ve got three big-headed louses, you won’t fool me with your whining!”

“Gee, man, chill!” said Peggy, eyes wide open in impression.

“Don’t call our children that!” reprehended Eliza. “I told you it can be traumatic for them”

“Traumatic is to find your cousin in a bath of his own blood when you just arrive from school. And, still, I turned out fine” spat Alexander.

“Yes, yes, totally fine” commented Peggy, sarcastically.

Eliza looked at her husband with tedium. “Why do you have to be such a beast when you talk?”

Peggy started to laugh at that. “Hahahaha, do you remember, in your wedding, when you two had to dance, that Dad chose ‘Beauty and the Beast’ as your song?”

Alexander clicked his tongue in disgust. “Yeah. And she still refuses to admit that he hates me”

“Dad doesn’t hate you. He’s bitter with the world in general, which is very different” Eliza defended her father.

“Like you” added Peggy.

“Peggy, dear, go wait in the car”

“I don’t wanna go”

“Peggy, get in the car”
“I’m still in my pyjamas!”

“I’ll choose you what clothes you’ll be wearing. Go to the car”

“But you have no sense of fashion!”

“A walking lemon doesn’t get to criticise my clothes. Now get in the freaking car!” he ended up shouting.

“Man, what the hell is wrong with you?” asked Eliza. “You’re in a worse mood than when you lost that bill on the street”

“I didn’t lose it, someone took it from my wallet” Alex defended himself.

“Yeah, and they left the other two of fifty” she agreed with sarcasm.

“Why do you have one hundred bucks in your wallet? Who do you think you are?” asked Peggy, starting to be annoyed by the previous comments.

“I am the idiot who pays everything in this house” he spat, without second thought.

“Oi, gosh, attacks in the morning. I am going to be offended in my room” declared Peggy, turning on her heels.

Alex trotted to her and grabbed her forearm. “No. Go be offended in the car” he insisted, serious.

“Alright” she said, upset, taking his hand away from her arm. “I’ll go. But I’ll be unbearable all day!” she promised, walking to the door.

“Like always” commented Alexander.

“Gee. God have mercy of your co-workers today” said Eliza, arching one eyebrow at her husband.

“Yes, pray because they are going to need it… What a shitty day, and… And week! And then they said I’ve got favourable treatment. I’d rather not having it at all!”

“Jesus, man, are you still stung for that comment? Didn’t Adams tell you that in December? Let it go!”

“No!” shouted Alexander, grabbing his briefcase and walking to the front door.

“Well, at least don’t kill anyone today!” she said, a bit worried.

“I am not promising anything!” he said before slamming the front door shut.

“…” She looked at her phone. “Should I warn them?” she wondered, out loud. She shrugged. “Nah, surprises are always nice”
Alex and i are late ‘cuz he went to adams’ house to wake him up and drive him there.

he’s really pissed off.

i think eliza is praying for us but put some pills in his coffee or smthing. Just in case…

also, look inside his drawers

i looked everywhere in the car for any guns or deathly weapons but i saw nothing but just to be merry sure

very*

and dont say anything to the rest

if those crackpots know they’d leave and that’d make it worse

i’m not going to stand him if that happens

i dont have the means to go home…

Angelica:

Peggs, you’re sending this through the group chat.

Maria:

lol

Peggy:

...

Lafayette:

Delete all that before he sees them

Peggy:

he’s very bossy being a prick

busy*

omg

HAHAHAHA
Angelica:

What???

Peggy:

Alex is literally dragging adams out of his house

Maria:

LOL!

Lafayette:

Really???

Hercules:

Man, record that.

Peggy:

on it...

omg

adams is holding the doorframes and refuses to let go

abigail is helping alex

Lafayette:

The poor woman must’ve seen Alex turning green and decided to be on his side before helping the Hulk to appear.

Peggy:

the fatman is resisting *emoji of face with tears of joy*
Eliza:

*The Hulk is afraid of an angry Alex*

Angelica:

*Eliiiizaaaa*

*Best of women and sisters*

Peggy:

*Ouch*

Angelica:

*Shut up, Peggy*

Eliza:

*What*

Angelica:

*Did alex tell you anything about if we’re going to have a meeting today as well?*

Eliza:

*Yep.*

Angelica:

*noooooooooooooooooo*

Laurens:

*I just got up*

*What’s happening*
Hercules:

John, did you fall asleep in the office’s restroom???

Laurens:

Nah

Hercules:

Good.

Laurens:

I’m at the pub, taking a little nap

Maria:

Man, come here asap

Alex is in a foul mood today

Laurens:

But that’s his natural mood :/

Lafayette:

Johnny, come here

Today we have to behave

Angelica:

You should behave ALWAYS

But you’re right.

Behave if you wanna see tomorrow

Laurens:
Fuck, I went out yesterday and I wanted to sleep today

Hercules:
What a life…

Laurens:
I’m missing Washington already………

Maria:
Man, alex is your bff

Laurens:
That’s why I can tell
I know him better than anyone in here

Eliza:
AHEM…

Angelica:
Look the bright side
Alex has less patience than Washington
Maybe we leave early today as well……

Eliza:
ANGELICA

Angelica:
Chill, sis, nothing bad will ever happen to that man
He survived when burr shot him
Nothing will kill him

Burr:

I thought it was a blank pistol! ¬¬

Laurens:

Look at the crafty
Reading in the shadows

Burr:

*middle finger emoji*

Eliza:

Aaron

Theo is not answering her phone

Is she alright??

Burr:

Her phone broke last night.

Eliza:

Is she free today???

Burr:

Yeah, why?

Eliza:

Because drinking alone is sad

With friends everything is better
Angelica:

Even being a drunkard

Eliza:

Look who’s talking…

Angelica:

The expert

That’s why I know

*Peggy has sent a video*

Angelica:

To YouTube

Jefferson:

Angelica

DON’T

Laurens:

Another crafty

Burr:

Intelligent*

Peggy:

really guys pretend to be working

alex lifted adams and threw him into the car
he scared Abigail

the poor woman is in the doorframe

she doesn’t want to get out

Lafayette:

Normal…

Eliza:

And then he says he can’t fix me the bathroom because is too physical for him…

Family is the real reason behind alcoholism

Jefferson:

Yes, it is

Angelica:

Yes, it is

Laurens:

Yes, it is

Hercules:

Yes, it is

Lafayette:

Certainement

Burr:

Yes, it is
Laurens spent a few more minutes sleeping in one of the stalls of the pub restroom. He went there almost all mornings to consume, they owed him this much for one day. Besides, it was meeting morning again for what he read on the group chat, and he needed to be fresh to stand it if Alex was in such a bad mood.

When his phone alarm went off, he stretched out and got up. He flushed for the act just in case someone was out there and get out the place, receiving a questioning look from the owner. The man shrugged it off. He liked them for all the visits he received daily on their part, so he let them be most of the times. He looked at his watch, seeing it was only ten minutes left until 8.30, when the meetings usually began. He still had enough time till everybody was silent to start the discussion of whatever topics.

Laurens frowned when he arrived at the building and saw the glass doors closed. He shrugged, thinking it might be because Maria was cold or something. His theory was proved wrong when he tried to open the doors and saw they were locked. He looked inside, seeing Maria sat on her counter with a face of resignation.

“Mari, open the door” shouted Laurens in order to be heard. He frowned at Maria shaking her head. “Why not??”

The second door by her left was swung open, and Maria lowered her head, pretending to be working. Alexander got out of his office, stone-faced, and walked to the front doors.

“What were you?” asked Hamilton, crossing his arms upon his chest.

“At the pub” answered Laurens, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. “Open”

“No”

“No?” repeated the HR manager, confused.

“You had to be here at 7.30” said Alexander, totally serious. “You are one hour late”

“But the meetings start at 8.30, I am on time” retorted Laurens.
“No, you are not. You all must come here all mornings at 7.30, not at 8.30. You are late and you’re not getting in” concluded Alexander, staring his friend straight in the eye.

Laurens looked back at him, perplexed. The other workers started to gather in the hallway. Maria looked at the freckled man with sympathy. Laurens frowned and, in an outburst of childish and stubborn rage, he picked the knob and started to shake it rapidly.

“Stop that and go home” ordered Alexander. “You are not going to come in”

His words fell on deaf ears as Laurens kept shaking the knob, persistently.

“Stop that. You are going to break it” said Alex, strangely calm. “Well, then it will match with the rest of this building…” he added, bitterly. He stared straight at Laurens while he still shook the knob, more violently than before. “If you break that, you are going to pay it. That’s it” he decided.

“I don’t care!” screamed Laurens.

“Of course he doesn’t” commented Hercules. “He is not going to pay it with his money”

Alexander turned around, seeing the whole staff there, in the hallway, seeing the scene. Laurens kept shaking the knob, enraged.

“What are you all doing in here?” asked the CFO, eyeing them one by one.

“We have a meeting today” answered Lafayette, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Yes, but we are going to have it in the afternoon”

“Why?” asked Angelica.

“Because I want to” was the simply response Alexander gave.

“Does that mean we can leave and come later?” asked Adams.

Alex frowned so deeply that everybody shook in their spots. “No” he answered, sharply. “Especially, you. I want you to do what you should have had done by now. This afternoon I am going to collect everything you all had to have done, and if some of you don’t have it, that person won’t get out of here. And I’m assuming you know pretty well I have no problems at staying late”

They all looked at each other, Maria the only one who looked at Hamilton with worry while the man walked to the front doors. He took the thread of the blinds and pushed it, without making them fall. He tried a couple more of times, while Laurens still shook the knob. Hamilton had a tic in
his left eyebrow while he hissed under his breath.

“Maria”

“Yes?” she asked, timidly.

“What is wrong with the blinds?”

“Hm… They are broken”

“Really? I could not tell” he commented, ironically. “Since when has this been broken?”

“Hm… Since last Autumn?”

“Are you asking or answering me?”

“Askwering”

“… …”

“He he” she laughed, shyly.

“And do you remember who broke it? Or were you too busy doing something that was not your job?”

“I don’t remember”

“Good. In that case, the repair will be paid by everybody’s salaries”

The whole staff started to complain at the same time. Alexander simply walked to his office, ignoring their screams and Laurens’ insistence. He got out from the room with the blanket Eliza had put in one of his drawers once and adhesive tape in his right hand while he dragged his chair with his left one.

The complaints died down slowly at the sight of Alexander putting the chair in front of the front door, getting on it and spreading the blanket in front of the glass doors, covering them and sinking the hallway in gloom. He put some tape in the corners to hold it in place and then jumped off the chair. He dragged it back to his office, the sound of the knob being shaken still present.

“Putain, il est tellement un lourd” complained Laf, under his breath.

They all jumped in their seats at the sudden noise of Hamilton punching his desk while taking a seat.

“SHUT THE HELL UP WITH THE FUCKING KNOB!” he screamed at the top of his lungs.
The sound stopped abruptly. The staff was too scared to breathe a sigh of relief.

“And the rest of you, to your offices and work until you can’t comprehend the English language and American Law anymore!” he added, taking a proper seat and taking his pen to resume with whatever he had been doing before Laurens arrived.

Slowly and doubtful, they all began to walk to their respective offices. Only Adams, still and the only one in pyjamas, stood still.

“Madison” he called.

“Yes?” asked the accountant.

“Can I meet you in my office?”

“I… Yeah…” he said, a bit down, and followed him upstairs.

Thomas stood in his doorway, watching them leave. He frowned slightly at the older man. Madison was having one of his days and the last thing he needed was to stress himself. For a moment, he thought about following them, but Hamilton storming off his office and stopping in front of Burr’s kept him in place.

“Aaron, get out” ordered Hamilton.

The lawyer looked up immediately, puzzled. “What? Why?”

“Out” repeated Alexander, serious. “And take all you might need for today, as well”

Aaron doubted for a moment before obliging. By the time he had it all inside his briefcase and was about to get out of the little room, a figure appeared on the window-hole. Laurens moved the curtain aside and prepared himself to jump in but stopped in his tracks when he saw the three men looking at him at the other side of the room.

Hamilton pushed Aaron out of his office and closed the door with a thump, while Laurens jumped in. The CFO locked the door, moving the tongue inside his mouth, in annoyance. Once he was finished, the knob began to move and Laurens, seeing it was useless, started to knock on the other side, with anger.
“Get out, John. Today you are missing in work. You are not getting in. If you want to be part of this, learn about punctuality” said Hamilton, before punching the door with enough fury to make the stubborn man stop.

“… … Let me in” pleaded John.

“No” answered Alexander, right away. “And do not make noise. Your workmates are doing what they should’ve had done a month ago. Do not interrupt or bother them with your childish behaviour” he added, turning around calmly.

“Hum… Alex?” said Aaron, with tiny voice.

“Yes?” he said, turning his head to look at him.

“Where do I do my job?”

“You have my permission to be in the break room. I trust you” nodded Alexander.

“Thanks”

Aaron and Thomas exchanged a nervous glare before the lawyer walked directly to the break room, for once isolated. Jefferson was slightly startled by Alex’s voice by his side.

“Is Madison sick?” asked Alexander, throwing a rapid glare to the secretary’s office.

“No, Adams called him” answered Thomas.

“Adams?” asked the CFO, squinting his eyes.

Thomas nodded and stood there awkwardly, seeing how Hamilton was watching the staircase with an unreadable expression. They turned their heads to Alex’s office when they heard a tapping on the window. Alex walked straight into the room, while Thomas stood at the doorframe, seeing Laurens at the other side of the window, tapping furiously.

“John, leave” said Alexander, standing at the other side.

“Let me in” demanded Laurens.

“Out”

“In”

“Out”

“In”

“Out”

“In”
Alex closed his blinds, sinking his own office into darkness as well. “Bye” he said, impassive. He turned around to look at Jefferson. “Close your blinds as well”

“I won’t see anything like that” said Thomas, with a raised eyebrow.

“That’s why ceiling lights were invented. Turn the switch on”

“But…”

“I think you all are old enough to come to those conclusions by yourselves” interrupted Alexander, sitting on his desk.

Thomas frowned at him, upset. “But I can’t turn the lights on” he explained, trying to contain his temper.

“Let me guess” Alex talked with mockery. “Is it broken as well?”

“No”

“Ah, good surprise there. What’s the matter, then?”

“I’ll have a headache” he admitted.

“Take a pill”

“I can’t”

“Why?” asked Alexander, more annoyed than before.

“Because I don’t take anything”

“And what do you do when you have one?”

Alexander sighed heavily when he didn’t receive an answer.

“Look, don’t worry. I have something else for you”

“What?” asked Thomas, suspiciously.

“Do you have the reports Lee writes monthly? Or used to write, seeing the current situation?”

“Yes, I do”

“And the reports of when some of you worked for Mr. King?”

“I… Yes, yes, I do have those as well…” he nodded, confused. “Why?”

“Bring them all to me” ordered Alexander.
“… I’ve got them back at home”

“Go for them, then”

“Excuse me?”

“You get out, breathe some fresh air, natural light… You won’t have a headache” said Alexander, getting up.

Thomas looked at him, dumbfounded, while the CFO walked straight to the secretary’s office. There, Laurens stood at the other side of the window, frowning enraged. Hamilton didn’t even mind him when he closed those blinds there as well. He turned around and gestured Jefferson to follow him to the front door. The secretary obliged, feeling uneasy.

Maria looked at them, sharing a nervous glare with Thomas. Alexander stopped abruptly when they walked past Peggy’s closed door. Alex looked at it and Maria shrunk in her seat, a bit scared. All of a sudden, Alexander opened the door violently, making it hit the wall behind it. Peggy jumped in her bed, waking up immediately.

“I told you I’d let you keep the bed if you did your work” reminded Alexander, still with that foreign calm voice.

“Hum, yeah, but…” Peggy tried to excuse herself.

“Get up and go work in the break room” ordered Alexander.

“But…”

“Don’t worry” interrupted Alex, one more time. “Burr is in there. You won’t be alone”

Peggy looked at his brother-in-law and then around her, with resignation of her face. She moved uncomfortably under Alex’s fixated glare.

“What?” she snapped.

“I wanna see you getting up and going in there” replied Alexander.

“… …”

With a heavy sigh, Peggy get up from bed and made her way to the break room. Alexander waited until she was out of eyeshot and then resumed his walking to the front doors. He moved the blanket a bit, so he could be able to unlock the door. Once it was opened, he made way for Thomas, who went out with uncertainty.
“Ah, also, go to Adams’ house and bring him formal clothes” said Alexander, casually.

Thomas frowned at him. “No” he refused.

“Without the reports and/or the clothes, you will not get in. And if you don’t get in, this day will be taken off your monthly salary” informed Alexander.

“Why me and not your friend?” asked Thomas, annoyed.

“And who told you I wasn’t going to do the same to John, just because he’s my friend?” asked Alexander, serene. “See what happens when you talk without knowing all the information? That you make yourself look like a fool. No wonder why you are a secretary and not a proper lawyer” spat Alexander, with venom in his tone.

Thomas was about to refute, feeling the blood boiling inside, when Alexander closed the door in his noses. They stood there, looking at each other through the glass. Maria alternated her glare between the two, containing a giggle at how ridiculous and without sense they were acting.

“I’ve seen turtles doing things faster, sir” commented Alexander.

Thomas clicked his tongue in annoyance and turned around.

“Wait” called Alexander.

Thomas turned around again, annoyed. He surely did that on purpose.

“What time is it, Mari, dear?” he asked, looking at the receptionist.

“Hm… 9.10” she read on her watch.

“Thank you” nodded Alex. Looking back at Jefferson, he said: “I want you back at 10”

“I won’t have time” complained Thomas, arms in akimbo.

“If you lose your time arguing about stupid things with me, no, you won’t” agreed Alexander.

“I don’t remember where I put the reports”

“Not my problem”

“… Hamilton, seriously…”

“Tic tac”
“Just…”

“Tic” Alexander turned the key in the keyhole, locking the door again. “Tac”

“How am I supposed to get in once I’m back?” asked Thomas, frowning in annoyance.

“Weren’t you a fan of knocking? Once you’re back you knock, knock, knock” mocked Alexander, knocking slightly on the glass.

Maria contained her laughter at his backs, pressing her mouth against her free hand.

“And what if you don’t hear me knocking?” spat Thomas, starting to lose the patience.

“I am not the one who must hear you. That’s Maria’s job” answered Alexander, calmly.

“What if she doesn’t hear me?”

“Leave me alone…” complained Maria, under her breath.

“I am seeing you a little more pessimistic than usual today, Jefferson” commented Alexander, with a casual tone.

“I am being realistic”

“If you were realistic, you wouldn’t be here right now, losing your precious time when you only have until 9.50 to come back”

“You told me I had until ten!”

“And now I say it’s until 9.45”

“Why?”

“9.40”

“Hamilton, really, we can’t keep going on lik…”

“9.35”

“My gosh…” muttered Maria, feeling bad for the secretary.

“How in Hell do you want me to be back in twenty-five minutes?!” asked Thomas, raising his voice.

“Is that you telling me you want to come back at 9.30 what I’m hearing?” asked Hamilton, pretending an innocent tone.

Thomas complained and swore under his breath before turning around, trotting to the parking lot. Alexander followed him with the glare. Laurens appeared on the other side, a frown adorning his features. He looked at Alex, red in the face.
The only thing Alexander did was to cover the glass door with his blanket again.

“How is the colour calendar going?” he asked, looking at Maria.

“Good” she answered immediately, a bit afraid for the scene she had just watched.

“What month are you doing now?”

“Hum… I was going to start June”

“Stop there. You can rest for the rest of the day”

“Really?” she asked, happily.

“Yes. You did more than I told you to do” nodded Alex. “Unless the phone rings and you have to answer it, you can do whatever you want until the meeting. And if you want to go out at some point, ask me and I’ll open the door”

“Thank you!” she said, smiling brightly.

“Thank you for being decent” he said.

Maria took out her phone, scrolling down whatever page she had been reading before. Hamilton nodded and walked to his office, stopping only when he saw somebody walking downstairs. It also caught Maria’s attention, as the person was sobbing quietly. But, as the office was, for once, silent, they could hear it perfectly.

“Aw, are you okay, Jemmy?” asked the receptionist, getting up from her seat and trotting to the sobbing man.

“Yeah” he lied, wiping some tears away.

“And why are you crying?” she asked, caring. She rubbed his arm affectionately.

“What happened, Madison?” asked Hamilton, with a drier tone than Maria.

“Nothing” answered the accountant, coughing in his fist.

“What a mean nothing it might’ve been for making you cry” he replied, looking at him up and down. He waited a moment to see if he received some response, but he only got a few sobs that the other man couldn’t conceal. “Was it Adams?” he asked, straightforward.

There was a pause, and then a quiet. “No”

Hamilton scrutinized him. “Okay” he said, not believing him. “Do you want to go home?”

“No, I’ve got a lot of work to do” he answered. He patted Maria on the arm as a ‘thank you’ and turned to his friend’s office. He stopped in his tracks when he found it empty.

“I sent Thomas to do me some errands” Hamilton answered his unspoken question.
“Ah, okay…” said Madison, trying to sound uninterested, but none of them bought it.

“Do you want to call him?” asked Alexander, walking to him and finally with a gentler tone.

“Eh… No, I…”

“Don’t worry about what you’ve gotta do” he interrupted, surely. “Do you need to call Jefferson?”

“No. I mean, yes, but…” stuttered the accountant.

“Call him. It’s alright”

“… Are you sure?”

“Yes. I give you my word you won’t have repercussions for the time you spend talking to him. You’ve got Maria as a witness” he added, pointing at the woman, who smiled at his direction.

After a moment of thought, he nodded. “All right. Thanks…”

“Not needed. Ah, Madison?” he called before the man get in the office.

“Yes?”

“Tell Jefferson he has till 12.00. He’ll understand”

“Okay?” said James, a bit confused.

He closed the door at his backs and Maria stood there, with a worried expression. Hamilton looked at her.

“Maria”

“Hm? Yes?”

“Can you come to my office? I want to talk about something”

“Okay?” she said, with the same hesitation.

Jefferson arrived at the law firm at 11.40. Just in case. Hamilton was off his rocket that day. That or that his tyrant vein had decided to come to light when it saw the perfect opportunity to do so. He gave Hamilton all the documents and reports he had asked for – thank you, obsession with order, the only good trait he had inherited from his mother – and then headed to his office, where James was waiting for him.
He seemed to be a bit better than when they talked on the phone. A sting of guilt was born as soon as his phone went off and the caller ID showed his friend’s name. Thomas knew he should have gone with James when Adams called him. He should have, at least, waited at the other side of the door while the two men talked. He should have told James he was leaving for a moment because Hamilton had asked him for something. He should have done many things to prevent James’ day to go worse, but he did nothing of them.

Thomas didn’t hesitate to answer the phone. Time spent on helping a friend such as James was never lost; let the rest of the world think whatever they wanted. He could face the consequences. For his surprise, Madison told him – first thing, before venting to him about what had happened with Adams, because James was just like that, one of the few decent people Thomas had the pleasure to meet – that Hamilton said ‘he had till 12’ and that ‘he would understand’. Thomas was suspicious at first, but James added that Maria was a witness and though the man and the woman didn’t get along too well, he decided not to say anything of his mistrust. James had already a lot on his plate and he wasn’t going to make it worse. More worse than he already had…

“Are you feeling better?” asked Thomas, closing the door at his backs gently.

James shrugged, sitting at the other side of his desk. Thomas took a seat in front of him and looked at the accountant, frowning in worry.

“Yeah, sort of” James answered eventually, when his friend fixated glare was too difficult to ignore.
“Do you want to go home?”
“No”
Thomas rolled his eyes at the expected answer. “Do you need to go home?” he asked again, rephrasing the question.

James frowned at him. “No, I don’t want to miss the meeting. The mood is not the best to go home…”

“Forget about Hamilton” spat Thomas. “If you’re having a bad day, you shouldn’t be standing him”

“He let me call you” muttered James, burying his nose in the papers he was writing. “Just for that I’d feel bad leaving”

“If he already knows you are not feeling well, he won’t have complaints about you going home” Thomas frowned at the papers his friend was working on. “Please, tell me you are not doing…”

“Just part of it… Adams had a lot of backlog…”

“That’s his problem” interrupted Thomas.

“I don’t mind” James shrugged again, not meeting his glare yet.

“You do when you have to call me, distressed” pointed out Thomas, with more venom than he had
“If you don’t want me to call you, tell me; but don’t throw digs” James emphasized his sudden anger by hitting the pen against the paper when writing a full stop.

Thomas rolled his eyes once again. “You know I didn’t say that…”

“You sounded like it” interrupted James, sharply.

“Look, don’t pay with me what you couldn’t with Adams” argued Thomas.

“Adams has it for me because of you” James threw in his friend’s face without hesitation. “As it happened with Hamilton and with a lot more of people. Don’t try to make me feel worse about it”

“I am not!” argued Thomas. “I am only saying that after that man tells you off because you did his work wrong once, you shouldn’t have accepted”

“I did not do it wrong…” complained James in a weak voice.

“I know, I meant…”

“I don’t want to fight today. I’m not in the mood, really”

Thomas looked worriedly at him. And something snapped. “You don’t, but I do” he declared getting up from his seat making more noise than necessary.

“Thomas, where are you going…?” asked James, a bit fearful.

“I am going to give Adams a suit”

“Really?”

“Yes”

“Only that?”

“Yes”

“Good”

“And maybe I’d have a chat with him” he added before slamming the door shut.

James got up from his seat, groaning under his breath. “No, Thomas, please! Let’s have a peaceful day!” he said, following his friend upstairs.

“I am only going to talk to him” said Thomas, disturbingly calm.

“Thomas”

“Go back to the office”

“Thomas, don’t!”

“I’m only going to talk to him. Go back to the office” repeated the secretary, knocking on the lawyer’s door.

“Come in” said Adams.
“Thomas, please, just give him the clothes and don’t bring anything I talked to you about up” pleaded James, frowning in concern.

“Go back to the office, James, I am only going to talk to him calmly”

Alexander had just finished packing up his things when he heard screaming coming from the second floor. He waited a moment before moving, his face not showing still any emotion. Eventually, when he had recognised the voices as Jefferson’s and – surprisingly – Adams’, he decided to get up, briefcase in hand, and head to the door.

When he walked out his office, he saw Peggy, Maria and Aaron were standing at the staircase, talking among the three. They hushed noticeably when they saw him passing them by, walking directly to the break room. Peggy and Maria exchanged a glare, shrugged and decided to go upstairs, too curious about to what was happening.

Aaron was left behind. The man cocked an eyebrow when he saw Hamilton simply preparing himself some coffee, humming a made-up melody. Aaron stood still there, shaking from fear at the calmness and apathetic attitude Alexander was acting with that day. This is not going to end well, he thought, biting his bottom lip.

A tap from a window called his attention. Gladly to focus on something else than Alexander’s strange behaviour, Aaron turned around and entered the secretary’s office, where the tapping came from. Aaron opened the blinds, finding Laurens on the other side, face against the glass and pupils befitting of a kicked puppy.

“Please, someone record what’s happening” he said, with a tiny voice, wanting to gain someone’s sympathy.

Aaron looked at him for a moment. His mind going from co-worker to co-worker, wanting to know who was the craziest and weirdest in there. He scoffed a bit to himself. And then, his uncle dared to tell him, when he was little, that he would never fit anywhere because he was a green dog*. If he saw the pound full of rainbow dogs he was working in now…

“Yeah, don’t worry” said the lawyer, closing the blinds again in the HR manager’s face without hesitation. He walked out the office, finding the CFO blowing his hot coffee. “Alexander” he said, a bit unsure.
“Yes, Aaron?” answered the immigrant, strangely polite and collected, before taking a sip from his mug.

“Are you feeling alright?”

“Very well, yeah” nodded Alexander. “How about you?”

“… I’m fine” he half-lied.

“Good”

Aaron’s glare followed Alex, walking upstairs while taking little sips of coffee. He frowned with worry and, eventually, went after him, at a prudent distance. *Nope, this is going to end very badly.*

James didn’t want Thomas to get in between what had happened between Adams and him exactly because of this.

Thomas wasn’t entirely to blame, though. It was a very low blow, a very dirty comment what Adams had said. In all honesty, James thought Thomas’ reaction was even very light for what Adams had said. And his words couldn’t be excused.

For a long time, Adams and Thomas were very close friends. Of course Adams knew that whatever he said about Jane, Thomas’ long-gone and most beloved sister, would enrage the secretary. And, as Adams was the one acting collected instead of screaming and gesticulating, everyone would think Thomas was exaggerating, because he would refuse to say anything about that comment about his sister, being so overprotective about his personal life.

Adams was lazy, not stupid. And James knew. That was why he wanted to avoid this at all costs. He wished he had done it better, but he let his bad day take control and now Thomas was hurt. What a friend he was.

Slowly, the staff began to gather at Adams’ door, seeing the show. Angelica took her time to start recording, startled by the secretary’s actions. It was usual to see him raise his voice with her brother-in-law, but this was very different at what they all were used to see. Hamilton had never used personal information he had gathered during the short time he had worked for them to take Thomas down in one of their quarrels.
Talking of the Devil.

Hamilton appeared at the crowd a few moments later, holding a mug of vapoury coffee he drank slowly, savouring it for once, while he saw the scene. Aaron showed up a bit after, watching the immigrant with a frown of curiosity and worry. Both college friends looked at each other, not knowing what was happening today and praying Washington would come back. It was better to hear him rocking in his chair, than seeing Hamilton acting so decent and human.

It was clear that his indifferent façade was breaking more and more as the day went by, because Aaron approached him without caring about the rest of the people surrounding them and made physical contact with him, taking his arm gently, to give him some sort of comfort while his friend was throwing past things in Adams’ face.

“Are you okay?” asked Aaron, in a low tone.

“Yeah” he lied.

“If you need anything, tell me”

“I’m okay, but thank you” said James, with a wee smile. “So, what’s gotten into him?” he asked, wanting to change the subject, pointing at Hamilton with the chin.

“Wish I know. It’s starting to freak me out a bit” admitted Aaron, throwing another glare of worry to the CFO.

“So” spoke Alexander just then, calling Angelica and Lafayette’s attention, being the closer ones to him. “This is what one feels at the other side?” he wondered out loud, alternating his glare between the calm lawyer and the enraged secretary. “Nice” he nodded, taking the last sip of his coffee. “Ah, good ol’ coffee” he commented, turning around to leave.

Angelica and Lafayette looked at each other’s eyes, pale with fear.

Aaron’s frown grew deeper.

“Madison, do you mind…?” he asked, pointing at where Hamilton had been standing.

“Yeah, of course” James nodded immediately. “I think he is scheming a murder”

“Me too”

Aaron ran out of the place, following the CFO. Angelica and Lafayette watched the whole thing.
“What the hell is going on?” asked the vice president, trying to conceal the fear in her voice.

“I don’t know…”

“Between Alex’s calmness and Thomas’ screams, it’s like I am in an upside-down world”

“Adams must’ve said something nasty to Thomas” suggested Laf, very sure of what he was saying. “I’ve only seen him losing control twice, this being the second. And it’s always for a justifiable reason”

“If you say so… That man is a dark horse” commented Angelica, pointing at Adams discreetly.

Their attention went back to Aaron, who came back in a rush, a frown in his face. He stopped at the doorframe, looking at the crowd, who was unaware of his presence.

“Hm… Guys?” he tried to say, in a tiny voice. “Hey… Just a minute? Please? You can go back to fighting later, but…”

Angelica didn’t doubt about lending him a helping hand. “HEY, AARON WANTS TO TELL US SOMETHING. SHUT UP!”

The fight stopped just then, and everyone was looking at him. Madison took advantage and went to his friend’s side, wanting to calm him down and convince him to let it go. Thomas sighed shakily, realising just now he was making a scene because of a man he had sworn to ignore.

Angelica nodded, smiling proudly. “That is the way I like it!” she proclaimed, turning around to face Aaron. “They are all yours”

“Thanks…” he said, a bit unsure.

“Whenever you need it, pal”

“What happened?” asked Hercules, eyeing him with curiosity.

Aaron shifted uncomfortably in his spot. “Em… Well… Alexander left…”

“Thank fuck” breathed out Hercules, without second thought. When he looked the confused looks around him, he explained: “Don’t get me wrong, I love the man and all, but, Jesus, he was crazy today…”

“Yeah, same” nodded Peggy.

“I am also grateful. Angel was starting to need her bottle” said Angelica.

“Sis, you’ve got a problem!”
“Nah, it’s not a problem until you lose control”

“Guys” interrupted Aaron. “I wasn’t finished. Alexander left and…” he scratched the back of his neck with nervousness.

“Aha” said everybody, expectantly.

“And he locked us in…”

“…”

“He what…?” asked Maria, blinking dumbfounded.

“He locked us in!” repeated Peggy, louder.

“I heard him!” complained Maria at the loud and sudden noise.

“Then, why did you ask?” spat Peggy, upset. “Then, you’d complain about being called incompetent”

“Look who’s talking, Sleeping Useless” argued back the receptionist.

“Maria, you’re on fire with the nicknames” laughed Hercules.

“People, please, focus…” growled Angelica, looking harshly at Aaron. “What do you mean he locked us in?” she inquired, crossing both arms.

“He… Well, he went downstairs, he unlocked the door, walked out and then locked it again…”

“What the hell…?” muttered James.

“And he walked down the parking lots, I followed him with the glare” added Aaron.

“And you didn’t say anything?” asked Jefferson.

“What was I supposed to say?”

“I don’t know. Maybe ‘don’t let us here all alone, don’t you remember what happened that time back at the cabin’?”

“Gee, he wants us dead” commented Peggy, darkly.

“What cabin?” asked Adams, confused.

“A place we had to stay against our will because you had to burn yourself” spat Angelica, her face red from anger.

Adams imitated her mood in a millisecond. “I never burnt myself!”

“You always have to be where you are not supposed to at the worst of times” commented Jefferson, calmer but with the same venom than before.

Adams frowned up at him. “According to you, I am only good at being at the good times”

“Unless it is for making someone’s life more miserable”

“Your life was already pretty bad before I arrived…”
“Adams!” cut off Madison.

“Don’t start again with your twaddle” said Angelica, scrolling down her contacts with a frown and a beating vein adorning her forehead. “I am going to call that bastard and I am going to…”

“No, no!” said Lafayette, immediately, taking the phone away from her. “Alexander has to talk with a calm person if we want him to come back to his senses”

“Alright, who do you suggest?” asked Angelica, her anger almost palpable through her voice.

“Aaron” said Peggy immediately. “He has orgeat in his veins*”

“No, no, I won’t talk to him” Aaron shook his head with vehemence.

“Coward”

“You talk to him” challenged the lawyer.

“No, no, she’s unbearable” commented Angelica, wrinkling her nose in disgust. “Put those two together and the phone explodes”

“You’re one to talk!” complained the therapist.

“Let’s call Eliza” proposed Maria.

“No, no, let the poor woman be happy” said Angelica, gaining a dirty and hateful glare from her youngest sister.

“Hercules, why don’t you call?” asked Aaron. “You’re the calmest in his group of friends”

Lafayette burst out laughing, then. “Hahahaha! One day in our house and you’ll realise how wrong you are”

Hercules threw daggers at his boyfriend. “You talk to him, then”

“Non, non” Laf shook his head while he wiped away some tears. “I’m having a good day and I want to keep it like that”

“A good day? This crap?” asked Hercules, incredulous.

“What a shitty life you must have…” commented Peggy.

“Thomas should call him, he’s the secretary for a reason” said Adams, trying not to smirk.

Thomas threw daggers in his ex-friend’s direction. James thank goodness when Maria interrupted Thomas’ sharp response.

“How are we going to let Lemongrab talk sense into Alex?” she asked, looking at Adams as if he were stupid. “One chat between these two hot-headed men and we will never see the light of day again”

“If that’s not his plan already” commented Peggy, again darkly.
“Stop it…” muttered Hercules.

“Someone must call him” concluded Angelica, taking her phone from Laf’s grip and she gave it to the secretary. “Here. Pretend he’s a client and use your Southern charm”

“No, don’t use it” contradicted Laf. “That’s one of the many reasons he hates you”

“He hates everything about him” added Hercules.

“Seriously, someone else call” pleaded Maria. “I want to see my daughter growing up”

Thomas frowned in her direction. “I am going to call him just to bother you” he decided, pressing the contact on the vice president’s phone.

“How mature…” commented the receptionist, rolling her eyes.

The phone rang once, twice, three, four and five times before it was picked up. Everyone sighed in relief and Angelica was fast enough to turn the speaker on.

“Yes?” said Alex’s voice on the other side.

“Hamilton?” asked Thomas, for pure formality. “It’s Jefferson”

“What are you doing with Angelica’s phone? Do your dirty tricks have no end?”

“We are all in here” hurried to explain Lafayette, when he saw his friend’s eyes squinting dangerously.

“Not even five seconds of conversation” muttered Maria.

“Alex, where have gone?” asked Hercules, also getting closer to the phone.

“It’s 12…” a small pause, in which they guessed he was taking a look at some clock. “12.28. It’s lunch break”

“Kudos for you knowing the timetable” spat Thomas, at the verge of his patience already. “But why did you leave?”

“Because it’s lunch break” repeated Alexander, slowly, as if talking with a little kid. “No kudos for your lack of listening comprehension”

“That doesn’t explain why you left us here. Locked us in here”

“Yes, it does” contradicted Alexander, still with that calm voice that enraged him and unnerved the rest with more ease than his shouting. “It’s my lunch break, and I got out to eat my lunch”

“And since when do you eat?” asked Peggy, receiving an elbow from Hercules.

“Since today. It’s that day of the year” answered Alex.

“But why did you lock us in?” pressed Thomas.

“Because I knew that, the second you realised I wasn’t there, you all would’ve run out the building.”
And I’m not having that today” he explained, death serious. “This afternoon, we are going to have the meeting. And I want all and each of you there”

“But… But you can’t lock us in, though” said Thomas, sharing a confused expression with Angelica.

“For not being able to, I did it. And it felt so good”

“Hamilton, this is not funny” said Thomas, his rage turning into a bit of fear for the CFO’s attitude.

“Are you hearing me laughing?”

“No, but…”

“But what?” spat Alexander.

“Hamilton, please, be reasonable…” tried to negotiate Thomas.

Alexander interrupted him, very uninterested. “Listen, you all, you’ve spent three years going out and in the building like that law firm were Bernarda’s pussy*. Now, you’re going to spend in there all the time you should’ve in the first place”

“But will you come back?” asked James, starting to be afraid.

“I told you we’ll have a meeting this afternoon” was Hamilton’s simple reply.

“And what time that is?” asked Thomas.

“From 1.30 to 5.30 PM, more or less”

“Hamilton, I’m being serious” retorted Thomas, trying to control his voice volume.

“I am serious right now, mister. It’s not my fault that you don’t know what afternoon is, you washed-up”

“Hamilton, please…” began to say James.

“For fuck’s sake, Hamilton! You can’t lock people up like that!” exploded Thomas.

“And less if that people are us” added Lafayette.

“Listen, you have a fridge and a couple of cupboards full of food. And the toilets I got fixed before 7.30 and you arrived. There are worse places to be locked up for a few hours. Have any of you been to Thailand?”

“It’s not about that!”

“Look, my order is arriving. Wait until I arrive. Eat your lunch and then go back to work”

“Alex, wait…” tried to say Aaron, shivering at the immigrant’s indifference.

“And just to let you know: we will have a very action-packed meeting this afternoon. So, be prepared. I’ll be”

“Alex…” said Maria, feeling nervous at the seriousness of the man’s tone. “Alex, please, listen…”

“What will happen this afternoon?” asked Hercules, sharing a worried glare with his boyfriend.
“I’ll bring litres and litres and litres of lime blossom tea so I don’t lose my temper that easily and I can discuss all the points, which are several”

“How many are ‘several’ for you??” asked Adams, paling.

“Just be prepared. Prepare yourself mentally and have all I asked for you this morning. Oh, Jefferson, I almost forgot… I let you something on your desk, print it and handed it out to your workmates”

“Hamilton, wait…” said Thomas.

“Ah, by the way, don’t you try breaking windows or something like that, because I’ve been doing some maths before leaving, and that won’t do well with the current situation of your salaries. Now, goodbye”

“Alexander!” shouted Angelica, grabbing the phone in her trembling hands.

Beep, beep, beep…

“That son of a bitch…” muttered the vice president.

“He’s beyond crazy” commented Adams, sickly pale.

“Well, to be fair, it took both Washington and Alex quite the time to reach the breaking point” said Lafayette, looking at everyone, serious. “I mean… I don’t think I would’ve been able to…”

“Shut the hell up, you French fry with ‘Coherence Leading the people’ syndrome!” exploded Angelica, running downstairs.

“It’s ‘Liberty leading the people’, actually…” corrected Laf.

“I’ve gotta get out of here!” they heard her scream.

“Buah, this woman now as well” complained Maria.

“Aaron!” Angelica came running, desperation clear in her irises. She grabbed the man’s shoulders and shook him violently as she spoke. “Give me the key to your office! I’ll get out through that hole!”

“It’s true! The hole!” said Peggy, happily.

“Finally, someone’s craziness here is useful” Adams sighed, relieved.

“Angelica, stop!” said Aaron, grabbing the woman’s wrists. He looked at the whole staff. “I don’t have the key. Alexander took them all this morning, remember?”

Angelica froze for a moment, as if not comprehending his words. Eventually, she let her legs shake and Aaron had to hold her to avoid her falling to the floor, while she cried, helplessly. The rest of the staff looked at her, sharing her desperation and some sympathy towards one another.
“My gosh…” muttered James, all of a sudden. “This is not the worst part. The worst part is that we still have to attend the meeting this afternoon”

At that statement, Angelica cried louder, being accompanied by a distressed Adams, sobbing against the palms of his hands.

“Always cheering up the mood with your comments, Dobby” complained Hercules.

Chapter End Notes

TRANSLATIONS/WHAT I THINK I WROTE:

Oh, Seigneur, prendre moi tôt: Oh, Lord, take me soon
Ça devait arriver un jour ou l'autre: it was destined to happen one of these days.
Putain, il est tellement un lourd: Fuck, he's such a drag.

NOTES:

To have orgeat in the veins (Tener horchata en las venas): It's what you say in Spanish to someone who seems to have no interest in anything or is no willing to anything or to someone who barely gets irritated.

Bernarda's pussy (El coño de la Bernarda): Today in "H is for Hamilton": learn how to be a vulgar Spanish-speaking with Leah. This is a very vulgar Spanish expression we use to refer a place which people get in and out without respect. For example, if my friends or relatives presented themselves uninvented and came in and out my house as if it were their own, I'd say "¿Qué te crees que es esto, el coño de la Bernarda? (What do you think my place is? Bernarda's pussy?)".
The one and (hopefully) last time (P 2)

Chapter Summary

In which Alexander tries to do a proper meeting.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alexander ended up coming back at sharp 15.30.

Laurens was still there, sat on the sidewalk when he returned, crest-fallen and with puppy eyes.
Alexander simply nodded in his direction, as a greeting, and Laurens watched him while he walked to the locked glass doors, frowning at his friend’s ignorance towards him.

Once he entered the building, he felt the fixated glare of Maria on the top of him but decided to ignore it. He found that a bit more difficult to do when he turned around and saw Peggy sat on a chair, facing the door with a mix of relief and fear in her features; Angelica was by her sister’s side, both arms crossed across her chest and jaw set, though it was clear she wasn’t feeling as sure as she was projecting. Aaron appeared at the break room door, soon after, looking at him with nervousness overflowing through his pores. He was followed by Madison, looking a bit better, and Jefferson, sticking their heads out the secretary’s office door. Lafayette and Hercules walked downstairs, the Frenchman looping his arms with his boyfriend’s as soon as he saw Alexander’s indifference and quietness. Adams made his way downstairs, as well. He stopped at the last step, with a look of fear.

Alexander eyed them all for a moment. They were all gathered in there and Adams was wearing the suit Jefferson had bought him. That was more than enough for him.

“Go to the meeting room” he ordered, passing a startled Angelica by, and unlocking his office door.

“What?” asked the vice president, blinking in confusion.

“To the meeting room” repeated Alexander, leaving his briefcase on his desk, with more force than necessary.

“Alex…” began to say Lafayette, a concerned and careful tone dancing in his tongue.
“To the meeting room” said Alex, once again.

“But, man, do you think it is normal to leave us locked up in here, come back, and the only thing you have to say is ‘go to the meeting room?’” asked Hercules, astonished.

“Yes” spat Alexander, looking at his friend in the eye. “Now, go to the meeting room”

“We’ll have to talk about what just happened” insisted Hercules.

“Newsflash, Hercules, that’s what normal people in their normal companies do during a meeting: discussing things. Now, to the meeting room”

“Come on…” whispered Laf, dragging the puzzled man to the room in question.

“Seriously, though, we should talk about what you just did” said Angelica, frowning at his brother-in-law. “You won’t do that again”

“I’ll do it as many times as needed. You are the ones who gave me no more option” deadpanned Alexander, with both arms behind his back.

“Excuse me?” exclaimed the vice president.

“I couldn’t leave you all in here with a single way out, with that ‘Prison Break’ syndrome you all have”

“But that’s not right” argued Angelica, stubbornly.

“What’s not right is that one of us had to be escorted in an ambulance to the hospital because your irresponsibility is costing him his health”

Ah, so it was that. Alexander had snapped, not because he was sick for some woe done to him, but to Washington. Jefferson bit back the nasty remark he was thinking about to not make the matters worse while Angelica stood frozen in her brother-in-law’s doorframe, suddenly lost at words. She knew it wasn’t wise to push Alexander to the limit when the man himself was already on the verge of a breakdown. She had seen what happened that time when he took the Reynold’s case, and though this wouldn’t end up with a panic attack, it would definitely end with fresh blood painting the walls. She didn’t want to live any of those things, thank you very much. So, she turned around and walked to where Hercules and Laf were whispering worriedly, waiting for Alexander to give them permission to enter the room.

Her action was enough to make the others imitate her. If Angelica decided the best was not to fight a battle, they would follow her example. Especially if the reason of the battle was standing in the middle of a dim lighted office, watching them walking by his door.

Alexander exited the room, briefcase and a few more papers in hand, closed and locked his door and walked to where the staff was gathered. Their murmurs died down once he was close enough to distinguish their words. With a gesture of his head, he indicated it was okay to walk in, and they obliged almost immediately, trying to be as organized as they were able to.
Alexander waited by the door, ignoring the strange and frightened glares he received in the meantime, until they were all in to enter. He closed the door at his backs, feeling the darkness of the room as all the blinds were closed.

“Someone, please, open the blinds” he ordered dryly.

He turned around, seeing Jefferson and Aaron doing the job of opening the blinds that covered the four windows across him.

“Initiative” he spat, grumpily. He walked to where the CEO was supposed to be sitting and stopped at what was in front of him. “What the hell is this fucking shit?” he asked to the air, pointing at the rocker.

“Hm… That’s been there since yesterday” answered Angelica, half way of sitting by his right.

“And nobody dared to put this thing in place?”

“As we were going to have a meeting today, we thought…”

“Ah, but you can think?” interrupted Alex, too sharply to anyone’s liking in there. “Good to know… Take this away, I want a proper chair”

“Can I have it?” asked Angelica, with a strange shine in her eyes. “I can trade my chair for it”

Alexander shrugged. “Suit yourself, girl”

Angelica gave a shriek of happiness as she dragged the rocker to Alex’s usual spot. Alexander ignored her enthusiasm while he put the chair with a thump on the side of the table, taking a seat and dropping his briefcase, heaving a sigh. With the corner of his eye, he saw Maria getting a bit closer.

“Hm… Alex?” she said, timidly.

“Yes, Maria?” he responded, casually.

“Can I go to prepare the tea or… Or…” she left the sentence dancing in the air, a bit unsure.

“You’ve got a water dispenser just there” he said, pointing at the object without even looking at it, in the corner of the room, at their backs. “If some of you want to drink something at some point, raise your hands and I’ll give permission for it”

“Water?” she repeated, shocked.

“Yes”
“But…”

“Did you all eat lunch?”

“Yes”

“Then, you won’t need a snack or anything similar”

“But…”

“You won’t have tea, I need you awake. And you won’t take coffee because I need you relaxed”

“Alright…” she said, a bit unsure.

“And I’m already being generous letting you have water” he snapped, hitting the table by letting a thick stack of papers fall on it.

Maria took that as the ending of the conversation, and don’t push the issue any further. She straightened herself in her usual spot, by Alexander’s left side. Jefferson went back to his seat, leaving Aaron fighting against the last blind, which refused to open properly. He let a chair unused by his right, not wanting to sit by Hamilton’s side. He looked, with a cocked eyebrow, as Angelica caressed the rocker’s armrests, with a tiny smile.

“One day, Angel, one day…” she whispered to herself, reassuring.

Fuck, this was going to be one hell of a meeting, and that was saying something when it came to them.

“Maria, dear, you can take a seat, I don’t want you to get tired” talked Alexander, suddenly, leafing through his papers.

The receptionist looked at him and decided to sit by his left side, pleased by the CFO’s consideration. Though his action also meant that they would be there for a while. Adams came to that conclusion as well, and began to move uncomfortably in his seat, by the end of the left side of the table.

“Um… Alexander?” said the unquiet voice of Aaron.

“Yes?” answered the man, not lifting his glare from the papers.

“Em… Can you look up?”
Alex cocked one eyebrow and, with boredom, lifted his head. The whole staff looked in his direction as well. They tried to suppress a laugh when they saw Laurens at the other side of the last window, face pressed against the glass and a frown still in its place.

Alex moved his tongue inside the mouth, in annoyance. “Laurens, leave” he ordered, managing to stay calm in the surface.

“No”

“Leave”

“In” said the freckled man, following their arguing for six hours ago.

“Close all the blinds, please” opted Alexander, uninterested.

“But it cost me hell to…” started to complain Aaron, shutting up immediately when he saw the dangerous gleam in Alex’s serious eyes. “On it” he said, turning around.

Maria got up to help him when she saw Laurens alternating himself from window to window and making Aaron more nervous as he fought against the blinds, cursing under his breath.

“Honestly, Laurens could create his own rap only with his childish repertoire” commented Alexander, on the quiet. “No, no, no, in, in, let-le-let me in, I’m on-I’m on time” he rapped.

The staff looked at each other and then laughed a bit, timidly. By the time Maria and Aaron were able to close the last blind, the room fell into darkness.

“Now, we can’t see” pointed out Peggy.

“Please, someone turn on the lights” said Alexander.

“I’ll do it” said Maria, looking at Aaron to let him know he could finally sit down. The man nodded in her direction, grateful.

“Now, to use light for the child’s nonsense” commented Alex, blinking a bit to adjust his eyes to the bright artificial light that flickered for a couple of times. “That could be his album’s title: ‘Laurens’ nonsense’. With epic and legendary songs such as ‘Let me in’, ‘It’s never my fault’, ‘Responsibility, what’s that?’”

Maria was red in the face from contained laughter by the time she made her way back to her seat. Angelica and Madison looked at her and bit their bottom lips, trying not to laugh out loud. The rest of the table looked at each other, with small smiles on their faces.
Alexander’s sigh made their seriousness come back.

“Alright, let’s start…”

An incessant tap interrupted his voice. Alexander gave another more tired sigh this time.

“Fuck, what a nag” complained Hercules.

“SHUT UUUUUP!!” screamed Angelica.

“In!” shouted back Laurens.

“Windows Laurens locked” joked Alexander, trying not to get mad. “Laurens, go practice rap and let the adults talk about their adult stuff!”

“In!” was the only response he was given.

“My gosh…” complained Lafayette.

Alexander startled them all, including Laurens, when he threw his empty – but still a bit heavy – briefcase against the window where the tapping was coming from. The briefcase tangled itself a bit on the blinds and then fell to the floor with a thump.

“The next one will be full, and I’ll throw it with the window open” threatened Alexander. “Leave or be silent”

Laurens, knowing the man as he knew and seeing he was more unpredictable than ever, obliged. And everyone sighed relieved before that.

“Good” nodded Alexander, satisfied. “Now, to the main…”

“Alex?” interrupted Peggy, raising her hand.

Alexander directed his glare slowly towards her. “Yes, Peggy?”

“Can I go to the toilet, please?”

“No. Now…”

“Why not?” interrupted the girl, upset.

“Because I say so. Now, let’s…”
"I need to go"

"Do you want me to throw my briefcase at you as well?" questioned Alexander, with a dangerous edge in his voice.

"No, I wanna go to the loo"

"You are not going to go to the loo. Now, let's talk about…"

"But I need to"

"Peggy, girl, shut up" pleaded Angelica, fearing the strong grip their brother-in-law had on his pen.

"But, why?" whined Peggy.

"You had the whole day to go" snapped Alexander. "Now, tie it in a knot, shut up and pay attention. I've got important things to discuss today. And your bladder necessities are not part of that"

"I need to go!" declared Peggy, raising her voice.

"You're 29, you're old enough to hold it in and wait until this meeting is over"

"And when will that be?"

"When we're finished talking about all we need to talk about today. Which reminds me…”

Alexander got up, took his briefcase and took a thermos out. He put it on the table while sitting down again. "My tile" he explained, opening it and taking a sip. "This will be like the magic potion of Getafix for me today"
“Thank you, dear” nodded Alexander.

“Can I go to the loo now?” she asked, hopeful.

“No. Angelica” he kept going.

“But I already gave you my thing!” argued Peggy, while her sister gave Alexander some stapled sheets.

“Hercules” called Hamilton once again, not minding the whining girl standing by his side.

“Really, Alex, I will do it fast!”

“Maria”

“You know I rarely take a lot of time when I go!”

“Laurens…” Alexander stopped for a moment. He picked up his red pen.

“I’ll be back before you even realised I was gone!”

“Laurens is missing today… And this day will be taken off his monthly salary, because I’ve got proof that he didn’t miss work because of being sick” the CFO muttered to himself, while he wrote something down.

“I’ll run up and downstairs if necessary”

“Peggy, go to your seat. Lafayette?”

The therapist frowned. “No! Please, I really really really need to go!”

“Burr” kept calling out Alexander, ignoring his sister-in-law with great mastery.

Jefferson and Madison exchanged a glare of confusion. The secretary was half-up his seat when he sat down again, seeing how Burr gave Alexander his part of work. The lawyer looked in their direction and shrugged, noticing the same as them.

“Adams?” this time, Alexander did look up.

The lawyer got up and handed his part over Hamilton, who took it more reluctant than with the others. He eyed the papers and skimmed through them while Adams made his way back to his seat. Peggy looked the scene with confusion before shrugging it off.

“Alex…”

“You still there?” asked the CFO, not throwing a rapid glare to the girl.
“Alex, please”

“Sit down, Peggy” he ordered.

“No”

“Sit down”

“No”

“Sit down”

“No”

“Well, what is this?” snapped Alexander, finally turning around to look her in the eye. “Is this your version of ‘in, out, in, out’ Laurens made me played this morning or what?”

“No, I…”

“In!” shouted Laurens voice from the same window that before.

“Gosh, it’s like Beetlejuice, you must not speak his name too much” muttered Hercules.

“Laurens, silence!” said Alexander, in a commanding tone.

“Alex, let me go to the loo” demanded Peggy.

“Sit down, Peggy, you are going nowhere. Nobody is”

“But…”

“Sit down”

“No”

“Sit down”

“No”

“Don’t start again” warned Alexander.

“Hamilton” said Thomas, suddenly.

Alexander looked at the secretary up and down, in a quiet derogatory manner. “What do you want now?” he spat.

“…” Thomas breathed in before opening his mouth to talk. “You…”

“I don’t care about you. Hush” he blurted out, turning his back on him and ignoring the hateful glare the secretary gave him. “Peggy, sit down, I won’t repeat myself anymore”

“Don’t repeat yourself, I am not going to move” challenged the girl, stubbornly.
“Excuse me?” inquired Hamilton, lowering his glasses to the top of his nose.

“I need to go to the loo” repeated Peggy.

“You won’t go” also repeated Hamilton, with conviction. “Now, go to your seat and behave. I think you’re old enough to do that, as well”

“Nope”

“Peggy…” tried to convince Aaron, gently.

“Girl, for every minute you stand there instead of being sat down as the rest of your workmates, I am going to take ten dollars off your salary” decided Hamilton.

“Alex…” pleaded Angelica.

“Now, sit down” he ordered again, ignoring his other sister-in-law.

Peggy’s only response was to cross her arms across her chest and look at his brother-in-law, defiantly.

“I’ll be counting the seconds, then” nodded Alexander.

“Alex, don’t…” tried to talk Angelica.

“What?” interrupted the CFO, sharply enough to make her flinch. “Each of you are going to learn to earn your salary. And you are going to start being paid by what you get done. The nonsense in here is going to end” he promised, solemnly.

Peggy then walked back to her chair, hoofing on the floor while muttering curses under her breath against all living being she knew. She let herself fall on the chair and started to kick the floor while groaning, her nose wrinkled in disgust.

“Peggy, could you stop behaving like a five-year-old?” asked Hamilton, boringly.

“No” was the childish response she gave, punching the table, enraged.

Alexander looked at her for a moment. “You know what?” he said, all of a sudden. “Go to the restroom”

“Really?” she asked, squinting her eyes in suspicion.

“Yes, yes, go” nodded Alexander, waving one hand dismissively.

“You sure?” asked Peggy again, vacillating in getting up.

“Yeah, go”
Peggy’s mood changed in a millisecond, as the girl got up with a bright smile on her face and ran to the door.

“I’ll be right back!” she promised, before storming off, leaving the door wide open.

“Don’t hurry” said Alexander, though he couldn’t be heard by her.

He got up from his seat once the steps became too distant to hear, keys in hand. He closed the door quietly and locked it, without hesitation.

“Sayonara, baby” he said, turning around and going back to his seat.

Everybody looked at the CFO, puzzled, and then at each other, uncomfortable.

“Hm… Hamilton?” said James, raising his hand shyly.

“Yes?”

“You haven’t called me or Thomas” pointed the accountant out.

“So?”

“… I… Well…” James stuttered.

“You’ve already given me your part”

“When?” asked Thomas, cocking an eyebrow.

The secretary received only silence, and James had to put a hand on his arm to prevent a fight. Hamilton spent a few moments in silence, just reading the paper Adams had handed him. The lawyer looked at the immigrant with a bit of discomfort. Eventually, he put those aside and looked at them.

“So, you’ll say” he stated.

“We’ll say what?” asked Hercules, confused as the rest.

“I don’t know, you tell me. Just choose a matter from the list I wrote earlier and let’s begin”

“We don’t know what we must discuss today…”

“Don’t you have my list? I think I told you to print it” said Alexander, making the secretary part of the conversation for the first time since they had come in.
“I couldn’t. The printer has no toner” explained Thomas.

Alexander looked at Thomas for too long for Thomas’ likings. He just stared at the secretary, not moving. Eventually and for Jefferson’s relief, Alexander moved to grab his thermos and take a sip from this tilleul tea. He never broke eye contact with Thomas, though.

Thankfully, a bang sounded from the door, calling everyone’s attention. Thomas let out a breath he didn’t realised he’d been holding when Hamilton got up and walked to the door, while Peggy knocked a couple of times.

“Hello?” she said through the door, clearly disconcerted.

Hamilton unlocked the door and looked at her. “Yes?”

Peggy hesitated for a moment. “Em… I’m back?” she tried.

“Good for you. Anything else?”

“… I… Can I come in?”

“No”

“Excuse me?” she said, shocked.

“No” Alex repeated.

“Why not? I gone and came quickly”

“You gone… You went, you’ll mean” he corrected.

“Yeah, that, but still…”

They looked at each other for a moment, as well. And Thomas, for the first time, felt bad for the poor girl.

“Don’t look at me with that face of abandoned kitty” said Hamilton, eventually. “You are not getting in”

“But why not?”

“Didn’t you like the loo that much? Go live there, then” he declared.

“What…?” asked Peggy, lost.

“I am sick of that obsession you have over going to the restroom. You don’t do that at home, why do you do it in here?”
“Because… Mmh…” she tried to think of something, but Alexander really caught her off guard.

“I will not put up with it anymore” promised Hamilton. “You can go and live there, work there, eat there and do everything there. You can even go and put your bed there and sleep there, and be unproductive there, for all I care… You were already spending ten of the nine hours you must be here there, anyways…” he commented, quite saddened.

“But, Alex, don’t be like this…” said Peggy, conciliatory.

“Why are you still here?” asked Alexander. “Go, girl, go give the good news to your favourite stall!” he hurried, faking a supportive and cheerful tone.

Everybody shared a glare. Peggy was frozen for a moment.

“Alex, please, let me come in” she said, in the end.

“Nope”

And with that, he closed the door in her noses. He turned the key on time before Peggy started to imitate Laurens, shaking the knob violently.

“Alex, let me in!” she shouted, from the other side.

“No. Leave. I don’t want uninterested people here” he said, calmly.

“Please!”

“No. And stop shaking the knob… What an obsession, really” he complained.

“Please, let me in!”

“No. Leave”

“Please!”

“‘Please’ is what I say… Leave, Peggy”

“Alex, pleeeeeaaaase!” whined Peggy, now knocking on the door with the same insistence.

“Leave” ordered Hamilton, walking back to the table. He grabbed his laptop case and unzipped it.

“Open!” kept talking Peggy. She had stopped shaking the knob and knocking, but her voice now sounded angrier than sad.

“Leave” responded Hamilton, automatically, while he took his laptop out and put it on the table.

“Open”

“Leave”
“I’ve got three little children, Peggy” Alexander broke the tedious game everybody seemed to want to play with him that day. “I can spend the rest of my days like this with each of you. Leave”

A growl was heard from the other side of the door and then Peggy started kicking the door from the other side, cursing under her breath.

“Spoiled brat” muttered Alexander. “Peggy, leave NOW!” he ended up shouting right after turning his laptop on.

“No, I want to come in!”

“Well, you won’t! Now leave or stay there in complete silence. I don’t want your disinterest in here! That’s enough! That’s enough with you, and WITH EVERYBODY IN HERE, OKAY?!”

Though it was kind of relaxing hearing Alexander screaming again, that time actually sent chills down everybody’s spines. Peggy finally stopped, but they could hear a faint sobbing from the other side. Angelica looked at the door with a bit of pity, but her guts told her not to face Alexander that day.

Alexander gasped a few times from pure rage while he took out a VGA cable he pulled in his laptop and then he looked up, seeing nothing in the ceiling. He stood there for a moment, simply evening his breathing and moving his tongue inside his mouth, trying to contain his anger.

“Where the hell is the projector I’ve been asking for since before Christmas, goddamnit?” he asked, kicking the floor three times as he talked, failing at controlling his temper.

Thomas moved uncomfortably in his seat and shook his head, as if trying to erase a bad memory. “We couldn’t purchase it yet” he answered.

“Of course we couldn’t” retorted Alexander. “How could we when not a fucking person in here takes these meetings seriously?” He plugged the cable out and threw it inside his case again, ill-tempered. He looked at his watch, starting to be red in the face. “Look at this, we’ve been here for almost an hour and we haven’t talked about anything, with so many tantrums and…”
Alexander stopped mid-sentence, taking a deep breath in. He took his thermos and drank another gulp of tilleul. He sighed, dropping the thermos with an angry thump. He rummaged through his briefcase, then, taking out a marker.

“Jefferson, write the list down on the whiteboard, please. Make yourself useful” he ordered, passing the marker to the secretary.

“All right” he said, not wanting to see how much Hamilton could handle today.

“Here” said Alexander, passing Maria his laptop. “Hold it for him. You can change shifts or something if one of you get tired. Which will happen, because this is a law firm of slots”

“Okay…” nodded Maria, shier.

Both the secretary and the receptionist walked to the whiteboard that was on the wall behind Hamilton.

“While Jefferson and Maria keep the reputation of this law firm being a primary school in disguise alive, let’s talk about a last-minute problem I realised this morning and that I’d like to discuss with you all, alright?”

“Yeah…” they said, shrugging.

“Okay, good. Adams”, he called, making the lawyer flinch in his seat. “please, could you…?”

“Hm… Hamilton?”

Alexander moved his jaw in a nervous manner when he heard yet another interruption. He turned around, seeing Jefferson standing next to him, marker in hand. By the whiteboard, Maria was still holding his laptop, giggling quietly.

“What?” he asked, after glaring up and down at him.

Jefferson passed him the marker, hesitantly. “This doesn’t work”

Hamilton looked at the marker with inexpressive eyes. He took it and examined it, as if he were Ariel and had just found a new cutlery item. Some people giggled along with Maria at the bad luck of the secretary and all the objections that appeared non-stop in Hamilton’s tries of keep going with the meeting.

Alexander got up from his seat, noisily and startling Jefferson, who stood aside, fearful of the immigrant’s reaction. The CFO went to the whiteboard and tried to write with it himself, gaining an
angry look from Jefferson. Alexander didn’t seem to notice – or decided to ignore it. Yes, probably it was that – and then shook the marker before trying one more time. He looked at it and blew at the point.

“I did all that already” said Thomas, unable to contain his tongue before the offense he was feeling.

Hamilton ignored his words again and tried to write with the marker a couple of times more before turning on his heels and throwing the marker with angry force. The marker fell to the ground, bounced a few times, right beside Thomas and Angelica, who covered themselves a bit, just in case.

“Sweet Lord…” muttered Aaron.

Hamilton went to his briefcase, rummaging through it once again, muttering. He swore under his breath when he saw he had no more markers. In the meantime, Angelica had gotten up and picked the marker.

“I don’t have any more markers” said Alexander, taking a seat again, bad-tempered.

“Do I go to look for some…?” tried to propose Thomas.

“That’s exactly what you all want” spat Alex. “No. Sit down you two. I’ll say it out loud. None of you is going to beat me today. We are going to have this done” he swore.

“Alright…” shrugged Thomas, walking back to his chair.

Maria returned the laptop to Alex and sat at his left again. The immigrant took another gulp from tilleul.

“I don’t feel like this crap is making anything to me” he commented, more to himself than to anyone in there. “Maybe it will only do something when I get away from all of you and can calm the fuck down. Maybe I’m lucky and I fall asleep while overworking myself tonight because no one wants to do a shit in here… I could use some rest after this motherfucking day”.

The staff moved uncomfortably in their seats, except from Angelica, who tapped Alex on the shoulder once he was finished cursing his life. She showed him the marker.

“Alex, I think you dropped this” she said, trying to conceal the wee smile that wanted to spread across her face.
Maria hunched over herself, using her long hair to hide her face, too red from too much contained laughter. Lafayette had to press a hand over his mouth to silence his giggles while Hercules wiped away some tears and tried to keep his serious façade.

Alexander looked at it with disgust, as if it wasn’t a writing utensil. He grabbed it and turned around, walking straight to the trash can they had in a corner, behind the door. Some took advantage from that to giggle a bit without being noticed. Alex threw the marker inside the trash can with hatred. He clapped both hands while making his way back to his seat.

“Adams” he said, after another gulp of tilleul. “Do you mind making a summary of what you’ve given me?”

“Eh?” asked the lawyer, confused.

“A summary. Said of a complete yet brief account of things previously stated” he defined.

“Uh… What do you want me to summarize?”

“… Adams, did you ever have a comprehension reading test, back in school?”

“Yeah”

“And when you did them, did you ever ask the teacher what chapter you had to summarize, or did you summarize the whole book?”

“I don’t know, I never did any”

“But you just told me you had them”

“I had them, but never did them. I never read the books”

“How strange…” whispered Thomas, sarcastically.

Alexander was quiet for a few moments. Then, he showed a face of not understanding a thing. He took another gulp of tilleul.

“So, you can be born like this. I learn something new every day…”

“Hm…” was the only thing Adams said in response.

“Are you going to answer me?” asked Hamilton, annoyed.

“What?” asked Adams, lost.

“Summarize your work”

“… I don’t remember”
“You don’t remember?” echoed Alexander, cocking an eyebrow. “How so?”

“Because those cases are three months old, at least”

“These are the cases from the last month” retorted Alex.

“Anyways… I can’t remember them all. I’ve got a life, you know?” spat Adams, starting to feel upset.

“Part of that life is your job as a lawyer” stated Alexander.

“A minimal part of my life”

“Do you want me to give you a hint?”

“About what?”

“About what you must summarize to me”

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why me?”

“Because you’re the first one in the list”

“Can’t you pass to the next one and so I see how to do it?”

“No. I like things well done” Alexander skimmed at some paper. “Come on. I’ll say the name of one of your clients, alright?”

“Hm…”

“Why don’t you tell us about… Mr. Gerald Brooks?”

Aaron squinted his eyes at the CFO as soon as he heard the name, in suspicion. Meanwhile, Alexander waited a moment, reading the case a couple of times before finally raising his glare before the lack of talking or muttering. He clicked his tongue, beyond annoyed, when he saw Adams looking at the water bottle that was in front of him, bewildered. Everyone followed his glare and cocked one eyebrow at the man. Thomas sighed heavily, rubbing his temples at the sudden headache.

The immigrant scared them all when he slammed one hand against the table.

“Adams!” he bellowed.

“What??” asked the lawyer, startled.

“What do you have to say about Mr. Brooks?”
"I don’t know, who is that?"

"One of your clients, Adams"

"Um… Alexander?" spoke Aaron, raising his hand timidly.

"Hush, Aaron" spat the CFO, his eyes glued to the confused lawyer.

"Can you give me a bit more of information?" asked Adams.

"I think you should be able to remember who I am talking about just by the name, mister"

Adams growled under his breath. “Hamilton, I am not a computer, I can’t remember all my clients”

“Oh, sorry, you’re right. You have so many in one single month, it must be difficult to remember” apologised Alex, mockingly.

“Well…” said Adams, frowning dangerously in the man’s direction.

“Could you have the decency to answer me, once and for all?” inquired Alex, being strangely calm the whole time.

“I don’t remember that man” repeated Adams, overwhelmed.

“Think back, come on. I am sure I gave you enough time already” pressured Alexander.

“But why can’t you ask another person?”

“Because I don’t want to. I want you to answer me first”

“I’ll answer you”

“Good, finally”

“After I see someone else doing it”

“What do you have to see? How a summary is done? How old are you?”

“Why do you care?” asked Adams, defensively.

“Mister, calm down, this is not a model job interview”

“No, but…”

“I am just saying that I think you’re old enough to be able to give me a summary without having to give you an example first. That’s fine for people like my son, who is six; not like you, whose hair’s been years in danger of extinction”

Maria couldn’t handle it anymore and let a few giggles escape her lips. Luckily, Alexander had his whole attention on Adams. The rest stopped containing themselves as well and imitated the receptionist, who couldn’t stop giggling under her breath. Even Thomas had to laugh a bit at the remark. The only one who wasn’t sharing their good mood was Adams, whose frown refused to leave.
“If someone does it before me, I’ll pay attention and I’ll do it right” argued Adams.

“Allow me to doubt it” retorted Alexander. “Because, as far as I know, the only thing you pay attention to is the water bottle you always bring with you. If I asked you for reciting what Fiji puts on their labels, you’d pass the text with A+”

“He’s ripping him to pieces today…” commented James, on the quiet.

“Gosh, I absolutely have to record this. I don’t mind the consequences” muttered Angelica, taking her phone out.

“Adams” said Alexander, boringly.

“Hm?”

“Answer me”

“About what”

“About Mr. Brooks”

“Who’s that?”

“A man that asked for your services as a lawyer this month”

Again, Aaron cocked an eyebrow at his workmate. But, this time, decided to be quiet about his confusion and let the two men to their arguing, quite enjoying the scene.

“Don’t you remember yet?” asked Alexander. “Do you want another hint?”

“Yeah, whatever…” shrugged Adams.

Alexander dedicated him a sharp glare before reading. “He wanted you to defend him about a family matter. Do you remember what that was about?”

Alexander gave the man a moment to think. Adams only stared straight at him, blinked a couple of times and then turned his head to the blinded windows.

“Are you expecting the Holy Spirit to come with the answer attached to one leg?” asked Alexander, making a few more workmates to giggle at that mental image.

“No…” admitted Adams.

“Well?”

“What did you say it was??”

“A family matter”
“Concerning who?”
“His family, mister”
“But what part of his family?” spat Adams, pissed off.
“The one he created” answered Alexander, reading the paper again.
“A divorce” said Adams, finally.
“A divorce?” echoed Alex.
“Yes, he wanted to divorce his wife”
“Aha” nodded Alexander.
“Is that?” asked Adams, feeling uneasy at the lack of comments.
“I don’t know, you’ll say. It was your case” said Alex, raising one hand in sign of indifference.
“But you have the report there” said Adams, pointing at the paper, dumbfounded.
“Yes, but you know better than me what happened”
“Well, yeah, that’s true, but…”
“Continue, please” interrupted the CFO.
“More??”
“Yes, what happened with his wife?” asked Alex, his glare fixated on the man at the other side of the table.
“Hum… Alex…” tried Aaron, once again.
“My, Aaron, is this your talkative day of the year?” asked Alex, finally turning in the other lawyer’s direction. Adams sighed at the relief.
“No, but…” tried to explain Aaron.
“Hush, please. It’s not your turn. You come next” informed Alexander, sharply. He turned again to face Adams. “Mr. Adams, please, continue”
“Hm… The man wanted the custody of the children”
“Children?” repeated Alexander, again with that strange tone of disbelief.
“… Yes?” answered Adams, doubtful.
“Good” nodded Alexander. “How many?”
“Hm…”
“Children” clarified Alex.
“Yeah, yeah”
“Just in case”
“Two”
“Two?”
“Yeah”

Alexander smiled a bit while he nodded. “Alright, nice…” He turned to face Burr, then. “Aaron, do you agree?” he asked.

“About?” asked Burr, carefully.

“About all we’ve been told. Do you agree?”

“… No” admitted Aaron.

“Why?”

“Because that’s not what happened”

“And what would you know?” snapped Adams.

“More than you or any of us” answered Alexander, rapidly. “And you know why?”

“… Why?”

“’Cause this” Alexander raised the sheet he had been holding that whole time. “was one of Aaron’s cases”

“… … … …”

“And do you want to know another very interesting thing?” continued Alexander, with a smile of superiority plastered across his face.

“… … What?” dared to ask Adams.

“This was one of Aaron’s cases… from when he was working for Mr. King” Alexander raised the paper he had been holding. “And to make matters better” he continued, before the lack of response from the man. “Mr. Brooks did get a divorce, but because his wife was mistreating him. And, thankfully, they didn’t have any kids involved. So, you didn’t get one a single one right”

“But…” managed to say Adams, after a moment.

“What?” spat Alexander, throwing the document aside.

“But that can’t be”

“What can’t be?”

“He was a man”

“So?”

“How was his wife going to mistreat him?”

“The same way a man does it”
“But that can’t be”

“What can’t be is that a man like you was able to go to college and graduate as a lawyer. And yet, here we are” snapped Alexander. He turned to Jefferson. “Really, why did you get angry at the fact that he didn’t want to take your case? I would’ve made him a monument to thank him”

Thomas cleared his throat in discomfort while Adams frowned, offended.

“You tricked me, that’s not fair” he condemned.

“I lied to prove a thing” Alex defended himself.

“What thing?”

“That you are a shameless and useless creature. Even if this case happened a lot of time ago, you still should’ve been able to remember hints of it, had it been yours. I remember all the cases I’ve taken”

“I told you I didn’t remember”

“But you doubted about if you took it or not. That’s why you made up that cliché story”

“It’s still not fair” complained Adams.

“Are you sure? Hold on for a bit, that now I am going to give you all a class of fairness” He skimmed through some more papers until he found the one he was looking for. “Madison”

“Yes?” said the accountant, a bit taken by surprise.

“Could you please give us a summary about Mrs. Jenkin’s case?”

“Hey, that was mine” said Adams.

“But this is not your turn” said Alexander, with a cutting tone. Turning it gentler, he kept talking to James, who was looking at the CFO as if he were crazy. “Please, Madison, proceed”

“Hm… That’s not my job…” explained Madison.

“What do you mean?”

“I take care of the accounts…”

“But you still know what this was about, right?”

“…”

“Do you?” he pressured.

“I…” James coughed a bit, uncomfortable. He looked at Hamilton, waiting for the man to drop the issue.

“Come on, talk. I know you know it” Of course, he never dropped anything.

“Unfair dismissal” answered James, under his breath.
“Could you say it a bit louder, please?” said Alex, softening his tone a bit.

“Unfair dismissal” repeated Adams, bitterly.

Alexander’s glare hardened when he looked at the lawyer. “Silence! I am not talking to you now!” he shouted.

“But you’re asking him about my case!” complained Adams. “You got those things mix up!”

“I’ve got them perfectly fine. Now, hush” ordered Alexander. Turning to Madison, who refused to meet his glare, he softened his tone again. “Madison, please, can you explain the case to us?”

“It’s not mine” the man excused himself again.

“But you know what it is about” repeated Alexander, stubbornly.

“But he doesn’t take cases, he has other duties” Thomas defended his friend, when he felt signs of slight anxiety in James’ behaviour.

“Has he?” inquired Alexander, now addressing the older man. “It’s true. He has. In that case, let’s do things right” He let the paper closer to him and then began to leaf through others until he took one out. “Alright, then. Madison, do you have the accounts from January and this month?”

Madison, who was already ready to pass a paper to him, stopped abruptly. “This one as well??” he asked.

“Yes” nodded Alexander.

“But… But it’s still mid-month”

“So?”

“… I thought…”

“I asked for you this morning to prepare this month’s as well” interrupted Hamilton.

 “… I, maybe, misunderstood…”

“You surely did” agreed Hamilton. “I assume, by that, that you don’t have them?”

“Not the one from this month, but…”

“And why not?”

“Because I thought…”

“You don’t have to think, you have to listen to what I say and do it. Simple as that”

“In that case, explain yourself a bit better” snapped Thomas, upset at the immigrant’s behaviour.

“Explain myself better?” parroted Alexander. “I told him, in front of you, to make matters worse, this morning: ‘Madison, I want you to give me whatever accounts you have from this month’. What could anyone not understand in that?”

“The boy made a mistake, for once. Have you never made one?” kept arguing Thomas.

“In fact, I have: the two months I lost my precious time working for you for free”
“That again?!” complained the secretary.

“You asked” concluded Alexander, looking now at Madison, who had his glare low. “Why did you get confused over such a simple order?” he asked, now looking at Madison.

“Because he got confused, simple as that” spat Thomas, repeating the CFO’s previous words.

“Are you his spokesperson?”

“If you’re going to be his executioner, then, yes”

“I am not an executioner, excuse me. I am his superior, he is the man that reports directly to me and he is not doing it as expected. So, if I want to rebuke him, I can”

“You’re not rebuking, you’re pushing him on purpose” accused Thomas.

“Look, hush” he cut the man off. “I am not talking to you. When I do, you can argue, scream and insult me. But, until then, hush”

“… No” Thomas refused.

“It was not an option. You either hush now and wait, or you get out for not coming back in for the rest of the afternoon”

“So be it” challenged Thomas.

“Madison” said Hamilton, sternly, looking at the distressed shorter man again. “Please, be honest: why don’t you have all I asked for you?”

“I don’t know” answered James, automatically.

“You don’t?” repeated Alexander, sceptic.

“No…” he muttered.

“Professionalism at its best, I see” nodded Alexander, serious. “Alright, then, let’s go to another issue, because I see talking to you is useless”

Thomas squinted his eyes dangerously at the CFO, while Madison gave a shaky sigh and moved uncomfortably in his seat.

“Angelica” called Alexander, turning around to face his sister-in-law. “How are you feeling?”

The vice president blinked, shocked, before responding. “Em… Fine?” she answered, unsure.

“Good… I am asking because, for what I’m reading here…” He took a look at another paper he had been holding. “You’ve missed work in the afternoon for almost two weeks in a row” He dropped the paper and locked eyes with Angelica. “Something to say about it?”

“Em…” she blushed slightly.

“I don’t know what you eat at lunch” kept talking Alexander. “But change it, it’s doing you no good
for what it seems”

“No, it’s not the food” she assured.

“How do you know? Have you gone to see a doctor?”

“No”

“You should. It is not very normal to fall ill every day after lunch break”

“Those were just coincidences”

“Coincidences?” repeated Alexander, tilting his head to the side.

“Yeah”

“Coincideeeeeeenceeeees…” half-sang Alex his glare fixated on nothing in particular.

Without looking, he grabbed his thermos, took off the tape and took another gulp. Everyone looked at each other, perplexed.

“Does anyone have something to comment?” asked Alexander, casually, while he tapped the thermos once again.

“About what?” asked Lafayette, after overcoming the initial and shared shock.

“About the strange case of Angelica Schuyler, the woman who falls ill in the afternoon and gets better when this end” answered Alex.

Angelica threw daggers to each of them. The rest of the staff stared at Alexander, confused.

“Nobody??? Really?” he gasped, and no one was sure if he was faking his surprise or not. “Nobody has anything to comment? Not a single comment?” he pressured.

“Who cares?” muttered Aaron, under his breath.

Alexander turned to him. “Excuse me, what did you say?” he asked, pointing at him.

Aaron doubted for a moment, but then made up his mind. “I said that who cares”

“Who cares about what? Specify, please”

“Who cares about if she misses work all afternoons or every two days. That’s her life, and coincidences do exist. It’s happened to Theodosia a few times” stated Aaron.

Alexander looked at him for a moment, making him uncomfortable. Suddenly, he got up from his seat, took Aaron’s hand and shook it, lively.
“Thank you” he said, totally sincere. “Thank you for being normal and decent. You are like a flower in the desert”

“Eh… Thanks…” said Aaron, not pretty sure about what just happened.

“You’ll see, Aaron, I am saying this because you don’t care. But there are *some people* in here who do”

“We don’t care” said Hercules, frowning slightly.

“You don’t care about Angelica’s case. Whose… Well, Angelica’s case is for Mr. Nightmare to make a video about it”

Angelica looked nastily at her brother-in-law for that, while Aaron bit his bottom lip, trying hard not to laugh.

“Let’s keep going with this. Madison”

James did all within his power not to sigh just then. Thomas straightened himself in his chair, prepared to argue if necessary.

“According to this… You’ve missed work the first week of February, the Monday of last week and this one as well…”

“Yes, I…” tried to excuse James.

Hamilton kept talking, though, not minding him at all. “You’ve got almost the whole month of January with miss days…” he commented. He threw the paper aside and looked at the rest of the staff. “Something to say about this?” he asked.

“That nothing is new” commented Adams. “He’s been like this since always”

“Yeah” nodded Alexander.

“But are you okay, though?” asked Hercules, leaning in his seat to have a proper look of the red-faced accountant.

“He won’t say” said Maria, in his behalf.

“But maybe something’s wrong and we can help” insisted Hercules.

“Adams knows the answer” Alexander chimed in, pointing at the lawyer with his pen.

“Me?” asked Adams, perplexed.

“Yes, yes” he nodded, exaggeratedly.
“Why would I know about this man’s life?” spat Adams, almost indignant.

“Your memory loss again?” asked Alex, faking concern. “Really, Mr. Adams, go to a specialist to take care of that. It is not very normal”

Adams frowned at the CFO, sending chills down Lafayette and Aaron’s spines.

“According to you, what’s wrong with Mr. Madison is that he has… How was it?” he pretended to think for a moment. “Ah, yes: acute lietitis”

Adams paled at Thomas’ enraged look from across the table. “No, that’s not…” he tried to contradict.

“Yeah, I know the copyright is not yours, you’re not that bright. I know you took it from Mr. King, who used to say this to Madison, along other things, like that he was unfitting and incapable of his job”

Madison started to feel his breathing uneven by that point and he had to swallow the lump in his throat in order to control the tears that were threatening with falling down in that precise moment.

Meanwhile, Alexander took a stack of papers that he showed to their workmates.

“Do you know what these are?” he asked, receiving a few whispers and, eventually, a general shake of heads. “These are the reports that King had” he explained. “Today I arrived later than I intended to not because I wanted to make you suffer… Well, maybe a little, let’s not lie. But the main reason why was because I was doing homework” He dropped the stack on the table, with a thump. “I not only read the reports Lee had been writing until he decided to disappear from the map; I also read all the reports whoever King had in charge wrote in its day. And, let me tell you, as I read, I wanted the Earth to swallow me alive”

Alexander’s glare softened a bit when he saw Madison unable to lift his glare.

“I am sorry, Madison. For you too, Angelica, but…”

“Yeah, I understand now” nodded the vice president.

“Good” said Alexander. “Madison, I didn’t do this to shame you or because you did something wrong; I did it because I want you, and the rest who is decent in here, to know who you must work with every day, and to know who deserves your help and who doesn’t”

“Okay…” muttered the accountant.
“I am sorry”

“No, don’t be” he assured, with a hint of anger in his voice, while he gave a sideways look to Adams.

Alexander put a hand on the stack of papers. “As I explained, I had a lot of homework to do and that was why I was later than I thought I’d be. But I did it all, very content” He alternated his glare between his sister-in-law and accountant. “Again, I didn’t want to humiliate any of you and I am sorry I had to do this, but I think enough is enough”

“It’s alright” repeated Angelica, while Madison waved one hand, nonchalantly.

“I’ve read this and…” Alexander sighed, more tired than before, surprisingly at a loss of words. “I don’t know what to think, what to make out of this… Really, this is one of the few things in this world that can let me speechless” He took one paper from the stack, prepared for the occasion. “In here, the expert in psychology and King of human empathy and sympathy wrote things like… Like you, Madison, again, I’m sorry, but this man had it for you, it seems…”

“Yeah, he did…” admitted James, with tiny voice.

“He wrote things like… Like that you were unfitting for working there, I don’t know, maybe his law firm was the Olympus or something. And, also, that you were uncapable of work in itself…”

Alexander decided to take another paper when he heard the small and almost unnoticeable sniff the man at his left did.

“For Aaron he got that he had problems at socializing” he looked at the lawyer, who tried to conceal his discomfort at the bad memory, but Alexander was now able to see through him. “I keep reading to only see him complaining about your lack of social interaction and I see that there was a point in which King made you talk to a counsellor, and the reports I’ve got from them is that you’ve got a problem…”

Alexander set that paper aside, shaking his head in disbelief and took another one.

“He also had something to say about Jefferson…” He looked at the secretary. “Jefferson, have you read this?”

“I didn’t want to” he answered honestly.

“I can’t blame you” agreed Alexander, reading the document. “Not even I, with all the hatred I have within towards you, would be able to say something like this. In summary, Mr. King is not a fan of shy people, but he hires them, nonetheless. That man has a mental problem” he blurted out, without thinking. “That must be it, I’ve got no more explanation for all this… This nonsense… I… Again, I am sorry to be the one saying this, Aaron, Madison”

“It’s alright” said Aaron, quietly.
“But I am saying all this, and in front of everyone, because I want to know if I’ve got a problem of understanding”

At that, all frowned confused at his words.

“Yes, because I’ve read a lot of not-very-nice things about people like Aaron, Jefferson, Madison and similar, but then I read nothing about Adams’ habit of giving his work three weeks late. And I’m not talking about King right now, I’ve been reading what Lee says about each of us and… Let’s say I don’t want him to come near this building in the next three months, at least. I don’t want to be known because of a murder.

“And I find rather interesting how critical these people are towards persons like Jefferson, Aaron, Madison, Maria, who are always with something to do and rarely give me things late, no matter how many day they must miss because their health maybe is not the best or they are going through a rough patch, and, meanwhile, they reward people like Adams, who makes despicable actions towards his workmates and can’t even be saved by saying he does his job fine. Because, he doesn’t do it at all”

“I haven’t done anything now” complained Adams.

“You haven’t done anything?” echoed Alexander. “And what about the work Madison wasn’t able to give me today?”

“What about it. That’s not my business”

“It is when you’re the reason why the person that reports directly to me is not performing as expected. I’ll ask you now: why couldn’t Madison give me what he was supposed to today?”

“Ask him” said Adams, shrugging.

“I did. Now I am asking you”

“I don’t know”

“You don’t know?”

“No”

Alexander was frozen for a moment. He sighed and took his thermos, again taking a gulp of tea.

“None of you ever know a thing in here, people. What a scene I have to face here all days… Then, you won’t understand why I am always in a bad mood. With all the bullshit I have to endure six days a week it is a miracle I am not in an even worse mood…”

“But…”
“I really thought you wanted those for the end of the month” repeated Madison, finally looking at him in the eye.

“You know I am not asking because I don’t believe that, Madison. You’ve been working all day, I know. What were you doing instead of this? Your only job in here?” asked Alexander, with a harsher tone than intended. He huffed when he received only silence. “Were you doing, maybe, this document?” he asked, tossing a few papers in his direction.

“What’s this?” he asked, taking a look.

“You tell me. You wrote that”

Madison was silent for a moment. “I just checked it”

“Checked it? Don’t you mean wrote it?” insisted Alexander. “Please, Madison, don’t insult my intelligence with…”

“No, no… I just wrote what was left”

“Ah, now you wrote a part of it? How many times will I have to ask you so you finally admit you did the whole thing?”

“…”

“Do you know why I did why I did earlier?” asked Alexander, leaning in his seat, pointing at the accountant with his pen. “I did it so you know that this man over there” He pointed at Adams. “not only doesn’t thank you with words, but neither with actions” He then looked around himself, with a frown of anger. “And, also, so everyone can understand why people like Madison or Aaron, sometimes, refuse to talk to even the speck of dust” he declared, taking another gulp of tea in the end to calm his nerves. “Adams, you are going to have a cut on your salary this month” he informed, after a pause.

“Why?!” growled the lawyer, blushing with fury.

“How will I be able to give Madison his raise, then?”

“What raise?” asked James, surprised.

“The one you are going to have to give Madison this month” replied Alexander, simply.

“But…”

“Are you going to give him my money?!” asked Adams, indignant, interrupting the shocked accountant.

“Your money? That’s not your money” Alex contradicted, shaking his head.

“It’s my salary”

“Salaries must be earned, Mr. Adams. And you haven’t earned it”

“I haven’t?”

“No”

“…”
“Have you done this?” Alex raised the sheet he had given to him earlier.

“… Most of it”

Alexander locked his glare on Adams, deathly serious. He threw the paper aside and took another gulp from his thermos, putting it back on the table with a thump.

“Adams, don’t text my patience today. Really, don’t” he advised.

“What have I done now?”

“Being a self-serving” spat Thomas, with venom.

“Thomas…” said James, trying to calm his friend down before another argument arose.

“Look who’s talking” retorted Adams, immediately.

“In comparison with you, I am Mother Theresa” said Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“Better don’t make me talk” threatened Adams, moving in his seat and avoiding eye contact.

“Talk” challenged Thomas, feeling the blood boiling in his veins. “Talk, I dare you. I’ve told you countless times that if you have something to tell me, tell me. But don’t bring James or anyone else close to me into it”

“I’m bringing him into it because this is about he taking something that’s mine away from me”

“None of this would’ve happened if you had done your job in the first place, instead of telling James to do it and then having the poor shame of rebating him for one single mistake that you made”

“That was not my mistake, it was his”

“Even if it had been, you don’t have the right to…”

Adams talked over him. “And you’re one to talk about me using the man, when you have him like a personal assistant, like you did with your sister. You don’t love, you just use”

“Look…”

Thomas took one deep breath in, trying to control himself as best as he could. Eventually, he simply slammed his hands on the table and got up, abruptly, making his way to the door. When he pulled the handle and was reminded the door was locked, he simply huffed and turned away, refusing to look at anyone in the eye.

He heard footsteps walking closer to where he was standing, and then the door being unlocked. He looked over his shoulder, seeing the door opening slowly while Hamilton walked to the water dispenser. Thomas didn’t give him too much thought as he stormed out the room.
James got up almost immediately, throwing a glare to Hamilton, who was now returning to his seat with a plastic cup full of water. Hamilton gave it to him and he took it, hesitantly.

“Go with him, I’ll go in a bit” informed Hamilton, looking him in the eyes.

“I… Alright, thanks” nodded Madison, walking out the room. “Shall I close the door?” he asked, at last minute.

“No, I am going to talk to you two now”

“Okay”

Hamilton took the keys from the table and the documents Adams gave him at the beginning of the meeting.

“Adams, you will come to work every day for the rest of the month, and the whole month of March” he said, sternly.

“Alright?” said the lawyer, cocking one eyebrow.

“I am serious” deadpanned Alexander, raising his head to look him in the eyes. “If you were normal, I would’ve suspended you as a punishment, but I know that would be like a gift. So, day you don’t come into work, day that will be taken off your salary. That’s it” explained Alexander, before turning around, the keys clinking on his way.

“That’s not…” tried to argue Adams, red in the face.

“Ah” Alexander stopped by the doorframe, and locked eyes with him once again. “And you will do this again. In a pretty handwriting, please” he added, showing him the sheets.

“Why?”

“Because this is your job, and if you want your salary, you will do as I say, understood?”

“Yes” nodded Adams, gritting his teeth.

“Good”

“Can I do it on the computer?”

“No”

With that, Alexander closed the door with a thump. He locked the room and turned around, seeing the hallway completely empty. Alex sighed with boredom as he made his way to where his sister-in-law’s office was. Again, he opened the door brusquely, waking Peggy up from the bed.
“Whaat…?” she said, groggily.

“You’ll never learn, right?” asked Alexander.

“What…?”

“Get up and go to the break room or the hallway. I don’t want you here, sleeping”

“You kicked me out the meeting room” Peggy reminded him, bitterly.

“Yes, because you didn’t have the proper attitude to be there”

“Yes, I did and do” she argued.

“No, you didn’t and don’t. This scene proves I am right”

“I was napping…”

“You must sleep and nap at home. You come here for working”

“I never wanted to come in today…” she muttered.

Surprisingly, Alex heard her. “And this also proves how right I am again. Peggy, when you take things seriously in here, you’ll be able to get in the meeting room and be part of this staff properly. Until then, you’ll be working on your own in the break room. That is until I get rid of this bed”

“No, please, don’t”

“And I will take what this cost you off your salary, as you must’ve done in the first place”

“Nooo” she whined.

“Yeees” he mocked, imitating her tone.

“Whyyy?”

“Because this is not a thing the staff would ever need or use. This was a whim of yours. Besides, you’re living in my and Eliza’s house. And I’ve never seen you use your money for anything yet. I am sure you will not miss those 300 dollars”

“I am saving for personal stuff” she explained.

“What personal stuff?” he asked, unconvinced.

“Stuff in general…”

“Like a house?”

“What would I want a house for?”

“… I don’t know. For living in it, like a mature and independent person?”

“Nah” she shrugged.

“… … Get up, Peggy”
“Please…”

“Get. Up” he repeated, frowning.

Peggy groaned and got up unwillingly. Once she was out, Alexander locked her door as well and they walked to the meeting room door.

“Wait there or in the break room. I don’t care. Nobody is getting out until the meeting is over” he informed.

Peggy groaned louder than before and slid down the wall, making her best puppy eyes to try to melt Alex’s heart, but the man barely looked in her direction as he made his way to the secretary’s office. She made a ‘tsk’ sound and rested her chin on her knees, deciding to get her phone out and play some game.

Alexander sighed heavily for what seemed the zillionth time that day while walked to Jefferson’s opened office. He stopped right in the doorframe, surprised to see Madison alone, sat on the desk, wiping away some tears while he sobbed in shaky breaths.

Alright, so maybe they didn’t end their relationship in the best way, but that didn’t mean that Alex liked to see the man like that or that he found any satisfaction in the scene before his eyes.

He knocked and walked in, ignoring the startle he gave the accountant. He put the documents on the table and walked to be by his side.

“I thought you came to comfort your friend?” was the first thing he said, while looking for something in his pockets.

“Me too” he admitted, giving a weak laugh.

Alexander passed him a packet of kleenex. “Here, take this” he said, putting a comforting hand on the other man’s back.

“Thank you” said Madison, after a pause, while he took one kleenex out to wipe the tears properly.

“You can keep it” said the CFO, waving one hand nonchalantly.

“No, I mean… For before” clarified the accountant, taking one deep breath.

“That was nothing at all” assured Alex, shaking his head. “I didn’t do it to…”

“Yeah, I know, I am not upset. At you, that is…”
“Good. Here, I’ve brought you what you did. Ripping it to pieces was too cruel because it was your hard work and it would do nothing to Adams, actually” he rambled, busying his free hand by passing and setting the papers aside.

“You don’t have to give me a raise with his money” said James, when the memory came to him like a flash.

“Yes, I have to” he contradicted.

“No, no. Adams already has it for me and Thomas, I don’t want to make matters worse” he explained.

“Let him” proclaimed Alexander, challenging. “Since I started ignoring Jefferson, days got bored. I need someone to kick off their high horse”

James laughed a bit at that, and Alex tapped him on the back, feeling better for seeing the man a bit more cheered up.

“Do you need to go home?” he asked, all of a sudden.

“No, really…”

“Here” said Alex, taking one key off the key-ring and passing it to him. “Go home, I don’t think I need to talk anything more with any of you today”

“No, seriously, I…”

“Here” insisted Alexander, tossing the key in his direction. “Go home, rest and forget about this day. Make sure to lock the door before leaving”

“And you?” he asked, taking the key, unsurely.

“That’s a spare” explained Alexander, walking to the door. “Make sure to give it back tomorrow or when you’re able to come back. I understand if you need a few days off”

“Alright… Thanks” he said, watching the key.

“Ah, and you can still give me the accounts of February when the month ends, as usual” added Alexander, before leaving.

“Okay”

“Good”

Hamilton ignored Thomas, who was walking back from the break room with a cup of some hot liquid and looking at him with an arched eyebrow. Jefferson came in his office while Alexander unlocked the meeting room door, feeling the intense glare of Peggy in the back of his neck.
He ignored her, as well, and closed the door in her angry face. Turning the key, he smirked at the lack of petitions from the girl.

“That was what they all needed in here” he commented to himself. “An iron fist”

He stopped in his tracks, a shocked expression plastered across his face when he saw the person sitting at the end of the table, across Adams.

“What the hell are you doing in here?”

Laurens, sitting beside Lafayette, who was looking at Alexander with worry clear in his irises, leaned back on his chair with a cocky smile.

“In” he simply said, with a triumphant tone.

Some people suppressed their laughter at that response, while others only looked at Hamilton, fearing what his reaction would be.

“Laurens, get out of here” Hamilton said, trying to stay calm.

“Nope” was the response he was given.

“Laurens…” Alex stopped mid-sentence, squinting his eyes. “Wait, how did you get in?”

“Through the window” answered the man, pointing at the window that was at the end of the room.

Alexander walked there with a frown. He opened the blinds and saw the window opened. Rage made his blood boil as he grabbed the handle to close it again. To his surprise, the handle was the only thing to follow his furious moves. He looked at it, in his hand, and then turned to the staff.

“What is this?” he asked, raising the object.

“It’s broken” replied Lafayette.

“I can see that. But why?”

Alexander noticed Angelica’s cheeks turning red as scarlet as she bit her lips to prevent her
wee smile to grow. He growled under his breath.

“Something to say, Angelica?” he inquired.

“I…” she tried to talk, but started to giggle under her breath.

“Well…” complained Alexander, clicking his tongue.

“It was me” admitted Hercules, raising his hand. “I was about to fall and I grabbed it… and broke it…”

“And how were you able to almost fall while opening or closing the window?”

“Because I was doing neither”

“And what were you doing?” Alex raised one curious eyebrow at that.

“I… Well, I and a few…”

“Who are ‘a few’?” interrupted the CFO, tapping his foot on the floor.

“Em… You know… The gang…”

“So, you, Laurens and LaF?”

“And Angelica and Maria” nodded Hercules.

“And what were you doing in here? And how comes nobody saw you breaking this or why didn’t you tell somebody?”

“You see… Em…” tried to explain Hercules, blushing slightly.

“It happened at night” said Maria, then.

“At night?” repeated Alexander, perplexed. “What were you all doing in here at night?”

“You are one to talk about people staying in late” commented Adams, still angry at the man.

“But I stay to do work!” exploded Alexander. “What happened? Were you five working and, when you finished, decided to do the dance of the hardworking or something??”

“No, we…”

Angelica interrupted Hercules with a soft laugh. That only made Alexander’s mood to get worse.

“Is there anything funny in what I just said, Angelica?”

“Well, imagining grown-up people doing the dance of the hardworking is funny as hell” nodded Maria, smiling.
“That ‘grown-up’ part is very debatable”

“You see, we came here one night” started to explain Maria. “And we smoked and drank a bit”

“How am I not surprised?” said Alexander, passing a hand through his face.

“And Hercules drank a bit too much and when he was about to get up, he lost his balance, grabbed the handle but broke it and fell to the floor with it in his hand” finished Maria. “Just that”

“Just that?” repeated Alexander, his frown deepening. “But do you think what you just told me it’s normal, miss?!”

Angelica finally raised her head, her eyes watery from tears of laughter. “When he fell was so funny”

Alexander laughed sarcastically at that. “Hahahaha! Yes! It is so funny that five employees came in here at night to drink and get high and one of them eventually broke something of the company! Tsk… When did the party happen?”

“Around September or something like that…” answered Lafayette, feeling a bit embarrassed at the memory.

“September…?”

“We were a bit sad because the summer was leaving” said Laurens.

“Shut up, you are not supposed to be here!” screamed Alexander, hoofing to his seat. He dropped the handle there, with anger. “Five months, goddamnit. This’s been broken for five fucking months… Why neither of you did anything?!”

“And what do you want us to do?” said Angelica.

“I don’t know. Maybe tell me or Washington so it can be fixed? We have enough with that hole Burr has in his office”

“Leave me out of this” complained the lawyer.

“Do things right and you wouldn’t be brought into this kind of messes”

“We came in through that hole, actually” added Lafayette, under his breath.

“Nice” nodded Alexander, sarcastically. “It is a miracle nobody has come to rob us yet. I swear to god if something happens one day, we are going to have it. And we are going to have it big if something happens to someone as well!!” he swore.

“Bah, what’s gonna happen?” dismissed Angelica.

“Nothing happens until it happens!” shouted Alexander. “And enough with this! I’ll make sure to call somebody to fix this… More wasted money for your nonsense. I hope you’re happy”

There was a moment of silence while Alexander leaf through some papers. Not before looking at the handle with pure hatred and hitting the table a couple of times with it, wanting to let some rage go before continuing with the meeting. He took his thermos and went to drink some more tea when he stopped. He shook the thermos a bit and then clicked his tongue.
"I’ve run out of tea" he informed, tapping the thermos and hitting the table with it as well. "And I’m not feeling it doing anything to me… I’ll try pills or something like that. I’ll mix them up, let’s see if that way something explodes inside myself and I finally end with this joke of a life… Living like this has no sense at all…"

They looked at each other, a bit fearful for his words. Alexander gave a tired sigh while he massaged his neck.

“What else did I have to…?” he muttered. “Ah, yes. Let’s leverage your disobedience… Laurens” he called out loud.

“Agh, leave me, Alex” said the man, with a face of tedium.

Alexander gave him a look of bewilderment. “But what the hell…” he whispered, while his face turned red. “WHAT THE HELL IS THIS NOW?!?” he ended up shouting.

“What?” asked Laurens, puzzled by his reaction.

“I haven’t even started to talk to you and you’re already shutting me up?!” asked Alex, indignant.

“It’s just that I know what you’re going to talk to me about and I pass…” answered Laurens, boredly.

“Ah, nice, very nice. I want to live like that as well, ignoring all my responsibility and running away from my problems, letting somebody else to fix them”

“Live like that” said Laurens, shrugging. “Who is holding you back?”

“… Morals are holding me back” replied Alexander.

“In that case, talk to Morals and let me live”

“Are you kidding me, mister?”

“No”

“No? I think you are”

“Well, I am not”

“Look, I am seeing I won’t be able to have a proper and mature conversation with you. I wanted to ask you for calling Lee and talk to him about what is going on in here, but I see I’ll have to do that myself. Like everything else. So, give me his number so I can contact him”

“I can’t”

“Why not?”

“Because I already called him and he told me…”
“Wait, you talked to him?”

“Yep”

“When?”

“The other day, I think? A few days after I returned to my house”

“Now it’s his house… Awesome…” complained Hercules, under his breath.

“Let it go” advised Lafayette.

“And why didn’t you say anything?” asked Alexander, starting to be upset once again.

“Because I didn’t understand much of what he said” answered Laurens. “The only thing he made himself clear was that he didn’t want to come in here yet. He is afraid and very pissed off at us”

“How shameless…” insulted Angelica, with a frown.

“Well, I don’t mind. I am going to call him. After today I’ve got some more pressing matters to discuss with him”

“Okay. Good, because he told me he wanted to talk to you”

“To me or to Angelica and Washington?”

“To you, to you” reassured Laurens.

“Well, perfect, then, give me his number”

“I can’t”

“Why not?” Alexander was starting to feel his anger building up again within him.

“Because he told me he wanted to come to talk to you in here”

“Alright, perfect. But give me his number”

“But he wants to come to talk to you in here”

“I said that’s perfectly perfect for me. But I need his number, I want to call him before the glorious day comes”

“But he wants to come to talk to you in here”

“And I want to talk to him before that happens. For what he let us see in the past months, he is not very willing to come here anytime soon, and I’ve got a few problems I’d want to talk to him about as soon as fucking possible”

“But he wants to come to talk to you in here”

“… But are you an idiot or…?”

“You’re the idiot”

“Excuse me??”
“I’m telling you he wants to come to talk to you in here”

“And I’m telling you I’m fucking pleased by that, I am fucking happy with the news! But I want to talk to him as well, and I want to talk to him now!”

“But he wants to come to talk to you in here”

“… Jackie”

“Hm?”

“Listen to me, dear, alright? Pay me attention”

“Yes, yes, I am listening” nodded Laurens.

“Good. I want you to give me Lee’s number because I need to contact him. Alright?”

“Aha”

“Because there are some matters I’d want to talk to him about as soon as possible. Something that I just noticed today, alright?”

“Yeah”

“Did you understand, dear?”

“Yes”

“Good”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

“…”

Are you going to give me his phone before summer solstice or…?” asked Alexander, starting to lose his patience.

“But he wants to come to talk to you in here”

“………………………………………………”

“Fuck, what a nag…” complained Hercules, under his breath.
And Hamilton lost it completely. “Well, John, that is enough! Give me his number!”

“But he wants…”

“I FREAKING KNOW HE WANTS TO TALK TO ME WHEN HE COMES, BUT AS I DON’T KNOW WHEN THAT WILL BE I WANT TO CALL HIM ON MY OWN, AS SOON I AM CAPABLE TO, TO TELL HIM ALL THAT’S BEEN HAPPENING IN HIS SHAMELESSLY ABSENCE AND A FEW MORE THINGS THAT HAPPENED TODAY!”

“And what happened?” he asked, curious.

“If you’d been here, you’d know”

“I wasn’t here because you didn’t let me in” retorted Laurens, annoyed.

“And why didn’t I let you come in?”

“Because today you woke up a bit ball-breaker”

“… … Look, Laurens, I am sick of you and your attitude” decided Alexander. “Give me Lee’s number and leave”

“Nope”

“Excuse me?”

“I won’t leave”

“You will”

“Why?”

“Because you don’t deserve to be here”

“This is discrimination!”

“What discrimination?” asked Alexander, with a mocking smile. “See how you use words that you don’t know what they mean?”

“I do know what that means”

“Oh, do you? Define it, then”

“Eh?”

“Tell me what ‘discrimination’ means”

“A very, very bad and ugly thing, Alex”

“That is? That’s gonna be your definition of ‘discrimination’”

“… Yes?”

“Let me tell you one thing, John: read something from time to time. And if that something happens to be a dictionary, all well and good”

“…”
“Now, leave”

“No”

“I’ll get Lee’s number other way” planned Alex, under his breath.

“Okay”

“Don’t ‘okay’ me, and leave”

“No”

“Laurens, don’t start again. I am getting tired”

“Sleep more, the hell I’ve gotta do with that…”

“You and everyone else in here”

“We haven’t done anything now” complained Angelica.

“You haven’t?” echoed Alexander, in disbelief. “Curious how you are the one saying this, Mrs. Stomach Ache”

“Fuck, I’ll not hear the end of this…”

“No, you won’t” agreed Alexander. “John, leave” he ordered.

“No”

“Leave”

“Make me”

“Excuse me, mister?” said Alex, leaning on his seat.

“I won’t leave. That’s not fair”

“What’s not fair is that Peggy is not here for her bad attitude, just like you should be”

“Let her in, then”

“… John, you can’t tell me what to do. I am the one in charge for the next few days and you must do what I say. I said you must have some work done, and you haven’t done it. I said you must come at one hour, and you didn’t. I said you must get out of here and you are not doing it…”

“But…” tried to argue John.

Alex cut him off without a second thought. “No. Shut up. I don’t want to hear more excuses or objections for the day. I want you to leave”

“No”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s not fair” explained Laurens, totally serious. “I want to be here, I want to be in the meeting and I want to be part of it”
“You must earn all that”

“And I haven’t?”

“No. You’ve spent months doing anything but working. I understand that you report directly to Lee and he’s been clearly unprofessional, but I’ll talk to him later about it. But you haven’t been any better either, coming in at whatever hour instead of the proper one and leaving the building to spend your days at the pub across the street. I understand if you have your own way of working, I am not asking anyone in here to be like me, but, Jesus, you’re surpassing the line, people. Dangerously surpassing the line.

“And you have the poor shame of thinking you have the right to demand things. To me or to Washington. No, you don’t have the right. Just a few honourable exceptions do, but nobody else in here. Why must I be good with you when you are not good towards anyone but yourselves?”

“But…” tried to say Lafayette, feeling bad.

“No, I don’t understand why you keep asking me to treat you like humans, when no one in here acts as such”

“Eh, Hamilton…” tried to argue Adams, thinking the CFO was exaggerating.

Alexander cut him off right away. “No, shut up. You are not human”

“And what am I then, fuck?” spat the lawyer. “A Pokémon?”

“Yes, you are a rascal-type Pokémon” replied Alexander, with a sided smile. “There are water-type, ghost-type, fire-type pokémon and you are a rascal-type”

Some giggled at that and Alexander gave himself the satisfaction of seeing Adams’ enraged face.

“Specialities?” kept saying Alex. “Talk-backs, vexations, disrespect, big airs…”

An alarm sounded, and Alexander took his phone out, silencing the strident sound.

“Well, it’s 5.30 already and we haven’t solved a shit. Well, maybe part of one problem, but…”

“5.30 already?” asked Maria, perplexed.

“Yes, dear, 5.30” nodded Alexander.

“Does that mean we can leave?” asked Hercules, hopeful.

“No” was Alex’s immediate response. “Nobody will leave until we solve everything I have on my list”
A common groan of complaint filled the room.

“Can I leave?” asked Laurens.

“Weren’t you pestering me about wanting to stay a couple of minutes ago?” asked Alexander.

“Yeah, but…”

“Now, you’ll stay”

Laurens mumbled a few curses against his ex’s name and kicked the floor a couple of times. Lafayette patted his arm, not wanting another fight between the two friends.

“Can we eat, at least?” asked Maria.

Alex paused for a moment. “Alright” he gave in.

“Wait, seriously??”

“I thought we couldn’t eat in here” said Lafayette.

Alex shrugged. “I gave up in keeping the building clean. It’s not worth it” He got up and went to unlock the door. “Wait in there, I’ll come back with a few snacks”

“Alright” they all said.

Alexander stepped out, closed and locked the door and walked to the break room. There, he found Peggy, scrolling through her phone, clearly bored.

“Hi, there, Peggy” he greeted.

“Hi…” she replied.

“Did Madison and Jefferson leave?”

“Yep”

“Did they lock the doors?”

“Yeah…”

“You wouldn’t be here if they hadn’t, huh?” he joked.

She laughed. “Nope”

“Do you still want to come in the meeting room?”
“Yes” she answered, raising her glare.

“Alright, you come with me once I’m done with the snacks”

“Yay, thanks” she said, happily.

“Make sure to go to the loo before”

“Hahaha… … … I actually have to…”

“Go, I’ll wait”

“Really?” she asked, with suspicion.

“Yeah”

“Okay…” she got up, slowly. “Don’t walk in the room and lock me out again”

“No, I promise I’ll wait this time”

“Good”

They made their way back to the break room. Peggy was back even before Alexander finished deciding what to take. The girl really was fast when needed. He’d make sure to remember that when Eliza and he were waiting for her when they had to go somewhere, and she spent too much time in the bathroom before leaving.

Peggy held the tray for him as Alex unlocked the door.

“You didn’t have to do that, you know?” she said. “The front doors are locked”

“Better safe than sorry” he said.

Peggy shrugged and was about to follow her brother-in-law in when she had to stop in order not to hit Alex’s back with the tray.

“What?” she asked at the sight of Alex frozen in place.

She looked over his shoulder and had to contain a laugh when she saw the room completely empty. The last window was wide open and letting the wind in, which spread some of the papers he had left on the table, making them fly and fall to the floor. Alexander moved the tongue inside his mouth and then passed a hand through his face, trying not to punch a wall. He should have gone home to pick his boxing bag…
“And now?” asked Peggy, containing her laugh.

“Now what? Now shit…” he said. “They are just clever for their own benefit…”

“As anybody else… Shall we eat this?”

“Yeah, wait until I clean all this”

“Let me help”

“No, don’t make unnecessary…” he tried to politely decline.

“Alright, see ya later!” said Peggy rapidly, running in the break room direction, without looking back.

Alexander watched her leave. “All of them: clever just for their own benefit…” he repeated, in annoyance.

Washington returned to work a few weeks later. Alexander knew he was procrastinating on purpose, but said nothing. That would be another favour the man could owe him in the future and he was willing to use it if necessary.

“I am clearly surprised” commented Washington, while reading some reports.

He had met with Alexander the same day of his returning, and the immigrant had been telling him everything that’d been happening in his absence. And, of course, as we were talking about Alexander Hamilton, each thing had its proper long report and essay.

“I’ve been trying to contact Lee for a very long time now” he admitted. “Good to read from him again… Though the unwillingness is more legible than his writings” he joked.

“I’ll make sure to let him know” said Alexander, with a tiny smile.

“And Adams is up to day with all his work!” kept commenting a very impressed George. “How did you do it, son?”

“Let’s say I’ve always had a way with words. I could sell a fridge to an Eskimo”

Washington laughed. “Yes. And all those recordings I’ve received from Angelica and that show your dark side have nothing to do with his?” he asked.

“Maybe. But that’s not my dark side” he clarified.

“It isn’t?” asked George, half-impressed, half-scared.
“No. That’s my intelligent side”

“Care to explain?” said George, now interested.

“Now that they know how things would go with me in charge they will behave in order not to make you suffer another incident” explained Alexander, concealing the cringe the last statement made him feel. “And, above all, I would never be head of this company. My sanity is more important”

“I’m glad to hear you talking like that, son” nodded Washington. “You can leave now, Alex. Thank you for all your hard work”

“It’s always a pleasure, sir” assured Alexander, before leaving the room.

Washington shook his head, with an affectionate smile. “Little devil… Why haven’t I thought of that before? Maybe I can still use the trick, maybe that way I’ll be able to have my dear early retirement…”

Washington spent that whole day planning his future and enjoying the silence of the company as much as it would last.

Chapter End Notes

LITTLE STORY TIME:

When I was kid I was a very sickly child. Like, the months have four weeks and I spent three and half of them sick and missing school because of it. While I grew up the missing kept happening but not as regularly. Still, teachers were kind souls that spread the rumour that I was a spoiled kid whose parents pampered too much and that my illness were tall tales, and so nobody believed me: not the teachers, not the students. Only a few did and were nice to me in my first school (in which I studied since I was three until I turned 15, and because I left because I couldn't stand it anymore).

Back on that school, on grades 7-12 you have one hour per week: tutorial class (I hope to be translating this well). It was an hour where the tutor would lose our time pretending to care about if someone had a problem, but it was rare the day we truly talk about problems and not lose time doing sheets of stupid questionnaires nobody read later.

Have you read that part I wrote about Hamilton opening a debate to discuss why Madison miss so much days? Well, when I was in third of ESO (in America it would be like... ninth grade, I think?) my marvelous tutor did that to me. Of course, her intentions weren't nice and I had to stand the whole class making assumptions and theories about if I was sick for real or not and what they thought about the matter. I didn't stand up for myself because I was a very shy kid. More like stupid, because I should have make a fuss just there, but meh.

You may not believe me when I say this, but half of the things I've written here were real, not only that part. I mean... Hamilton throwing the marker and Angelica making fun of it? That happened in one of my Maths classes, just like I wrote it. People getting
in a room (or classroom) through windows? That happened. In an every day basis, even. The conversation Hamilton, Laurens and Adams had about being human and the other replying "What am I, then? A pokémon?" was real as well. And I still have a lot more of crazy stuff that happened during tutorials and normal classes XD.

Hope I've got the proper next chapter ready soon and that you enjoyed this in the meantime.

Sursum corda!
The prank call

Chapter Notes

Seriously, another filler chapter. What is this, Naruto?

This was based on a prank call I saw the other day plus some things I made up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There were a few things Eliza and Alexander were different in.

For example, Eliza liked to live the moment without thinking too much about tomorrow. She loved to waste a few moments of her day daydreaming. She took risks on some specific times, like when the heart started to beat differently or when her sixth sense was screaming at her that she’d be a fool if she let that opportunity go. She wasn’t ashamed of showing her love and affection to the world, to share personal memories and to enjoy her free time with her beloved ones. She was never ashamed of making a fool of herself or to trip over some stone that happened to be on her way. If Eliza fell, she got up again. Just like that. And she would make jokes about it, especially if, by that, she could help someone she cared about to feel better in a bad day. She liked to know new people and to connect with them on a personal level, to create friendships that, hopefully, would last forever; friendships where the two would share emotions and problems and they would help each other, being the only reward the happiness of the other.

Alexander, on his behalf, tended to obsess with where he would be tomorrow. Or if he would be there, at all. He hated to waste any second of his time, he treasured his time more than anything in his life and despised the idea of let one second of that time being thrown away, even if it was for relaxing a little bit. He always took the risk. His personal experience taught him that today might be his last day on Earth, and he preferred to regret some decision that be left without knowing what would have happened. He was cold and standoffish. Maybe too much, sometimes, falling in the category of a heartless prick who thought to be above everyone else. He was secretive of his life and feelings. Even his long-time friends didn’t know everything about Alexander Hamilton, a very strange thing, taking into account how much he liked to talk and write, and how little he left of his personal matters on his writings.

If Hamilton fell, he got up and kept doing his life, upset with himself in the inside. And if Hamilton fell and made someone fall with him, then, he would spend more time than necessary to get up, and would spend days, months, years, remembering that event in his head, repeating unceasingly, no matter how many times the other person affected told him it was alright and he was forgiven – or that there was nothing to forgive, in the first place – but Hamilton would not believe it and keep tormenting himself with his past mistake. He could be funny and tell jokes, especially when he had gained confidence, but he would rarely make a joke about himself. He had gotten better about not getting offended that easily, but the sting would be there, and Hamilton always avoided doing jokes about anything that concerned himself, especially his flaws. If some beloved one was feeling bad, he
would try not to get too close, fearing his straightforward personality would make everything worse. And if he was hurt by people calling him insensitive and selfish, he never let it show.

Despite what his talkative self would let people think, Alexander was not outgoing. He hated crowds and the small talk was not his strong suit… And as he hated making a fool of himself, he usually avoided those moments as much as possible. He didn’t like creating bonds with people. On the contrary, when Alexander felt the person was getting too close – dangerously close – he would withdraw into himself, he would lock the doors to his heart and would destroy the key. And if people would call him, again, heartless and arrogant, he would let them. He knew it wasn’t true. Or wanted to believe it wasn’t true.

One day, Lafayette and Eliza decided to talk about him as if he were some kind of experiment or problem waiting to be solved. Right in front of him because, well, stone hearts can’t feel, right? He went along with it and let them do the talk. Both came to the conclusion that Alex was like that because of his childhood because, nowadays, everything had to do with the childhood. Alexander hated to talk about his childhood and tried to avoid the subject as much as he could, not caring if by that he was making their point. Lafayette commented he was afraid of being hurt. Eliza opined he wasn’t fond of bonding because he wasn’t used to stay at the same place for too long, and he got tired of losing something that took too much time to build and too little time to destroy.

Alexander knew the two were right.

He never confessed it, though.

The case was that the differences between Eliza and Alexander were too clear, and people surrounding them always wondered how they could stay blind to them, in denial. They never understood that Eliza and Alex always acknowledged them, and that they were finding the way to counteract one’s flaws with the other’s virtues.

Alexander was overworking himself again? Eliza would come and show him how to relax and teach him that the time one spent having fun was not wasted time. If Eliza doubted about if she should jump into the pool* or not, Alexander would make her see her worth and that she could do it only if she truly wanted to. If Alexander was having a bad time in some reunion, Eliza would come and tell that memory that would make everyone laugh. If Eliza was giving too much to someone who wasn’t reciprocating, Alexander would go and help her see it was okay to be more selfish on one’s behalf.

They were the living proof that opposites not only attracted, but that they could be beneficial for the other if they found a balance and coexisted with respect.
But, alas, there was no such a thing as the perfect couple. And Alexander and Eliza weren’t going to be the exception.

There were days when Eliza would be dead set on something, and though Alexander would do his best to persuade her, she would not listen and throw herself into the abyss just to see what would happen. There were days when Alexander became obsessed with one little paragraph and wouldn’t stop working for nothing in the world and there was nothing Eliza could say to make him stop and breathe and eat and being human. There were days when Alexander would snap and take it out on Eliza, and Eliza would spend the next four hours going from crying, to punching the pillows, to burning his dinner. There were days when Eliza would feel so frustrated for Alexander’s indestructible walls that she would simply throw it in his face and Alexander would not talk to her until he had cooled down.

There were nights, as well. Like last one. Where they would agree on going on a date and Alexander’s work or the children wouldn’t be a obstacle (the only good thing of having Peggy there, between tantrum and endless hours she spent doing nothing else but sleeping), where they would be in a good mood, where there were no problems in finding a good parking spot, where they were given a good table in a comfortable spot for the two… Where the food was nothing as expected from a four-star-restaurant. Where Eliza could convince Alexander not to make a scene and she could sigh in relief because, for once, she was able to control Alexander’s tongue.

… But there was nobody in this world who could stop Alexander’s writing.

The next morning, Eliza woke up and saw the critic her husband had written online against the restaurant and its food. Just by reading the title, ‘The death trough’, Eliza didn’t need to go any further.

“Hey, it could be worse” Peggy tried to cheer her up, while reading the critic.

“How?” she asked, with scepticism.

“You could be married to a vulgar man. At least, Alex writes the insults so poetically that it’s difficult to know if he is picking on you”

“Yeah, well, that depends on the person’s culture”

“Yep… … … … Are you calling me uncultured?” asked Peggy, squinting her eyes.

“… Kids, we’re getting late to the day care!” she shouted, getting up from her seat.

“Today’s Sunday” said Peggy, with a cocky smile, and crossing her arms.

Eliza frowned. “My lil’ sister, who forgets the house keys every damn time she goes out, now knows what day we’re living in” she retorted.
“I don’t, actually” admitted Peggy. “But you have the calendar hung right in front of the door… Happy Fool’s Day, by the way”

Eliza cocked one eyebrow and looked at the calendar. In fact, it was April 1st. A smirk spread across her face.

“Are you planning a vengeance on me?” asked Peggy, after seeing her expression.

“Something even better” she said. “Come on, I’ll need your help”

“My head hurts” complained Peggy.

“I’m gonna play a prank on Alex”

“It doesn’t bother me that much, actually”

Eliza smiled to herself when Peggy jumped from her seat, excited. She took out her phone and dialled everyone who would be able to help her.

Eliza didn’t need to do much. Honestly, it was like the planets had lined up and were wishing her good luck on her plan.

It was easy to gather their friends and relatives in Hercules and Lafayette’s house. The couple didn’t need to be told twice or asked for a more specific explanation on what she had planned to start pulling the right strings to receive her and the rest at home. Aaron and Theodosia had let their daughter with her grandparents; Maria had sent Eliza a sad emoji face, telling she had to help her daughter with some homework, and made Eliza promise she would send it through the group chat; Angelica had also the afternoon free because Pip was doing some school project at some classmate’s house, and her husband had to go to a meeting that afternoon; Martha and George came as soon as they read Eliza’s private text; and Laurens never had anything to do.

Well, that afternoon he had to meet someone, but that someone was the essential piece to this whole puzzle for this to go well, so Eliza was overflowing with happiness.

Alfred came with Laurens right after they had sprawled out and were chatting animatedly, giving ideas and suggestions. Angelica made sure a bunch of times that her phone was recording and that it had enough battery for what was about to come. She sent a text through the group chat,
informing the rest and promising she would send the video – and the audio her nephew and niece would be recording back at their house, as Eliza had instructed them to do – once this was over.

Eliza was finishing telling Alf what he had to do and that he was free to improvise. But that he had to do everything within his power to make Alexander go to the limit, because it would be impossible to repeat this prank with Alex again. The man could be fooled once – and seldom, actually – and they had to leverage their chance.

Once Alfred had finished reading the critic – commenting with the rest and laughing at some parts – he said he was prepared and knew exactly what to do. Angelica walked to be in front of the whole group, gathered around the couch, looking at the phone Alfred was dialling the number with as if it were some kind of alien they had to worship, and pressed the record button, trying to contain her laughter, imagining what could happen.

Eliza, Peggy and she shared a look. One of their sisterly looks only they could understand, and this one clearly read: *This is going to be awesome.*

Alexander took advantage of the fact that Eliza went to visit Angelica with Peggy to spend some sister-time between the three to get some work done. It may sound cruel, but the times Alexander was alone at home, was one of the best. He had put John to sleep – that baby really took after Peggy – and made sure Philip and Angie were busy with their own things. Philip was reading while Angie was drawing something. They would be like that until dinnertime, if something didn’t get in their way and started a sibling argument.

He had been working for almost half an hour when his phone rang. Alexander picked it up, seeing it was an unknown number. His first instinct was to ignore it. And he did it. And so he did the second time. And the third, and the fourth, and the fifth…

By the sixth, he answered, just to know who that was to be able to curse their whole family tree.

Eliza insisted on keep calling, knowing how untrusting her husband was about everything.
After the fifth one, she was starting to feel frustrated, and the people around her were showing a bit of disappointment. She thought about calling Alexander, making up some excuse about that he was going to receive a call on her behalf because her phone was out of battery, but, finally, Alexander answered the sixth time.

Angelica sat on the ground not to get too tired, and bit her bottom lip, excited. Everyone else hunched over Alf, who tried to ignore them for not losing his concentration.

“Yes?” asked Alexander, on the other side.

Peggy covered her mouth when the frustration in his brother-in-law’s tone was evident.

“Good afternoon, sir” greeted Alf, trying to change a bit his voice.

He was told by Laurens that he didn’t need to, as Alexander was horrible at making out voices. As a proof, he told him the story of one time, when both men started dating, when John, for fun, put his phone number as private to fool Alex, who never recognised him. Hercules and Lafayette corroborated his story, between fits of laughter.

“Good afternoon” greeted Alexander.

“Am I talking with Mr. Alexander Hamilton?” asked Alf, trying to sound polite and naïve.

“Yes, you are. Did you need anything? Who is it, please?” he added rapidly, a bit curious.

“Yes, sorry. I’m calling from the restaurant you went to dine the other night. I think you were accompanied by your wife, I’ve been told?”

“Ah. Yes, yes” Alexander’s tone changed from interested to annoyed.

Eliza could imagine him moving his tongue inside the mouth, trying to contain the anger. He was working, Eliza knew that very well. Interrupting Alexander while working was a dangerous risk, especially if he was pissed at you.

“Well, you see…” began to say Alf.

Damn CSI vein… complained Eliza, inside her head. Alf looked at her, a bit panicked, expression the rest of the group imitated. She gesticulated and mouthed to just keep going, to evade the question. Thank goodness, Alf was very quick-witted.

“I’m going to explain myself in a minute, sir” he promised. “If I may…”

“Uh, okay. Yes, please, continue” indicated Alexander.

The whole group sighed as quietly as possible.

“You see, sir” started Alf, sitting more comfortably on the couch. “I’m the manager of the restaurant, and, from time to time, I like to read the reviews my restaurant receives”

“Aha”

“I like to know people’s opinions”

“Hmm…”

“And I happened to read your review”

“Yes”

George looked down when he heard the sharpness in Alexander’s voice. He and his wife shared a glare of ‘Here we go’.

“And it worried me a bit, what I read there” continued Alfred. “And that was why I decided to contact you and see if you could give me a deeper explanation of what happened”

“Well, what happened was…” tried to explain Alex.

“I read…” interrupted – on purpose – Alf. “I read something about some vegetables in bad condition?” he asked, innocently.

“… Yes. We had vegetable stew” explained Alexander, a bit upset for the interruption.

“What problem did you have with our stew?” asked Alf, faking interest.

“Well, we…”

“Explain yourself”

“… We…”

“Explain yourself” repeated Alf.

“… I’m…”
“Explain yourself” he repeated once more, with insistence.

“I am already explaining myself, sir” said Alexander, trying to control his tone of voice.

Angelica breathed in and out a few times, while the Washington marriage had lowered their heads, focusing on being quiet. Peggy had buried her face in her hands, already red from containing her laugh.

“What happened with the stew was, basically, what you read in my review” explained Alexander, calmly. “We wanted the stew after it had settled a bit, and we were given it… Well, cold and with the vegetables totally undercooked. Almost raw”

“But, sir, you could’ve simply told one of the waiters, and we would’ve cooked it better for your tasting” replied Alf.

“Yes, but it wasn’t only that” proceeded Alexander. “The vegetables were… Well… How can I say this? The vegetables smelled funny”

“Funny?” repeated Alf.

“Yes”

“What do you mean?”

“Well… Funny, as…”

“Did the vegetables tell you a bad joke or something?”

“… … …”

Laurens got up from his spot, walked to the opposite side of the room, pressed his face against the wall, and giggled as quietly as possible. Peggy didn’t dare to reach her head. Eliza covered her smiling lips while Aaron shook in his spot. He turned to Theodosia, who was also trying hard not to laugh. She pressed her head against his chest, muffling her laughter and Aaron focus on the grey wall.

“No” said Alexander, after a pause. “I mean that they smelled… Funny, damnit, bad. They were in bad shape”

“Did you try to suggest them to go to the gym?” asked Alf, clearing his throat right after, swallowing his laugh as the rest did so.

“What?” asked Alexander, confused. “But… Are you laughing at me or…”

“No, no, sir” Alfred shook his head rapidly. “It's just that I hate unsatisfied clients. I just want to end this on a good note”

“Yes. You better do” warned Alexander.
Eliza looked at the other side, focusing on a flying pigeon she saw outside the window.

“*What I’m trying to say*…” kept talking Alexander, as calmly as possible. Which wasn’t very much, because his irritation was palpable even from the other side of the line. But, hey, the intention counted. “…*is that the vegetables smelled awfully. They stunk*” he decided to be direct.

“Stunk?” repeated Alfred.

“Yes, horribly”

“What do you mean?”

“What do I…?” repeated Alexander, a bit confused. “*I mean that it smelled like putrefaction*” he spat, not concealing his annoyance anymore.

“Putrefaction?” repeated Alfred, sounding unconvinced and confused. “Sir, I don’t know what you mean by that”

“What do you mean you don’t understand?” spat Alexander. “The vegetables stunk, they smelled like they were rotten”

“But that…” tried to say Alfred.

Alexander kept talking. “*They looked like they came from Stranger Things*”

Alfred this time got the phone separated from his mouth and pressed his head against his free arm, trying to containing his laughter. Laurens was kneeling on the floor, while Hercules had a fit of mute laughter that Lafayette didn’t want to see, looking up while breathing in and out to calm himself. Theodosia hugged Aaron tighter and buried her red face in the crook of her husband’s neck, while Aaron did the same in her dreadlocks. Eliza didn’t want to look at Angelica or Peggy, who were avoiding each other as well, inspiring through their nostrils to calm themselves.

“Hello?” said Alexander, rather confused. “*Sir? Hello*?”

Alfred cleared his throat. “Sorry, sir, I had to fix something very quickly” he made up.

“*Uh, okay. Don’t worry*…”

“So, the vegetables…” He cleared his throat again, trying not to giggle. “… were in bad shape”

“*Exactly*” nodded Alexander.

“And did you eat it?”

“*Of course, I wasn’t going to leave it there. Food can’t be thrown away*”

A small giggle escape from Laurens’ and Eliza’s lips then. They looked at each other and rubbed their index and middle finger with their thumbs, as if to say ‘money, money, money above all’. Their faces turned red and Eliza also had to got up and go to the other side of the room, because if she and her husband’s ex kept looking at each other for too long, they wouldn’t be able to contain themselves much longer.

“Sir, I’m sorry, but I still don’t understand” talked Alf.

“What don’t you understand?” asked Alexander, with a condescending tone.

“I can’t believe the vegetables weren’t good” retorted Alf, sounding very serious and indignant. “I, myself, took care of those vegetables”

“Excuse me?” asked Alexander, dumbfounded.

“I talked to them, read them stories, I even played some classical music for a better raising…”

Washington had gotten separated from the group as well, and Martha buried her face against a cushion, muffling her giggles.

“Hm… Sir, you could’ve played them reggaetón, for all I care” argued back Alexander. “What I know it’s what it was, and what it was, was that your vegetables were stinking, they weren’t good”

“Couldn’t it be that you are a bit of a…?” Alf pretended to think for a moment, sounding annoyingly polite. “…picky?”

Aaron and Peggy raised their glares and looked at Alf with a bit of fear in their amused expressions.

“Excuse me?” huffed Alexander. “Look, sir, I’m going to let it slide because you don’t know me. But let me tell you that I’ve never been picky with food. Never” he defended himself, offended.

“If you say so…” said Alfred, unconvinced.

“Yes, I say so” said Alexander, brusquely. “I know when a food is in bad shape, alright? I’m sorry, I know it’s your restaurant, but the truth is that the vegetables of that night were awful. Horrible. Like, some people are used to pray before eating, right? Well, I had to pray after eating so I wouldn’t die in my sleep that night”

“Well, sir, calm down. Don’t get angry” said Alf, with a calm tone.

“I am very calmed”

“Well, let’s go to another thing. I also read…” Alf pretended to be re-reading something. “Yes, I also read another thing, and this thing… No, this thing simply is a ‘no’, sir”
“What?” spat Alexander.

“Here you wrote that our shrimps were also bad. And, this, this…” Alf started to sound angrier as he talked.

“Yes, they were” nodded Alexander.

“I don’t understand it” spat Alfred, with a harsh tone. “Here, you wrote…”

“Drop the screaming a few notches” said Alexander, offended. Eliza could imagine him squinting his eyes at the nothingness of their living room.

“Excuse me?” said Alfred.

“Stop raising your voice. I think it’s not necessary” said Alex.

“The pot called the kettle” muttered Aaron, with a wee smile.

“I apologise, Mr. Hamilton. Sincerest apologies” said Alfred, sounding a bit regretful.

“Hm, yes…” said Alex, unconvinced.

“Could you please explain what was the matter with the shrimps?”

“The matter was that they were harder than a horn” spat Alex, ceasing in stopping the annoyance in his voice.

Alfred lowered the phone and turned his head against the couch, trying to muffle his fit of laughter. The rest, after seeing his reaction, had to control themselves, as well. Martha had to focus her vision on the wall, as her husband was actually crying for contained laughter, and she knew that, if she looked at him, she wouldn’t be able to contain herself. Alexander, talking through the phone, unaware of everything that was happening on the other side, only made their attempts almost useless.


Alf had already calmed down a bit, and was prepared to keep going, but Hamilton’s shout of frustration just made everything start again in Laurens’ friends’ living room.

“FUCK THIS PHONE TO HELL AND BACK!!!!!” cursed Alexander. “Hello?” he repeated, as if he hadn’t exploded in the first place.

“Thank goodness it wasn’t needed to raise the voice” commented Lafayette, on the quiet.

Aaron looked at him, hugging her giggling wife. “Told you”

“Hello?” asked Alexander once again, this time a bit upset. He threw a few curses under his breath. “Hello??”
“Sir?” said Alf, after he thought he could handle it. “Sir, are you there?”

“You... Yes, yes” nodded Alexander.

“I apologise, sir, the coverage in here is a bit bad” Alf excused himself.

“Don’t worry” said Alexander.

“Did you say…” Alf cleared his throat. He tried not to look at Eliza, who was shaking in one corner, not wanting to look at her backs. “Did you say that the shrimps were harder than a horn?” he asked.

“Yes…” said Alexander, slowly, as if he was talking to a little kid. And Alf had to bite his bottom lip to control himself. “That thing wasn’t thawed…” he continued.

Alf interrupted him. “That can’t be, sir”

“What do you mean ‘it can’t be’?” asked Alexander, challenging.

“Sir…”

“Were you dining with us that night or what?”

“There he goes, there he goes” laughed Laurens under his breath.

“Contradict him, that drives him up the wall” commented Hercules, in a whisper.

“I vouch for that” nodded George to himself.

“Sir, please, calm down” said Alf, who had gotten up, so the others couldn’t be heard. “I wasn’t there, dining with you. But I…”

“What?” interrupted Alexander. “Did you play them disco music, so they could warm up by dancing?” he inquired, mocking.

“Oh, Dieu…” muttered Laf, and he exited the place to laugh in peace against one pillow inside his bedroom.

“Sir, understand that if I go to a place that is, supposedly, top notch” continued Alexander, indignant. “I want to be given good shrimps. Not that thing that was frozen…”

“But that can’t be, Mr. Hamilton” interrupted Alf. “I can understand that you didn’t like the way they were served, but you…”

“But, sir, I know what I was…” talked Alexander, at the same time.

“Let me talk, Mr. Hamilton!” Alf raised his voice a bit, silencing the other man. “Let me talk, please” he said, gentler. “This sounds more like a monologue, instead of a conversation, Mr. Hamilton. Please, let me talk, and I’ll let you explain yourself when I’m finished”

“Yes, yes, yes, you’re right. Proceed, please” nodded Alexander, unexpectedly giving in.

“All right. I was saying, that I understand that the shrimps weren’t your taste; but one thing is that, and another, very different, thing is that you’re saying that my shrimps were bad” Alf’s tone got harsher and heated. If the people surrounding him hadn’t known that was a joke, they would’ve fallen for it. “You’re telling me that in my restaurant, that’s more than 102 years old, we served you unthawed shrimps… Mr. Hamilton, I’m not having that, Mr. Hamilton”
“Sir, it was frozen…” tried to talk Alexander.

“I’m not having it!!!” shouted Alf.

Eliza turned on her heels, a shock expression on her face. Angelica was doing a hard work not bursting out laughing just there. The rest of the room was looking at Alf, expectantly, with surprised expressions. Eliza and Laurens were even a bit afraid, knowing Alexander as they did.

“…… … … Mmmh, sir” talked Alexander. He clicked his tongue. “Sir, you’re making me mad already” he warned. “You’re making me mad… And I…”

“I am not having it!!!!!!” screamed Alf, at the top of his lungs.

There was a brief pause before Alexander exploded. “I AM THE ONE WHO IS NOT HAVING IT, FUCK!” he shouted back, making the rest to hunch over themselves, Alf included, trying not to laugh out loud. “AND YOU BETTER CALM DOWN ALREADY, BECAUSE…” Alexander inspired. “Buuuuuuuf…” he exhaled, clearly overwhelmed.

“I apologise if I lost my manners, sir” said Alf, totally serene. “If?” repeated Alexander, impressed. “But try to understand” kept saying Alf, not minding him much. “that it’s not normal…”

“What’s not normal is how bipolar you are” interrupted Alexander, with a harsh tone. “I am not bipolar, sir, please, don’t insult” retorted Alf. “And try to understand…”

“Insulting? Defining, as much” Alex talked back.

“Please, let me talk” Alf cut him off. “This morning, when I read what you wrote about my shrimps being bad… Uf… I got so nervous that I punched the table, and I broke it into two”

“Yeah? Well, you can go now and break it into three, four and what follows, because I am not going to retract”

“Sir…”

“Less after seeing who is in charge. Now, I understand things”

“Sir, please, don’t say things I could use against you in a court” warned Alf.

“Excuse me?” exclaimed Alexander. “You served me shit in your restaurant and you are the one threatening me with going to court?”

“Yes. Because you have hurt my feelings”

“Excuse me?” repeated Alexander, dumbfounded.

“You can’t imagine how much it hurt to read that about my shrimps, my high-quality shrimps!”

“That ‘high-quality’ thing is very debatable” spat Alexander.
“They come from the Mediterranean, and you, sir…”

“They can come from Coney Island, for all I care”

“Each one of them come with their own identification number”

“They can come with seven, for all I care. That won’t change the fact that they were frozen”

“That’s impossible, sir” argued Alf. “That could be because the weather is still cold. Or maybe because you made them nervous”

Alex huffed. “Yeah, I made them nervous with my presence”

“Shrimps tense when they are in front of something, or someone, they don’t like. And with that attitude of yours, I can totally understand they seemed frozen”

“They seemed, no. They were frozen”

“That…”

“Just imagine how frozen they were, that one of them couldn’t stop singing Let it go. You can’t picture what a nagger that was”

Laurens was already on the floor, legs against his chest and hiding his face between his knees, red from laughter. Alf had to do a great effort, having Angelica already crying in front of him, not to make his voice tremble with giggles.

“Yeah, right. You’re very funny, sir”

“Alas, I admit it” nodded Alexander. “I am a very bright man”

“And very humble, as well” retorted Alf. “Look…” He cleared his throat when he heard Alexander huffing dangerously from the other side of the line. “Look, sir, I want to reach an agreement”

“Yeah, let’s see…” said Alex, suspicious.

“You understand that this review hurts the image of my restaurant”

“Aha. Don’t say you’re going to serve quality, and then serve putrefaction. See how easy the solution is?”

“You’re overreacting, sir” accused Alf.

“Overreacting?!”

“My food is good!”

“My stomach is having its own civil war, right now”

Angelica had begun to shake in her spot, and Eliza grabbed her phone and let her run into the bathroom to giggle in peace.
“Look, the only thing you have to do is delete that review, and we’ll forget about this whole thing” promised Alf.

“I’ll delete that review as soon as you give me my money back” said Alexander, calmly.

“I can’t give you back the money of a thing you have already eaten, sir” argued Alf.

“Then, I can’t delete the review, sir. Sorry” apologised Alexander, sounding not sorry at all.

“Why don’t you come to the restaurant, and here we’ll discuss it as real men?” proposed Alf. Eliza looked at him with a nervous smile.

“Because I am afraid that if I go to the restaurant, I might smack you right in the mouth” answered Alexander, with sincerity.

“Oh, my gosh…” whispered Aaron, turning his back on Alf and Eliza, while Theodosia had her face buried in her hands.

“You’re making me madder than I like to feel in one same day” kept saying Alexander.

“Listen to me, sir” said Alf, with a threatening tone. “If my shrimp is so hard, come here, and I’ll smack you in one eyebrow with it”

“I’m sure you’d break my skull with that lethal weapon, sir”

“You don’t you who you’re talking to, right?”

“I am talking with a man who can’t thaw shrimps properly”

“He has an answer for everything” commented Theodosia, impressed.

“You dared to doubt it?” asked Washington, rubbing his wife’s back, while Martha laughed against the couch cushions.

“Excuse me, sir!” exclaimed Alf, totally enraged. “My shrimps were in perfect condition!”

“Yes, in perfect condition of freezing” mocked Alexander, with a cruel laugh at the end.

“Why don’t you come to the restaurant, and we sort this out?” asked Alf, once again.

“Mmh… Are you sure you want me to go to the restaurant?” asked Alexander.

“I am very sure, sir” nodded Alf. “As sure as that as soon as you come in, I’m gonna throw you my vegetables stew right in the face” he promised.

“Well, I’m sure, then, that you will kill me because of poisoning”

Angelica had gotten out from the bathroom to hear the last part, and she had to press her lips against her arm to silence herself. Alf threw Eliza a shock expression, and the woman nodded, as if saying ‘Yes, this man is true’.
'You know what?' said Alexander, casually. ‘I may go to the restaurant in a bit’

“Yes, please, come” said Alf, welcoming. “This time, the food is on me. I’ll pay. As soon as you come in, I’ll serve you the appetizer: a punch right in the guts”

“Maybe I’ll return the favour smashing your teeth in” said Alexander, faking innocence.

“Do you like this menu better?” continued Alf. “Or are you going to complain about this one as well?” he asked, with mockery.

“Nooo, this one... I’m gonna serve you this one. Just you wait. I’m going” swore Alexander, sounding friendly.

“Yes? Good” nodded Alf, with an imp smile. “Just a quick question: do you like ham?”

“If it’s better than the vegetables, yes, sure” spat Alexander.

“Yes? And what about a little Hammy with stabs on the sides?”

Alexander took a bit to answer. He clicked his tongue in annoyance. “If the knives you’re going to use are the same ones you used back with the vegetables, then that thing won’t cut even the peanut butter” he commented, with venom.

Alf bit his bottom lip when he saw Eliza hunching over herself, covering her mouth with one hand, while with the other, tried to keep recording the conversation.

“This is getting out of hand, Mr. Hamilton” Alf shook his head. “I am asking you to, please, delete that review. You have offended me, and you are going to ruin a family business”

“Well, you have ruined my and my wife’s dinner. So we’re even” retorted Alexander, stubborn.

“How much did the dinner cost you? Let’s reach an agreement” said Alf, conciliatory.

“Almost 300 dollars” answered Alexander, with a bit of bitterness in his tone.

“Look, I’ll give you 140 dollars, and a check, so you can come over here whenever you want” proposed Alf, totally serious.

Alexander took his time to answer. “But... How much money will there be in that check?” he asked, a bit confused.

“For a dinner of…” Alf pretended to think. “Of 60 bucks”

The was a death silence at the other side of the line, and the people in the living room looked at each other, expectantly.

“Sir, that doesn’t make it up for me” said Alexander, calmly.
“Doesn’t make…?” tried to repeat Alf, eyes wide. “Listen, listen, sir, Mr. Hamilton, we’re sailing on dangerous waters right now” he warned.

“Sir, I’ve already told you…” Alexander inspired, clearly tired. He exhaled, clicking his tongue, at the end. “That doesn’t make it up for me, sir” he repeated, sounding almost sorry. “It just doesn’t, sir. I paid almost 300 dollars, and you…”

“Well, maybe I can make it up for you with other things” interrupted Alf, with a casual tone. “Like the blow I’m gonna give you in all your back, by courtesy of my punishing stick”

They all lowered their heads, trying to contain themselves. Alexander was quiet for a moment, processing what he just heard. The next time he talked, his fury was palpable.

“Let’s see if I return you the blow in the back of your neck” he proposed.

“And I promise you” continued Alf, as if he hadn’t talked at all. “That my punishing stick is going to be hard”

“Let me tell you one thing, you goddamned son of a bitch”

“He’s already lost it” commented Aaron, between giggles.

Eliza mouthed. “He lost it when he was born, and he never got it back”

That made both the Burr and Washington marriage to press their lips to muffle their laughter.

“Are you there, in the restaurant?” asked Alexander.

“I am right here, in the restaurant” answered Alf, with confidence.

“Well, I swear…” began to say Alex, darkly.

“I am waiting for you” added Alf, sounding teasing, as a result of the little giggle that escape his mouth.

“Well, I swear that I’m coming for you” swore Alex.

“Come, come” nodded Alf. “Come. I want you to come over here” he challenged.

“I am coming” said Alexander, totally serious.

“Listen. Listen, sir” tried to talk Alf, over the immigrant, who was clearly red in the face, as his tone gave away.

“Just you wait. I am coming for you” swore Alex.

“Sir…”
Beep, beep, beep…

The whole room burst out in fits of laughter. Peggy and Angelica hugged each other, laughing against each other’s shoulder; Martha seemed to be unable to raise her head from the cushions, still muffling her own fit, while George patted her on the back, laughing more discreetly; Laurens was still on the floor, laughing against his knees. Hercules saw him and tried to get him on his feet, but, because of his own fit, he lost his balance and fell by the freckled man’s side, and Lafayette laughed harder at that image. Eliza was hunched over herself, laughing and crying, as she was imagining, very clearly, her husband’s pissed expression. Alf and Aaron looked at each other, and laughed on the quiet, wiping some happy tear from time to time. Theodosia, unlike her husband, was repeating some sentences from the conversation with Angelica, and both women were unable to stop giggling.

“Call him” said George, after he had cleared his throat. “Call him. That man is capable of punching the first waiter he sees as soon as he enters the restaurant”

“I vouch for that” nodded Aaron. “He once told me that time he punched the bursar of one college he wanted to go to”

“That man is out of this world” commented Theodosia, between giggles.

“Out of this universe, actually” added Laurens, breathing in and out a few times.

“This man nicknamed him the ‘little lion’ for something” said Hercules, pointing at his boyfriend.

“I see through people” explained Laf, shrugging.

“Call him, seriously” insisted George. “Martha, please, get off the couch…” he told his wife, still shaking with laughter against the cushions.

“Sweet goodness, Eli, you outdid yourself this time” congratulated Angelica.

Eliza giggled a couple of times more and gave her sisters the thumbs up. He looked at Alf and pointed at the phone with her chin, while wiping some tears from the corners of her eyes. Alf nodded and dialled the number.

They had calmed down by the time Alexander answered. The phone only rang twice.

“What?” spat Alexander, infuriated.

They all squinted their eyes in confusion at how blurred his voice sounded. Peggy was the first one to realize what was going on.
“Oh, gosh” she muttered. She turned to Theodosia and Angelica, who were closer to her. “He is out. He got out of the house, he’s going” she explained, giggling against the palm of her hand.

“What a man” commented Angelica, shaking her head.

“Listen” talked Alf, with a harsh tone.

“What” Alexander spat once again, defiant.

“I am hearing the wind” pointed out Alf. “Are you really coming to the restaurant, squirrel face?”

Laurens had to bury his face in his knees once he heard the insult. Eliza looked at Alf with a nervous smile, not expecting him to keep going with his role.

“Squi…” Alexander repeated in a whisper. He laughed with sarcasm. “Heh. Yes, I am going to the restaurant. I am in the street, right now” he informed.

“Oh, really?” asked Alf, sounding impressed.

“Yes” deadpanned Alexander. “I’ll be there in about… 20 minutes, at much”

“Oh. Well, in that case, you only have twenty minutes more of life” commented Alf.

George and Aaron exchanged a nervous smile.

“Huh. Twenty minutes is what you have” retorted Alexander, already gasping.

Angelica had to lower her head, as she imagined Alexander trotting on the streets, walking straight to the restaurant.

“What are you?” asked Alf, with mockery. “The most mischievous squirrel in the forest?”

Laurens cried from laughter. “Gosh, I’m gonna call him that from now on” he promised under his breath. Hercules, who was closer to him, tried not to burst out laughing just there.

Alexander laughed, teasingly. “Yes, yes. I am the badass cousin of Chip and Dale”

“Gosh, I can’t, I just can’t” muttered Theodosia, muffling her giggles by pressing her face against Aaron’s chest.

“Listen” said Alexander. “All the bullshit you’ve been telling me on the phone, I want you to repeat it to me in the face now. I am coming”

“Mr. Hamilton, I hope that, if you come, you come willing to fight” commented Alf.
Alexander huffed a couple of times, before replying, sharply. “And I hope you come to me willing to die”


Alf looked at the phone, perplexed. He threw a glare to Eliza, who was looking back, puzzled. She shrugged.

“What do you mean, ‘willing to die’?” asked Alf, mocking his voice at the end

“As soon as I see you” explained Alexander, in a threatening manner. “I’ll kill you. Just like that” he said, normally.

“But are you really going?”

“Yes”

“Good, I am out, in the entrance” nodded Alf. “I am looking at the corner, waiting for you”

“I am almost there” promised Alexander. “Let’s see if you…”

“I warn you” interrupted Alf. “that I’m a black belt”

“Yeah, and I am a green jacket”

Peggy and Theodosia filled their cheeks with air as they contained themselves.

“Listen to me, walking fiddlestick, let’s see if you repeat all the shit you’ve been talking…”

“As soon as I see you” interrupted Alf, on purpose, once again. “You are going to regret not having an umbrella with you. Because for today afternoon, I am predicting a rain of punches above Hamilton region”

“We’ll see”

“Are you really coming, sir?” asked Alf, now a bit uneasy.

“Yes, yes”

“Sir, please, stop walking”

“No... Why?”

“Stop. Stop walking, please” he begged.

“… Why?” asked Alexander.

“It is a joke, Alex” revealed Eliza, giggling.
“…Betsey?”

“Yes”

“Man, you’re a walking show” commented Peggy, cackling from the couch.

Angelica and Theodosia exploded in fits of laughter, hunching over themselves while they hugged their bellies. Hercules imitated their reaction, clapping. Aaron, Lafayette and Washington first sighed relieved and then laughed a bit more. Martha finally raised her now red face and laughed while coughing a bit. Her husband patted her back again.

“What’s going on?” asked Alexander, after hearing them all laughing.

“What day is today, hun?” asked Eliza.

There was a pause. Alf let himself laugh as well, while Eliza patted him on the arm, thanking him for the help.

“Son of a bitch…” said Alexander at the other side. And he laughed a bit as well. “Betsey, are you crazy?”

“Did you like my little revenge for reviewing the food, though I told you not to?” she asked rhetorically.

“Jesus, Betsey, I was trotting to the restaurant right now” he admitted, his mood had considerably lightened.

“Man, really?” asked Theodosia, impressed.

“Do you believe our stories now?” asked Lafayette, receiving a nod from the woman.

“Who have I been talking to??” asked Alexander, with curiosity.

“Alf” answered Lafayette.

“Hi, Alex” greeted the man in question.

“Listen…” said Alexander. He laughed a bit, in a sigh. “You should become a voice actor or something. You really made me fall for it” he admitted.

Alf laughed. “Thank you”

“Did you leave the kids alone?” asked Angelica, all of a sudden.

“I told them: Dad has to go to fix something. I’ll come back soon”

“They recorded you as well” explained Eliza.

“Little naughty” laughed Alexander. “I’ll see that now. I was about to go crazy”
“We heard it” nodded George.

“Epic” commented Martha.

“I’ll see it with you” said Eliza.

“Alright, we’ll wait for you” promised Alexander. “See you”

“Love you!”

That April Fool’s Day marked a before and after for Eliza. Now, not only she had something to see when she was angry or down to cheer her up, but she also had something to use each time Alex tried to convince her he needed to bring someone down with his writings and she knew the thing would only make matters worse for her husband.

Eliza and Alexander weren’t the perfect couple, but they really know how to counteract each other’s flaws and dangerous impulses. They knew they had chosen right.

A little teaser for the next episode, the real episode XD:

"Angelica Schuyler was going to kill somebody.

And she wasn’t thinking this just because she was angry. Honestly, saying she was angry didn’t start to define how she was feeling.

She was enraged, infuriated, red as scarlet, shaking from fury and with such a tensed jaw that it was starting to hurt.

She…

She was just going to kill somebody.
And if she had to go to court she would blame it on that good-for-nothing called John Adams.

And her brother-in-law would support her. Though, in all honesty, Alexander Hamilton didn’t want to know anything about nothing anymore, his anger becoming palpable. The gears in his brain moving frantically trying to find a solution for this huge mess.

But, if you asked George Washington, he would say it was his own fault, because he should have seen it coming. How could have he not seen it coming?

And if you asked Aaron Burr, he would say he agreed. Well, he wouldn’t say it aloud, but he knew what he meant by that. One of his looks, and the CEO would understand, as well.

But, if you asked Thomas Jefferson, he would say it was all Hamilton’s fault, for coming with that idea, just so Daddy could favour him a bit more because of his ‘thoughtful nature’.

James Madison, on his behalf, would say it was all Angelica’s fault, for being unbearable to talk to and spending days being a nuisance that complained about every little thing that she didn’t like for hours, driving them all crazy, and so, leading them until this present situation.

John Laurens didn’t know whom to blame for what happened, but he had one thing very clear: Sleeping Useless was going to pay.

Margaret ‘Peggy’ Schuyler wasn’t much concerned about the incident, either; she stood her ground and focused on the most important matter here: to get back what was hers and to make John Laurens regret having been born.

Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis du Lafayette was fuming mad. And that was saying something. He couldn’t stop thinking about what could have happened and he blamed it all on that dictator disguised as a timorous.

Hercules Mulligan did his best to order the images inside his head, all memories blurred and confusing. He didn’t know who was to blame, but he knew one thing for sure: he was not going to (literally) pay for that.
Charles Lee was wishing the death upon each of them.

John Adams simply was fucking fed up with everybody.

Maria Lewis didn’t know what to think. She simply prepared the coffees and the teas, pouring them inside plastic cups. Any other material seemed too deathly dangerous today. More than ever.

She made her way to the meeting room, hearing the screaming and the insults and the threats growing louder. Angelica was trying to impose peace, being completely ignored for once.

But that wasn’t scary.

Alexander was quiet. Head low, eyes hidden behind his hands, keeping his opinion to himself.

But that wasn’t scary.

Washington was looking at the white wall across him, with a lost glare, not even rocking in his chair, his expression unreadable.

But that wasn’t scary.

Peggy was about to jump on the table, run across it, and throw herself on Laurens to strangle him.

But that wasn’t scary.

John Adams was redder than a tomato that had just had a bath of ketchup, growling and cursing every name.

But that wasn’t scary.
Aaron Burr was screaming at the top of his lungs, his opinion and words clearly distinguished from the whole racket.

Now, that was freaking scary. Terrifying.

Maria walked to Washington’s left side and let the tray on the table with shaky hands. Her mind still in stand-by. She just didn’t understand.

How had they come to this?"

Chapter End Notes

Sursum corda!
The Adams' administration (P 1)

Chapter Summary

In which Washington and Angelica goes on a well earned vacation, Adams is left in charge and we get to know more about how Aaron and Alexander bonded.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, me being horrible at describing houses.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Angelica Schuyler was going to kill somebody.

And she wasn’t thinking this just because she was angry. Honestly, saying she was angry didn’t start to define how she was feeling.

She was enraged, infuriated, red as scarlet, shaking from fury and with such a tensed jaw that it was starting to hurt.

She…

She was just going to kill somebody.

*Literally.*

And if she had to go to court she would blame it on that good-for-nothing called John Adams.

And her brother-in-law would support her. Though, in all honesty, Alexander Hamilton didn’t want to know anything about nothing anymore, his anger becoming palpable. The gears in his brain moving frantically trying to find a solution for this huge *mess.*
But, if you asked George Washington, he would say it was his own fault, because he should have seen it coming. How could he not have seen it coming?

And if you asked Aaron Burr, he would say he agreed. Well, he wouldn’t say it aloud, but he knew what he meant by that. One of his looks, and the CEO would understand, as well.

But, if you asked Thomas Jefferson, he would say it was all Hamilton’s fault, for coming with that idea, just so Daddy could favour him a bit more because of his ‘thoughtful nature’.

James Madison, on his behalf, would say it was all Angelica’s fault, for being unbearable to talk to and spending days being a nuisance that complained about every little thing that she didn’t like for hours, driving them all crazy, and so, leading them until this present situation.

John Laurens didn’t know whom to blame for what happened, but he had one thing very clear: Sleeping Useless was going to pay.

Margaret ‘Peggy’ Schuyler wasn’t much concerned about the incident, either; she stood her ground and focused on the most important matter here: to get back what was hers and to make John Laurens regret having been born.

Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis du Lafayette was fuming mad. And that was saying something. He couldn’t stop thinking about what could have happened and he blamed it all on that dictator disguised as a timorous.

Hercules Mulligan did his best to order the images inside his head, all memories blurred and confusing. He didn’t know who was to blame, but he knew one thing for sure: he was not going to (literally) pay for that.

Charles Lee was wishing the death upon each of them.

John Adams simply was fucking fed up with everybody.

Maria Lewis didn’t know what to think. She simply prepared the coffees and the teas, pouring them inside plastic cups. Any other material seemed too deathly dangerous today. More than ever.
She made her way to the meeting room, hearing the screaming and the insults and the threats growing louder. Angelica was trying to impose peace, being completely ignored for once.

But that wasn’t scary.

Alexander was quiet. Head low, eyes hidden behind his hands, keeping his opinion to himself.

But that wasn’t scary.

Washington was looking at the white wall across him, with a lost glare, not even rocking in his chair, his expression unreadable.

But that wasn’t scary.

Peggy was about to jump on the table, run across it, and throw herself on Laurens to strangle him.

But that wasn’t scary.

John Adams was redder than a tomato that had just had a bath of ketchup, growling and cursing every name.

But that wasn’t scary.

Aaron Burr was screaming at the top of his lungs, his opinion and words clearly distinguished from the whole racket.

Now, that was freaking scary. *Terrifying.*

Maria walked to Washington’s left side and let the tray on the table with shaky hands. Her mind still in stand-by. She just didn’t understand.
It all started after Angelica let their ears ringing due to the half an hour she spent screaming like a woman who’d been possessed by an unrested soul seeking for revenge.

Laurens commented about calling an exorcist an all.

Hamilton had told his friends that his sister-in-law was only stressed because of some problems going on with her marriage. Angelica hated to feel she was losing control over something, and if that something was her life, then the discord was served. Eliza and Peggy had tried to help her sister each time she came uninvited to their house to complain about a small thing Church had done or said, and that made her madder than it should have.

That morning, however, Peggy failed at calming her sister down. In fact, it only made matters worse and, before anyone knew what was happening anymore, the two sisters were face to face, screaming and throwing past mistakes in their faces. Peggy ended up crying and running to her office, where she locked herself up for the rest of the day.

Day that Angelica spent damning them all to hell and hitting every object she saw on her way. Especially the photocopier. Angelica spent almost twenty minutes in front of it, waiting for some memos and important documents she needed for the next meeting. But the damned thing hadn’t been at its best lately. Thomas knew that was what happened when you used a photocopier as a table and a trash can, but didn’t say a thing.

He thought about going to Angelica and offering her his help when he saw that the vice president had decided that kicking a photocopier was the most rational solution to make the machine work. But as soon as he thought about it, he dismissed the idea. He didn’t want Angelica to call him names and proclaiming he was a misogynist sexist pig who thought she couldn’t make photocopies without his help.

It sounded ridiculous and exaggerated, but Thomas had already made that mistake once when Angelica was having a hard day a few weeks later he had started working for Washington. He tried to explain her how to use the computer, as the whole software was updated, and she didn’t understand why everything looked different. Angelica was good at computers, but she needed time to comprehend new things. But she couldn’t take time when she was fuming mad and with zero concentration and patience. Thomas had approached her when she saw she was about to throw the
thing out of the window and, as soon as he began to explain and do the things on her behalf, Angelica jumped from her seat and…

Well, let’s say Thomas still had nightmares about imagining Angelica ripping his heart off his chest and eating it just there. Which he thought she would have done that day for real if he hadn’t been fast enough to run away from the computer room. Needless to say, he avoided the woman as much as he could until Gilbert told him it was safe.

From mistakes we learned. And Thomas never ever got closer to Angelica again when he saw her eyes about to pop out of her head.

A loud noise was heard from the break room, and everybody lowered their heads in their respective offices, feeling under mortal danger, no matter how far they were from the cursing vice president. None of them dared to get out until they heard Angelica informing (screaming at) Maria that she was going to get some photocopies done somewhere else.

Thomas took his time for getting out. He wanted to mentally prepare himself until he saw the real damage. For some reason, he knew he would be the more affected, though he had done nothing at all, and was the only person who treated the machine properly. And he was, also, the only one who used the photocopier on a daily basis. For stupid things, most of the times, because he was the secretary of a day care, but it was essential for the ninety per cent of his job. He could always write the memos a few more times, but he didn’t think his brain could handle it without suffering a breakdown for exceeding its limit of stupidity and nonsense.

Washington always had it for him – Thomas never knew why, maybe because their personalities didn’t go well together – but, join that to the fact that now Hamilton was going for him and wouldn’t hesitate in participating in any chance of bringing him down, and Thomas knew he was going to pay for Angelica’s immature way of dealing with her personal problems.

Eventually, Thomas got up from his seat, sighing heavily, and walked to the door, where James was standing with the rest of the staff crowded in the hallway. James was looking, with a frown, at the break room. His friend made way for him, and got a bit separated, with a nervous sideways glare in his direction. Wise man; when Thomas saw the scratches and the bump adorning the photocopier, he felt an assassin vein taking over his rational being.

He sharpened his earing. If he heard Washington rocking in his chair, he would have to put up with it; but if he heard nothing at all, meaning his boss wasn’t there today, Thomas would simply turn around and leave without looking back. Luck was, once again, not on his side. He felt shivers going down his spine when he heard Washington rocking slowly through the other side of his locked office.
And it’s only Monday… thought the secretary, trying to think for a solution or a good defence for when Wednesday arrived, and he had to evade the guilt for not having any photocopies done. Thomas sighed, quietly. He thought that week, in which Hamilton had asked for a couple of days off, would be peaceful, for a change. Seemed that life never got tired of proving him wrong.

“This is getting a bit too far” commented Lafayette, shaking his head.

“A bit?” inquired Hercules, cocking an eyebrow at his boyfriend. “I don’t know how the wall didn’t fall down…”

Aaron trembled slightly at his side, gaining a questioning look from Maria, who was closer to him. Aaron pretended nothing happened and avoided looking at the staircase. Washington and he hadn’t still decided to tell anyone neither how they would solve the problem. A drawing – no matter how good it was, whoever said the contrary was clearly envious – was not going to make the problem disappear from their lives. But Aaron kept his mouth shut – a very useful weapon, even though Alexander would never share his opinion – and kept glaring at the broken machine. He threw a rapid glare to Thomas, who was too serious and rigid to be good for the rest’s behalf. Aaron took a couple of discreet steps back.

“Someone should really talk to her” advised Maria, alternating her glare among her workmates.

“Believe me, that’s not going to work” said Peggy, bitterly. She had only dared to get out of her office when she heard her sister was no longer there.

“Well, we can’t keep going on like this” insisted the receptionist, stubbornly. “Our vice president starts kicking things when she’s having problems back at home, and our president’s solution is to rock himself in a chair. An idea he came up with because our personnel manager decided to abandon us in a cottage in the middle of nowhere, and he hasn’t showed up in two months, almost three!”

“So clear you’re documenting it” commented Thomas, finally turning his glare away from the broken photocopier.

Maria frowned at him. “Oh, yes, I almost forgot” she commented, faking a casual tone. “Our secretary that made our Chief Financial Officer mad and added even more tension than we already had”

“Betty Boop, don’t you have to pretend to be doing something in here?” spat Thomas.

“No, that’s your thing, Lemongrab” she retorted. Without giving the secretary a chance to reply, she looked at the rest of the staff. “We should do something. For our sakes, at least”

“And what do you purpose?” asked Laurens, crossing both arms across his chest.

“They are stressed” said Lafayette. “Alex told us so”
Aaron, Hercules and Laurens nodded, looking at each other.

“When I feel stressed, I go out” commented Laurens.

“Then, you are always feeling stressed” mocked Hercules. “Go to a therapist, it’s not very normal”

“What’s not normal is that fixation you have with me, man…” complained John.

“Kids, behave” ordered Laf, with a thoughtful expression, gaining a dirty look from his partner and friend. “Hey, isn’t Angelica’s birthday close to Washington’s?” he asked, all of a sudden.

“Yeah. Hers tomorrow” nodded Laurens.

“And Mr. Washington is on the 22nd” added Maria, after a moment of thinking.

“Why don’t we do something for them?” said the Frenchman.

“Like what?” asked Peggy.

“A few days off? Alex’s been proposing that to the two of them when all things and titles were settled, but they refused. I think this time they wouldn’t even think about it before accepting, things are being a bit rough for them, and it would be like a birthday present” explained Lafayette, shrugging.

“It will do both them and us good…” added James, under his breath.

“Perfect idea” nodded Maria.

“And who is going to be in charge until they come back?” asked James, always paying attention to the little details.

“True, Angelica is second in command. Who goes after her?” asked Hercules.

“I think it’s Alex” guessed Maria.

“Alexander can’t do anything this week” Laurens was fast to say.

“Not that he would be the best option…” commented Thomas, trembling at the thought.

“We could handle ourselves for a couple of days” said Peggy, a bit confused at their worry.

“Pegs, don’t you remember what happened after Lee’s last visit?” asked Hercules, gently. “Adams ended up burnt alive”

“He doesn’t throw away his shot to remind me all my mistakes” complained Laurens, looking at the staff with a frown.

“As if I didn’t have any better things to do…” said Hercules, rolling his eyes.

“Let’s fate decide” commented Peggy.

“What do you mean?” asked Lafayette, with a raised eyebrow.

“We’ll write our names on a piece of paper; we put them inside a hat, we gather tomorrow in the
meeting room, and whose name comes out from it, will have to put up with it” she explained.

“That idea sounds dangerous…” whispered James.

“Peggy, this is not Primary school, as shocking as that sounds” said Thomas, tired. “We can’t choose who is going to substitute Washington like if we were choosing the class president…”

“Or can we?” inquired Maria, with an imp smile.

“What do you mean?” asked James.

“We don’t need to let fate decide” she explained, looking at Peggy. “Why don’t we choose someone, write their name on all our papers and peace here, and glory thereafter”

“That’s some amoral scheming, Mari” commented James, impressed.

“So?” she shrugged. “Like any of us here is a saint…”

“Touché” nodded the accountant.

“And whose name will we write?” asked Peggy, a bit excited.

“Let’s write Aaron’s. Screw him”

“Laurens, I’m here…” complained Aaron, frowning in his direction.

John was taken aback at first. “Gee, make yourself more noticeable next time!” he condemned.

Hercules shook his head, exhausted. “It’s never his fault…”

“We would need someone whom we can dodge, but whom Angelica and Washington wouldn’t mind leaving in charge for a couple of days, because they’re not a crazy goat*…” Maria thought aloud.

Their thinking was interrupted when Adams came downstairs, stopping abruptly when he saw them all gathered in the hallway.

“Am I late to the meeting?” he asked, cocking one eyebrow. Everybody raised their heads to look at him. “Wait, what day is today???” asked the lawyer, a bit lost.

The whole staff exchanged a mischievous smile.

“It’s Monday, Mr. Adams” informed Maria, while walking towards him. “We were discussing something, though…”

Maria explained Peggy’s idea, of course concealing their plan. Adams agreed on doing so, also thinking Angelica and Washington were turning scarier as the weeks went through. The lawyer
wrote his surname on a piece of paper he gave Maria that day, just in case he wasn’t going to come tomorrow. Which meant that he wasn’t going to come, but they didn’t give him any mind.

Adams was going to have to come for the rest of the week, either if he liked it or not.

Alexander had spent the whole day entertaining his head with his children, books and, he couldn’t help himself, doing some work. He was glad Washington and he knew on a personal level, because that way Alex didn’t have to come up with some poor excuse about why he always needed the nineteenth and a few more days of February off the office. After some thinking, Alex thought that it wouldn’t even be necessary, taking into account the anarchy that building lived in, but he wouldn’t have risked it anyways.

Eliza couldn’t be with him that day, as she was busy comforting her father. Catherine hadn’t come back yet, and she hadn’t sent any signs of being alive. Wherever she had gone to, she must be having a good time, because no one from her family knew anything about her. Alexander was never fond on the woman, but didn’t wish bad upon her. Wherever she was, whatever she was doing, Alexander hoped she was being happy. And, hey, if, by that, his father-in-law, aka ’Betsey, you could’ve done better’, sank into the most absolute desperation because he was a complete useless rich man…

Well, let’s just say that Alexander had finally sent a text to Laurens that morning, telling him he believed in karma. After preparing himself mentally for the constant ‘told you so’ he would receive from his best friend from now on.

It helped a bit that it was the second week after he had visited Jefferson’s sister house to let Lucy know her tenants had found other place to live. And, though having Jefferson as a neighbour and tenant was never part of his list of wishes, Alexander could cope. Though he didn’t want to know anything more about the secretary, Alex kept in touch with Madison about the whole ordeal.

“I declined being Jefferson's attorney, not yours” he had explained to the accountant, the same day he had informed him he would be missing work the first day of that week, and, so, he would take care of the furniture movers. “I want to keep things formal with you, as I intended to do even after your friend came back from France. I won’t change my mind until you prove me I’m doing a poor decision”

Madison had been shocked at first, but accepted. Alexander didn’t need to know the man too
well to know Madison was thinking it was a way to still having him working on the girls’ case if Lucy still was obsessed with their custody. And, following his reputation of talkative, he had explained:

“I am not Jefferson’s attorney, but I never said anything about his daughters. I don’t mind working with them, they seem more mature and easy to work with”

He hadn’t received an answer for that, but Alexander knew he had made his point very clear.

So, for once, Jefferson and Madison helped him getting his mind out of things instead of fulling his head with more problems and complications. Maybe the fact that they weren’t physically there helped.

When the moving was finally over, he dared to open the front door and take a look.

Alexander felt a wave of nostalgia hitting him when he entered the house that saw him going from a quite discouraged sixteen-years-old boy to a college student with clear ideas of how he wanted his future to be like. And Alexander held to those memories, which were more comforting and with a better ending that the one this day meant for him.

The house still looked as he had last seen it. With the little but welcoming entrance, adorned by a large mirror hung above a now empty shoe rack on the wall by his right, and a hanger and an umbrella stand by his left. He walked up the small step that was in front of him – the one Henry always tripped over with, no matter how many times Lu had reminded him of it and that made Alexander smile even to this day – and, not two steps further, he turned his head to the right, finding the entrance to the large living room.

For an instance, Alexander thought he had seen Lu’s crimson couches, one in front of the other, with the coffee table in the middle, with that grey circular carpet below, and that cream-coloured vase with red and white flowers in the middle of it, and some books and magazines spread all over it. He thought he had seen Henry’s dark grey armchair by his right, in the corner, where he loved to read any book he chose from the large bookshelf he had right beside.

But in a blink, it was all gone. The wall was empty, as well as the corner, and the couches were the ones Jefferson’s had back at Lucy’s house. The only bookshelf that lived there now was at his left, standing against the corner with simplicity, as it was less big and matched better there. It was by the sliding glass door that connected the living room with a small terrace, where there still was the round white plastic table, surrounded by three wicker chairs.
Alexander had a brief flashback of summer afternoons where Lu would spend time in there, writing, while her husband accompanied her, reading across her, and Alexander would study, write or simply enjoy the company of Dawn, their old Cardigan Welsh Corgi.

Alexander turned his glare to inside the living room again, wanting to return to the present. He smiled when he saw the white thin curtain opened, letting the natural light come in. Lu always had the paranoia of closing it, even when it was summer, hating the idea of someone watching them, though there was a wall surrounding the property, as the rest of the houses in that street, and there was a driveway that separated the house that was behind.

He fought the urge of closing the curtain as an old habit and followed his way by walking up the staircase next to the wall connected to the living room. Automatically, Alexander turned left, and advanced through a wide hallway. He didn’t need to open the doors that he walked by. At his left he had the first guest room, across Lu’s old workroom. Alexander had to do a great effort not to open the double wooden sliding doors and be bathed by another wave of nostalgia. He had spent the great majority of his time living in that house by Lu’s side, while she worked in that workroom. More than in his own bedroom.

Then, there was the huge bathroom, equipped with a shower, a sink and a toilet. Almost three meters away, there was another door, this one leading to a smaller and second bathroom, this one only with a built-in bathtub, along with a sink and a closet Lu always had well-ordered with bottles of perfume, oil bath, creams and so forth. Across these two doors, there was the master bedroom, aka, where Lu and Henry slept. Or rather, used to.

Alexander stopped right in front the last door. He bit his bottom lip and thought about if he should open it. He didn’t know why he was doing this, especially on this day, and on this week, where he had to accompany Aaron on a trip to talk with his wife’s ex husband about the custody of their child. At first, he thought it would be better than spending the day alone at home – Peggy had to go to work today, of all days – and being visited by small flashes of his life back in Nevis, which were not very agreeable, especially after the passing of his mother, which anniversary was today.

He thought maybe remembering his life with the Knox would be a more pleasant journey, but it was being everything but. Alexander wasn’t only remembering the first time he had a nice family since he was left alone by his biological one; he was remembering all he had and worked hard to get and didn’t have anymore. All because of his faux pas.

_Yes, Alex, think about that case again, that would be really helpful right now._ He shook his head and, without thinking, turned the knob to enter to his former bedroom. He felt the same uneasiness at its spaciousness as the first time he came to that house. The bed – not his, anymore – was in the middle of the room, against the wall at his left side. What once was occupied by his dark
Alexander dared to walk in the room and turned to the left. He saw the door that connected his bedroom with the bathroom that was wall to wall, now with a few boxes half-empty on the floor. Alex let a laugh escape his lips, imagining the oldest of Jefferson’s daughters abandoning her task of adorning and ordering her new bedroom half-done because she had gotten tired. By the bed’s right, there was a night table, and, on the other side, a full-body mirror. A few clothes were on it, as well as on the bed. Yes, Patsy had got out the house in a hurry that morning.

Across him, there were the double crystal doors that led to a balcony, where he used to read in peace, or where he liked to write and study on one of his many sleepless nights. The curtain was half-opened, letting a bit of natural light come in. Alexander left the room with more resolution than he had come in.

He went downstairs, his head already turned to the right once he was halfway. By that side, there was the dining room, where the Knox and he used to watch TV while talking about anything that had happened to them during the day. By the table’s side, there was a rectangular hole, a window that let the people in there see the kitchen.

Alexander came in the dining room as well and went directed to the kitchen through the always-opened door, with a window on the top in form of a circle. It was just as big as the dining room at the other side of the wall. The long granite counter against the wall; the sink under a window with sights to the back garden. The sink ended the counter on his left side where there was a step before a door that lead to aforementioned garden. At the right corner of whoever was using the sink, there was the toaster, beside the microwave, and the silver fridge, set into the right corner of the room. Across it, there was a table for six people; two chairs across each other, and one at each side. Behind it, there was another door that lead to the hallway. Behind the sink, there was a kitchen island, with a cooktop and oven.

Alexander stormed off the kitchen through the door behind the table, stopping in the hallway to catch a breath he didn’t realise he had been holding. He was in front of the door that lead to another guest room. This one was smaller and more modest room, but cosy, nonetheless. He didn’t want to see it. A sudden urge of leaving the house invaded him. He turned on his heels, prepared to oblige.

The little closet door under the staircase caught his attention, stopping him midway. He remembered it couldn’t be opened because all the junk Henry had been keeping there. Alexander felt calmer at the memory of Lu’s shocking expression and Henry’s innocent laugh and poor excuses. ‘It’s not a big
deal’, he had said, in his defence. It was one of the few times in his life that Alexander had to be the peace maker in a discussion.

More serene, he finally made his way to the front door, leaving the house, and all the sweet – and some, bittersweet – memories behind. Literally. He sighed while in the porch. No, not one of his best ideas. At least, he had been clever enough not to enter Lu’s workroom. Though her things weren’t there anymore, the images of her and him studying and discussing law topics would bring him more sadness and rage than nostalgia.

“Seeing if everything was alright?”

Alexander looked at his right, seeing Eliza locking up their car. His wife smiled at him and walked to where he was. The destroyed wall that was supposed to separate the two gardens failing at its duty.

“Everything fine?” asked Eliza, frowning in concern when she was in front of him.

Alexander nodded. “Yes. Everything seems to be in place. Though we would have to wait until they come to truly know if something’s missing” he answered, walking downstairs.

Eliza followed him, feeling a bit stupid for having walked the steps to going down them a second later. “They still have this whole week, right?” she asked, walking by his side. Alexander nodded. “Have you talked to them?”

“I told Madison I would make sure of the safety of their things. And I helped Polly and Patsy to pack their things last week” replied Alexander, taking out his house key when he was midway to his own porch.

Eliza frowned. “And Jefferson?”

Alexander stopped right in front of the steps that lead to their front door. “Eliza, not this again”

“You’d have to talk to him eventually” his wife pointed out, with a cocked eyebrow. Alexander groaned and trotted to the door. “He is your tenant” she kept saying.

“Yes, and each month, on the ninth, I’ll talk to him to get the money he must pay me” said Alexander, unlocking the door and letting her come in first.

Eliza walked past him, her eyes on him the whole time. “You know what I meant”

Alexander closed the front door with a thump. “Eliza, don’t” he warned.

She put her arms in akimbo. “Come on, I know what he did was stupid…”

“That’s an understatement” commented Alex, under his breath, while he walked to the living room, where he had left his laptop prepared to keep working once he was back.

Eliza pretended she hadn’t heard him. “But… You two should solve this. It is not healthy to live with
resentment’

Alexander sat on the table. “I have no resent” he said, serious. “I simply feel indifference. It was, is and will not ever be worth it’’

“You shouldn’t leave business unfinished, honey” she advised, putting a gentle hand on his forearm.

“That’s what I’ve been doing all my life” he shrugged.

“Alex…” she tried once again, with that tone she used when their children didn’t want to listen to reason.

“Eliza, stop it” Alex cut her off, frowning in her direction. “You should understand me, instead of persuading me”

“I understand!” complained Eliza. “But that doesn’t mean I agree with this way of solving problems. Alexander, you can’t live like this with a person”

“Betsey, I have a name that would wreck your plea” said Alexander, with a smirk.

“Yes? Go ahead” she challenged.

“James Monroe”

Not even Eliza’s sudden and enraged punch to the table was able to erase Alexander’s smile of satisfaction.

“That name cannot be spoken in this house, Alexander!” she shouted, enraged. She straightened herself and looked down at him with a frown. “Never!” she shouted again, now walking to the door. “And this isn’t over!” she swore.

“Whatever. I won this” celebrated Alexander, typing on his laptop.

Aaron and Alexander didn’t start on the right foot. And that was an understatement. Aaron knew the immigrant when he decided to work in another law firm, because he hated the negativity he felt all mornings between King and Washington. Laurens, who’d kept working there because he’d always had a better way to ignore the vibes surrounding him with his slaphappy personality, told him in that law firm worked one of his friends from college.

Aaron didn’t know Alexander and Laurens had been dating before the immigrant married the middle Schuyler sister, but he wasn’t that surprised when he found out later. Laurens talked about the Caribbean with a lot of affection, and he kind of promised him that Alexander was a good and intelligent man, that maybe he and Aaron would get along just well.
He started working in the new law firm with that idea on mind. Aaron wasn’t much into listening to somebody else’s opinion, he; liked to know people and, on his own, define them. But that time, as the opinion was good, he’d decided to give the man a chance. Laurens and he weren’t very close, but the man was honest and a good person overall, so Aaron trusted his word.

What either Laurens or Eliza had seen in Alexander Hamilton, he would never know. The man was a hurricane, he never stopped, he never knew when to shut up and he always thought to be the smartest in the room. Chatterboxes never did well with Aaron’s quiet personality and collected demeanour, so, he decided to keep doing his job on his own. He won his cases, and some people approached him to congratulate him, not having expected such a young man to do the job so well. The only one who, sometimes, could outpace Aaron was, of course, Hamilton.

Before any of the two men realised it, a competition began. If one of them won a case, the other tried the impossible to get a new client. The more difficult, the better. In the law firm they’d been known as arch nemesis, at much. Some joked about their relationship, while others simply witnessed it. Aaron remembered there was a sweepstake each month, to see who would win more cases for the next thirty days. Even their boss was in and won a couple of times.

Now, looking at it after some experience, Aaron blushed at the memory of how blind, young and idiot they were. Theodosia joked about the whole thing to this day. Especially when the two families gathered on a weekend, so the kids could play together. Hey, Aaron, remember when Alex and you starred in your own personal Trial Fighter? She would say, making Eliza hunch over herself from laughter. Alexander and he would only blush, trying to avoid the issue as much as possible.

That was today, but on that time, Aaron really started to feel it like personal if Hamilton did his job fine (better than him); when he used his rhetoric better than Aaron in a meeting; when he obtained the whole attention of one room; when he would spend sleepless nights working on whatever had caught his attention. There’d been one night when Aaron tried to leave after him, but when he saw it was about to be five in the morning, he thought there was a limit of craziness and workaholism, and Hamilton was so far from the line he barely saw it. Maybe he didn’t even know he had crossed the line or that it existed at all.

The (childish) rivalry continued. The two men barely talked a few words, but when they did, it was clear Aaron was able to put Hamilton on his nerves. Well, but, was there anything that didn’t ignite his internal fire, anyways? Hamilton had let clear, on more than one occasion, that he despised how he never took a side, how he always stood to the side and how highly he thought of himself.

_Huh, the kettle calling the pot..._
Aaron wasn’t arrogant. At much, he pretended to be because that was what life had taught him: pretend to be disagreeable, because if you show you are the opposite, people would use you. He was tired of being used by opportunists, he wasn’t going to wreck his walls because of an immature’s whim he barely knew and who criticised every move he made. And, it wasn’t like Hamilton was very open himself, or humble. He barely talked about his personal life and was always pinning medals* for his own merits. For Aaron, that kind of people was infuriating. He wasn’t used to hate people, he simply ignored them, independently of what they thought about him, but with Hamilton it felt different.

He felt the urge to put the man in place.

Maybe all was because Alexander reminded Aaron of his uncle, whom was the personification of imperfection, but still thought to be better than the rest and condemned the others for their mistakes, instead of taking care of his own. Whatever it was, in Aaron’s humble opinion, Hamilton needed to come down his high horse once and for all.

But he wasn’t going to give his patience up. Aaron knew how to wait for things. He waited for the best time to take action. Hamilton could criticise his choice, but Aaron knew better. He waited. And, eventually, his time came. A woman wanted to hire two attorneys for divorce proceedings. Hamilton and he ended up working together. And, this time, Aaron wasn’t going to let Hamilton lead. Now, it was his turn. And he was going to show Hamilton he knew how to do his job, that he could do his job fine, better than him, in his own quietly and collected way. Thank you very much.

But Aaron, despite his cold façade, was still human, and had a beating heart. And, despite what Hamilton may think or say, Aaron had morals. What happened was that Aaron decided when he should let those morals take control over his actions or not. And when Aaron Burr saw Alexander Hamilton, his annoying, obnoxious and arrogant workmate, on the floor, hyperventilating and about to cry before they had to go to court with Maria, he just let his morality control his moves.

Maria had run to get the poor man some water and explain to the people in charge that she couldn’t go to court that day for personal matters. Meanwhile, Aaron had tried to talk to Hamilton, but though Hamilton’s body was there, his mind was miles – more like years – away from Maria’s washroom. And Aaron did something he wasn’t used to. Without even thinking, he hugged who had been, for several months, his rival in his workplace. And, on the top of it all, he hugged him even though he always tried to avoid physical contact with anybody that wasn’t part of his circle of friends and family. Hamilton had been the first exception in ages.

Eliza, who had gone there to visit Maria that day to give her support, picked up the slack as soon as she understood what was happening. When Hamilton calmed down considerably, she drove him home. Hamilton didn’t look at him or Maria on his way out. As far as he knew, Angelica was also by the lawyer’s side when everything happened, helping Eliza to make Hamilton listen to reason. Aaron was left alone for a couple of days doing all the paperwork and making sure to delay
the trial’s date, blaming Maria on the matter for her own petition, though he never agreed with that.

“It’s not fair for Alexander” she had said, with a timid smile. “What happened was not his fault. He just needs time. I know what that feels like”

That had been enough for Aaron to respect her decision, though he still thought she was condemning herself. If Reynolds’ attorney decided to use this mishap in that rascal’s advantage, they were screwed. Still, he never found it within himself to confront Hamilton about it. Honestly, he didn’t call the man for the whole first week.

How do you start a concerned conversation with a man you’ve been competing against since you were hired? Aaron was polite and always knew what to say and how to say it, but with Hamilton all those things were useless. The immigrant always seemed to be with the guard up, reading between lines. And Aaron didn’t know what to think about Hamilton’s lack of attention or willing to contact him. Out of the two, he was the workaholic.

A moment came when Aaron had to get out his shell and be straightforward with Maria. Aaron was surprised when the woman told him Hamilton was coming that same day, that he had called her and that she was about to call Aaron to deliver the news, a bit before he had knocked on her door. Aaron could sigh with calmness. He wanted the whole thing to be over. Especially for Maria and Susan’s sakes, they needed to live normally and safely once and for all.

His calmness was so brief Aaron started to doubt if he had ever felt it at all. Hamilton met with the two to admit, through clenched teeth, that he could not keep going on with the case. He gave his part of the work to Aaron. He skimmed it, seeing, to his, still, displeasure, that it was completely flawless, and it would help them win. Not that the case was very difficult, Reynolds had the word ‘guilty’ written on his forehead at this point, but that defence would help them to take the bull by the horns once again after their suspiciously pause and pleas of procrastination.

Maria barely paid Hamilton’s professional words any mind. She simply got up and hugged him, asking him how he was feeling, that if he needed anything she would be there for him. And then Aaron saw something he never thought he would see. Hamilton apologised – more than once – to the woman. Maria told him there was nothing to forgive, that they were cool. That wasn’t surprising. Maria Reyn… Lewis was good-natured. But hearing an apology from Alexander Hamilton – and more than once – was enough to make shivers to go down Aaron’s spine. He tried to swallow the lump of guilt that was born in his throat, focusing his glare on the papers his workmate had given him.

Hamilton and he didn’t exchange much words that afternoon.
Aaron became Maria’s only attorney.

They won the case.

Reynolds was sent to jail. Maria and Susan were finally free.

Aaron received a few nice comments from some workmates when he went to work the next day. Maria and he kept in touch, and he and Theodosia helped her in all they could. As well as Eliza and her sisters. From what Aaron heard, Hamilton did as well.

Hamilton and he acted colder than ever, and their co-workers felt it. The funny comments about the two of them died and were replaced by some worried questions about what had happened during the Reynolds’ case. Aaron never said a thing. He lied saying everything turned out fine, as they all knew, because Hamilton and he had worked as hard as they could and knew. He denied the evident tension between the two.

Hamilton dedicated himself to fill some paperwork and worked in a couple of small and very easy cases that didn’t even go to trial. The comments and rumours grew. Aaron never denied them neither he defended the now crest-fallen immigrant. Aaron then understood that Alexander Hamilton was a true hurricane: he held the strength with which it attacked and the destruction that came in the end. But just then Aaron discovered that the destruction was never something anyone around the man would ever experience, it was something Hamilton would endure in the end. Alone. Hamilton’s pride was the only thing that seemed to have survived the destruction, and it prevented his family and friends’ comfort to reach him. Hamilton wanted to get out of that state on his own, or maybe he didn’t want to. Maybe he wanted to drown in shame for the inconvenience he thought he had caused Maria and Aaron.

Aaron realised that maybe Hamilton and he weren’t so different. He also buried his noses in paperwork and entertain his mind with cases, so he could not pay attention to the guilt that consumed his chest. He recognised a breakdown when he saw one. But Aaron didn’t know if he had caused that breakdown, and the doubt was killing him. He never asked, though. Hamilton’s coldness and indifference towards him – there were days when he wouldn’t even receive a polite ‘good morning’ from his workmate – made the answer very clear.

A few weeks went through, and, one day, Aaron was told that Hamilton had quitted. Needless to say, that only made the guilt worse. Maybe it wouldn’t have been so bad if he had asked Hamilton. Even though the answer would’ve been a ‘yes’, it had still been more concise than his doubts. That was one of those times when Aaron shouldn’t have waited.
Aaron really tried to get over his guilt. It was easier now than he had someone as Theodosia at his side, who always found something positive and nice to say when he was about to sink in negativity. The comments and whispers at his workplace made his struggle a bit more difficult than normal, but Aaron could cope. He tried to help Maria find a stable and nice job that helped her raise a child on her own; he worked and helped people in need; he played with his daughter; he spent time with his wife, discussing any topic they would think about.

He had almost forgotten about the whole thing. He was able to ignore his co-workers’ theories and the interrogatives ceased. Even the ones that came from his boss, who seemed to trust him a lot less. Aaron thought that maybe Hamilton had quit because he couldn’t stand the judgmental look of that man all mornings. In that case, he had to agree with the immigrant: if he could, he would leave as well. The tension was too much to handle sometimes, even for someone like Aaron who barely left his office.

There were days when he felt simply enraged. Neither he or Hamilton were performing monkeys hired to entertain those people’s sad lives. Whatever relationship they had decided to have it was their problem. They always acted as civil as they could, so why would anyone get in between or comment about it? Especially in front of them sometimes? Especially making jokes about it? Theorizing who had triggered the war of coldness between the two?

That was something between Hamilton and Aaron. He knew his ex-co-worker didn’t like to talk about his personal life – one of the few things they had in common – and Aaron, despite what even Hamilton himself had thought, was going to respect his privacy and wasn’t going to use what had happened in the Reynolds’ case against him. There were limits, even in war.

At the end of the day, rumours would only grow, but both Aaron and Hamilton knew what they knew.

It was mid-April when Aaron received what could be defined, given his situation, a celestial call. Washington called him to ask if he was interested in working for him in his law firm. It seemed that King and Washington had been having their own war all that time, and Washington had won, creating his own company. Aaron liked Washington. Though a bit influential sometimes, he was a good man. He accepted after a short moment of thought.

For his pleasant surprise, there were a few people he knew and liked working there. Angelica was Washington’s right-hand woman; Laurens was also there, assigned as the Human Resources manager, under the orders of Lee, who was the personnel manager – Aaron and he would exchange a few innocent comments about that in the future –; James Madison, an ex-classmate from college, was also working there. His friend told him there was also another man, John Adams, working there, but Aaron spent the first weeks without knowing how he looked like.
For his not-so-sure-if-it-was-pleasant-or-not surprise, Alexander Hamilton was working there, as well. As the Chief Financial Officer, but working there. Aaron decided it was good to see the man being non-stop and energetic again about his work, even though it wasn’t as a lawyer.

One day, he was with Angelica while the now vice president was making a few calls, with almost no time to breathe in peace. She joked about hiring an assistant who could answer the phone in her place, and a little bulb lit inside his brain. That same day, he went to talk to Washington about Maria. After hearing her situation, the CEO was positive about hiring her as the receptionist.

Maria was jumping with excitement when she knew she was going to work in a law firm. To make matters better, in the same law firm Aaron and Angelica worked in. She was also gladly surprised to see Hamilton there, and the two hugged affectionately when they saw each other on Maria’s first day. Aaron had kept his distance until they were finished, and then approached the woman to welcome her.

“She seems very excited” had commented Angelica, laughing happily at Maria’s joyful attitude. “Good decision, Burr” she’d complimented.

“She deserved it” he’d said, as if it hadn’t been a big deal. Which, honestly, hadn’t been.

“Thank you for your cooperation” had added Angelica, a smile across her face as she looked directly at him.

Aaron had smiled softly. “I should be the one thanking you” he’d admitted.

“Huh?” Angelica’d arched one eyebrow, totally confused.

“You’ve been helping Washington to hire a good and professional staff” had explained Aaron. “I should be thanking you for recommending me”

“Oh, that. No!” she’d shaken her head, laughing a bit. “That wasn’t me. I contact them. Alex is the one helping Washington”

Aaron hadn’t had enough courage to name the sensation he had felt then. He just knew it had left him cold and shook.

“What?”

Angelica’d nodded again. “Yes. He was very sure about hiring you, so Washington didn’t hesitate”

Angelica hadn’t had bad intentions. Aaron felt those things. He also knew when someone was lying to him. He wished Angelica had been making the whole thing up.
“Well, I think I should help Maria with the calls” had said Angelica, taking him out of his thoughts. With a thoughtful expression, she walked to the counter where the new receptionist was making herself comfortable. “I think today they told me I had to call Mr. Jefferson… Hey, Maria, could you…?”

Aaron had stopped listening there.

His mind had started to work too fast for him to comprehend his own thoughts, less what people might’ve be taking around him.

Aaron had felt a strong urge to let it go, to forget what Angelica had told him, but he knew he wouldn’t have been able to. To this day, Aaron was glad that time he had decided not to wait and take the lead. That day, however, he had walked down the hall with his heart thumping against his chest and with his throat closing slowly. At least, he’d felt that. At the moment, it felt real, but when everything was over, Aaron was hit with the reality that he had only imagined it. And that was what he told himself each time he thought he was going to die for lack of oxygen in one of his mini anxiety attacks. It was hell, fighting with your own head, but it was Aaron’s life, and he had gotten used to it.

“Good morning, Mr. Burr”

The formality had come wrapped in frost, and Aaron had felt the palms of his hands turning as cold as the ice both men thought the other had in the place of a heart. But, that time, Aaron already knew he had been wrong all along. Whatever flaws Hamilton might’ve had or how much he was able to put Aaron on his nerves, he was still human. And that, joined with his guilt, child of his paranoid thoughts, was the perfect mix-up to make Aaron stumble.

“Mr. Hamilton” he’d greeted back, with a formal nod, though the man across him was more focus on the paper he was reading and the coffee mug he was holding with his free hand, than on him. Good, without the pressure of a cold glare, Aaron could do this faster and, so, end it sooner. “I’d wish to talk to you in private”

Hamilton had raised his glare upon his thin glasses for a couple of seconds, as if studying the man across him. “Sure” he’d shrugged, returning his eyes to the printed words. “Is anything the matter?”

Yes, that I pushed you to the limit for some childish competition (in which you were complicit, as well, but, whatever) and tarnished your reputation and record of won cases. In Aaron’s mind, everything always sounded so easy to say. He had never had a problem with apologising, unlike some other man… No, Aaron, you are trying to apologise and to keep things civil…
“Mr. Burr?” had inquired Hamilton, looking straight at him, with a cocked eyebrow. “What is what you wanted to talk to me about?” he’d pressured, because, when hadn’t he?

*Be direct. It would be hypocritical of him to complain about that,* he’d advised himself while clearing his throat. “I’d like to apologise for whatever discomfort I may have caused you during Maria’s case”

Hamilton’s cocked eyebrow had raised even more. “Beg your pardon?”

“Though we both acted immaturely” had continued Aaron – one thing was to be humble, and another one was to be an idiot. “I shouldn’t have let whatever rivalry we had take control over the case. And I am also grateful that you recommended me to work in here, after all the inconvenience”

“Inconvenience?” had repeated Hamilton once again. “Burr, sir, I hope you aren’t implying that you feel guilty over… what happened?”

The dithering made Aaron understand that, though Hamilton had come back on action, he hadn’t put what happened behind him. Aaron still felt shivers thinking about that to this day, as the similarities between the two started to be too evident.

“Burr, what happened had nothing to do with you” had continued Hamilton, before his lack of response, with a cutting tone. “And you weren’t hired because some feeling of remorse from my part. You are a good attorney. After the whole affair I thought you’d come to that conclusion”

Hamilton had resumed his reading, taking a sip from his coffee. Aaron’d been left there, without a proper response to give. He’d had a lot of questions – still had them to this day – but he hadn’t been able to speak them. One of them, though, was answered in that moment, and it helped Aaron to see Hamilton in another new perspective.

“After having let that clear” had continued Hamilton, and Aaron, being so observant as he’d always been, had seen his again workmate’s cheeks turning a faint tone of pink. “I’d want to say that, though your hiring had nothing to do with what happened, I do want and need to apologise for the inconvenience that I caused both you and Maria”

Oh. So, the coldness and indifference Hamilton had been showing on the exterior had been the fruit of his internal guilt. Just as it had been his case. Aaron had never felt so stupid in all his life yet so relieved. He was soon hit with a reality Aaron hadn’t thought about in all that time: his guilt was born because he thought he’d pushed Hamilton to overwork himself; Hamilton had been feeling guilty because his breakdown almost cost Maria and, especially, Susan their happy ending. And maybe Aaron’s good reputation as a lawyer, as well.

Aaron felt bad once again. One thing was that they couldn’t tolerate each other because they were too different (a statement that had started to lose weight after Aaron paid attention to the little details of Hamilton’s personality), but Aaron wasn’t going to let Hamilton think he had been hating
him or having sour feelings towards him. Maria was right: what happened, had never been Hamilton’s fault.

“Hamil…” he had tried to say.

“So, yeah” the ex-attorney had interrupted him. After an uncomfortable cough, he’d added. “I am sorry”

And Aaron had never hated his shyness and lack of spontaneity so much as that day. He’d wanted to assure Hamilton that he had nothing to be sorry about, that he had thought he’d been angry at him the whole time and that was why Aaron’d acted so cold towards him in return. But he said nothing, he let the silence spread over the break room.

Eventually and, as expected, Hamilton broke the uncomfortable silence.

Aaron had never been so glad of his incapability of being quiet for more than one minute in a row.

“Well, everything clear and settled, then” had commented Hamilton.

And if, in his tone of voice, Aaron’d felt some disappointment before his lack of spoken forgiveness – or even some scolding Hamilton had been thinking he deserved – Aaron had done (and would do) everything within his power to ignore it.

He had tried once again to speak some words of comfort, anything that would’ve let Hamilton see there had never been hard feelings on Aaron’s part, but his cold thinking had abandoned him when he needed it the most.

“Alexander, I need you to…” a deep voice had said from Aaron’s left. Turning around, he saw the figure of George Washington emerging through – what Aaron guessed – was the man’s office. “Oh, good morning, Burr” had greeted the CEO, with a polite smile. “Did you need anything?”

“No, sir” Aaron had shaken his head. “I…”

He threw a sideways glare towards Hamilton, who watched their conversation with a stoic expression. And Aaron had one of his brilliant moments of inspiration. Right then, he’d remembered why Hamilton thought of him as arrogant, and most of the times he had used to call him that during a heated discussion. In which only the immigrant participated, it was needed to say…
Hamilton’d never had a problem with being addressed with his first name. In that sense, the man had always been very indifferent. Aaron, on the other hand, had been raised with addressing strangers (and everybody who wasn’t a close one, actually) by the surnames. And he applied that rule to himself, as well. When Hamilton had used his first name within a week of knowing each other, Aaron let him know. It had been the beginning of the war.

Aaron had returned his whole attention to Washington, more confident than a few seconds ago. “I was only talking and catching up with Alexander”

Aaron had smiled to himself when he noticed Hamil… Alexander’s surprised expression. He was sure that, if they had been talking to each other, Aaron would’ve let Alexander speechless just there. It was an imaginary moment Aaron would always cherish.

“It’s been a long time since we worked together” he had continued, smiling back just as polite.

Washington had nodded, satisfied. “Glad to see the staff gets along. I hope we can create a peaceful environment to work in”

“We sure will, sir” had encouraged Aaron.

“Alex, son…”

“I’m not your son” had said Alexander, almost automatically.

Washington had ignored him just as automatically. “When you’re finished, come to my office to discuss a few more things”

“Yes, sir”

Washington left as quickly as he had appeared. Aaron turned his head, facing Alexander, with a tiny smile.

“I’ll let you to it” he had said, pointing at the paper the ex-attorney was still holding in his hand.

“Actually, you can help with it” had said Alexander, while he turned around. “You’ve always had enough patience for details, and this thing is full of them” he’d commented, casually.

“Sure” had obliged Aaron, shrugging one shoulder.

“Thank you, Aaron”

While sitting down beside his friend, Aaron had responded: “Not needed, Alex”
“Alexander, I wasn’t expecting you to come in today”

Aaron knew what time of the year it was for the CFO, so he was more surprised than usual when he saw Alexander’s office door opened and he already working. Alexander raised his glare from the document and shrugged.

“I don’t see why I couldn’t come in today…”

“No, I didn’t mean that” rectified Aaron, walking in the office. It was a liberty he never thought he would have with somebody, especially a workmate of superior position, but things like this made Alexander more tolerable than most people would think. “I thought you used to be off work for a couple of days at much?”

“Yes, but you’ve gotta meet Prevost on the 23rd, and I don’t think the best would be to procrastinate”

“Alexander…”

“Besides” a cocked eyebrow. “I received this text through the group chat yesterday. What was that about there will be a meeting today?”

“Oh, that. We were going to listen to you and give Angelica and Washington a break. You know their birthdays are too close” explained Aaron, hesitant about if he should tell Alexander the plan or not.

“Thank goodness” sighed Alex, with relief. “Those two were about to murder someone”

“Yeah…” agreed Aaron. “To be honest, we are also going to do a meeting to decide who’d substitute Washington while he’s gone”

“He’d choose whomever he hates the most, so they can suffer as much as he does” joked Alexander.

“Actually” drawled Aaron, a bit unsure. “Maria had the idea of writing Adams’ name on pieces of papers, pretend each one wrote their own, and then to pick one of those papers randomly”

Alexander locked eyes with Aaron, his expression as serious as unreadable. Aaron changed his weight from one foot to the other. Eventually, the CFO let out another sigh, this one more exasperated than the one before.

“Really, the level of craziness and surrealism in this office is starting to increase dangerously”

Aaron shrugged. “It’s not like anyone likes the man. He’d put up with it and we’d do whatever we want”
“Like always, you mean?”

“That’s the plan… Anyways, I told you so you don’t write your name. The possibilities are small, but it’s better safe than sorry”

“I would’ve declined, anyways” shrugged Alexander. “I promised to help you before any of this craziness came up, so your case has more weight in my balance”

Aaron looked straight at him. “Oh, God, Alexander” he said, with a shocked expression.

“What?”

“You’re maturing!” said Aaron, with a proud tone. “Never thought I’d see the day”

Alexander rolled his eyes, though with the same friendly demeanour. “Everything’s possible. Look at you, making jokes and all”

“Me joking is not strange at all. What happens is that I only do it with intelligent people; not everybody can get my humour”

“And then the conceited one is me!” fake complained Alexander, the smile remaining. It felt good knowing Aaron had enough trust in him to act as his true self with ease.

“I am not conceited” denied Aaron. “I just know how to love myself”

“I’ll remember that one”

Aaron took the liberty of seating on the chair across his workmate. It seemed stupid how much they had delayed this comfort for some prejudice, misunderstandings and misdirected pride. Though the immigrant could be frustrating sometimes (Aaron was not a fan of fighting against brick walls, which was what Alexander was when he convinced himself he was right about something) it was also true that he was a good friend overall. And Aaron was a fan of unexpected details. He still had his birthday present well kept back at home, in his workroom.

Knock, knock.

Aaron looked at the opened door, seeing Jefferson standing there, with a stack of papers in his hands. He frowned at the image. The whole building knew about the cold war these two were having. And it was different from the one Aaron and Alexander once shared; Jefferson and Alexander were never civil, even though the taller man sometimes wanted to act as such. Where Aaron offered flexibility and passiveness, Jefferson gave the same amount of stubbornness and arrogance. Ironically, the polar opposites were able to reach good harbour*, while the equals drowned.

But Aaron thought they would be able to sail safely if they were on the same boat. When Madison came to him, overwhelmed by the situation his best friend was living back at home, Aaron had proposed him to ask Alexander for help. It was like killing two birds with the same rock:
Alexander could go step by step and start with the cases again, seeing if he was already prepared or not, and both men could maybe talk and discuss their differences, or realise their similarities, as it happened between them.

He had never intended for things to end worse than they were already. Saying he was feeling partly responsible for the tension the two men lived in and made the others suffer during the meetings and brief exchanges they could have during the day, didn’t start to define it.

Alexander barely raised his glare. He threw the secretary a sideways glare and returned his attention to his papers. Aaron tried hard not to look in Jefferson’s direction. He took a couple of sheets and pretended to read them. He felt a lump in his throat when he saw Alexander was – again – reading and studying his case. He had come and started working on his case, leaving his own work aside. It wasn’t as if Alexander was two months late on his own work – who was he fooling? That little caffeine addict was, at least, five months ahead – but the dedication he had showed for Aaron and Theodosia’s situation was heart-warming.

“Can I come in?” deadpanned Jefferson.

“No” answered Alexander automatically.

Aaron hunched over himself, almost burying his nose in the paper, when he saw Jefferson’s eyes squinting.

“How do you want me to give you these?” he asked, annoyed.

“Wait there” replied Alexander, still not meeting his glare.

“What?”

“Do you have somewhere else to go?”

“Well, I need to make a few more copies of some other documents” explained Jefferson, unwillingly.

“So, you have to wait around three or five minutes in front of the photocopier. You can do that here while I finish this, which requires an actual effort”

Aaron didn’t know what he feared the most: Jefferson’s enraged expression or Alexander’s calm tone. The latter. Totally the latter.

“Actually, I have to write them myself” clarified the secretary. “Your sister-in-law broke the photocopier yesterday”
“What sister-in-law are you talking about?” This time, Alexander did look at him. “The vice president or the therapist?”

“Angelica” spat Jefferson, with the patience about to run out.

“I told you all Angelica is having a hard time in her personal life right now. Have a bit of empathy, trying something new won’t kill you, and respect her. Especially when she’s not present and when she still is more productive than you, no matter how hard life’s treating her”

Aaron dared to look when he saw Alexander getting up from his seat. He frowned with some kind of sympathy at Jefferson’s direction, but the secretary had his attention more focus on the CFO, who ripped the documents he had been holding from his hands.

“Go write whatever you were told to and don’t bother me again, unless it’s important” ordered Alexander, turning on his heels as soon as he had the documents in his power. He threw the papers on the desk and sat down again, returning his attention to what he had been reading in the first place. “And with ‘important’ I mean something like the building burning down or someone about to murder another someone, not throwing a tantrum because you are unable to stand in the doorway for more than one minute, fearing to become perennial”

Aaron looked at the CFO with a frown. Alexander was a good friend and person; but he was one son of a bitch when he wanted to be. One of those people that are better to have as an ally instead of a foe, if you had to choose. He bit his bottom lip and looked at Jefferson, who was staring straight at the immigrant. The secretary stood there for a moment, and Aaron felt some kind of empathy. Though they didn’t get along, Aaron wouldn’t like to be treated like that. He wouldn’t like to be accused of abusing his position by a person he had tried to help either. He decided to stay quiet, it was always the safer solution for somebody who saw life in grey scale, and not only white and black.

“Do you need anything else?” asked Alexander, breaking the uncomfortable silence and adding a bit more of tension inside the room with his sharp tone.

Jefferson seemed to dither. “No” he eventually said.

“Then, why are you standing there?” asked Alex, arching one eyebrow. “Do you suffer from delays when it comes to do things you were ordered to?”

“No” answered the secretary, getting quite nervous for the other’s behaviour.

“Maybe it’s something contagious in this office” kept saying Alexander. “Maybe that’s the reason why not a soul in here gives one thing on time”

Jefferson moved his tongue in annoyance. Aaron lowered his glare, as if the floor were the most interesting thing in the world right now. Alexander went back to read and write some notes; the documents he had been given forgotten at the corner of the desk. He shook the hand he was holding
his pen with, to dismiss the man at the door.

“You can go, Mr. Jefferson. Doing some work yourself will do you some good”

The secretary threw daggers with the glare at the CFO before whipping around and walked directly to his own office. Alexander looked at him with the corner of his eyes and squinted his eyes in anticipation.

“Do not slam your door shut” he warned.

Jefferson came back of his steps, arms in akimbo. “You’re one to talk about respecting and taking care of the office furniture!” he condemned. “Or anyone in here, for that matter!”

“Who are you talking about, Mr. Jefferson? About me, the Chief Financial Officer? About Angelica, the vice president? About Washington, the CEO? About Laurens, the Human Resources manager? About Mulligan, the Chief Information Officer? About the rest of the staff, all graduated lawyers, though sometimes doesn’t seem like it?” began to question Alexander, with a condescending tone.

“About Maria, who broke one of the drawers in the break room a few days ago” answered Jefferson, mocking his tone.

“True” nodded Alexander. He shrugged. “Well, but I let it slide when it comes to her”

“Why?” inquired the secretary, cutting.

“Because I like her” was the simply response Alexander gave.

Aaron looked surprised at his friend while Jefferson blinked, stunned.

“Hamilton, I think this is getting a bit out of hand” he commented, calmly.

“I disagree. Not a surprise there” Alexander shrugged once again. “You know?” he added, casually. “You’ve been standing there for two good minutes already. Did it cost you that much?”

“It wasn’t about if it cost or not” argued Thomas.

“It was about not having someone to entertain you in the meantime” stated Hamilton. “Like a little child” he added, with a bit of cruelty, making Jefferson’s face to turn completely red. He cut off whatever response the secretary may had prepared for him. “You were dismissed, Mr. Jefferson. If you have something to tell me, speak it in your office, at my back. You’re very good at that” he spat, with venom in his voice.

Aaron couldn’t help but sigh relieved when the secretary finally left. Jefferson closed his door softly, but he felt all the rage the secretary was feeling within more than if he had slammed it shut. He
turned to Alexander.

“Don’t be like that…” he commented, on the quiet.

“He asked me for it with his attitude” Alexander excused himself. “He must be happier this way. Don’t you see how serene everything’s been lately between the two?”

“I wouldn’t define it as ‘serene’” said Aaron, arching one eyebrow. “Why don’t you two talk it out?”

“I talked all I had to talk with him. And he talks all he has to when I turn around. I don’t think we need to add anything more”

“Come on, it was only a misunderstanding” tried to persuade Aaron.

“No. It was a dirty trick” contradicted Alexander. “Besides, I said and swore to myself that I didn’t want to know anything more about him. And when I swear to myself, I keep it”

“You still rented him your foster parents’ house, though” he reminded his friend.

“That’s different”

“How?”

“I’d already promised Madison that I would not let Jefferson lose his daughters, and less to his sister” he explained. “A very stupid move, seeing what happened next…”

Aaron kept silent and went along with Alexander when he changed the subject to Theodosia’s case again, concluding the conversation.

Though Alex couldn’t conclude Aaron thoughts about how, no matter how son of a bitch the immigrant could be (and unbearable, especially if he had it for you), Alexander would always try to fulfil his promises.

Aaron felt a comforting calmness taking over him and smiled to himself while he practiced his defence for what felt like the zillionth time.

Angelica Schuyler was afraid of nothing, but she had to admit that when Lafayette came to inform her the staff had gathered for a meeting, she felt as if the doors to Hell had opened in front of her eyes and the Devil himself was waving at her from the other side. In fact, she was starting to imagine very strange things while she walked to the meeting room. What could be at the other side of that door wasn’t good.
She opened the door, gathering her courage and putting on her well-known mask of confidence. Washington was already there, standing, as he had let Lucille in his office. The CEO looked at the vice president, fearful, and Angelica had to put a lot of effort for not turning around and taking to her heels. She walked slowly to Washington’s side, eyeing her workmates with squinted eyes in suspicion. They were all quiet and calm.

“What the heck is going on here, little beasts?” she asked, putting her arms in akimbo.

The personnel looked at each other, talking with the glare. Washington moved uncomfortably at her side. Angelica looped her arm with his.

“Don’t look away, don’t look away” she advised. “You have to look them in eye to let them know who the Alpha is”

Lafayette got up from his seat and cleared his throat. “Mr. Washington, Angelica. We all wanted to give you a present for your upcoming birthdays”

“My birthday is today” said Angelica, cocking an eyebrow.

“She has to contradict it all…” complained Alexander.

“Look who’s talking!” she complained back.

“Please” said Hercules, leaning on his seat.

“Merci” thanked Lafayette, nodding in his boyfriend’s direction. “Maria had the idea of…”

“Eh, eh, why do you say it was my idea?” interrupted Maria. “What if they don’t like it?”

“Put up with it, Betty Boop” complained Jefferson.

“D’accord, d’accord!” Lafayette hurried to say before an argument arose. “It’s alright. We all agreed on giving you two a couple of free days to do whatever you want, and, in the meantime, someone would take Washington’s place” he explained.

Angelica and George exchanged a look. A desperate look. A look with they told the other ‘I need it, I don’t mind what they do to the building, this is a sign’.

“It’s actually an excellent idea, Gilbert” nodded George.

“It was mine, hehe” commented Maria, while the whole staff rolled their eyes.

“But there’s one problem” continued the CEO. “Who would want to be in charge of this hell…?” A nudge from Angelica made him cough while he clearly changed the sentence. “…of this wonderful
“We’ve already written our names down” explained Peggy, taking out a bowl full of pieces of papers. She got up and put it on the table, right in front of her sister and boss. “Let’s fate decide”

“Seems fair” said George, smiling devilishly.

“Eh, eh, eh” said Angelica, as soon as she saw her sister about to pick a paper. “No. Let’s an innocent hand put that out”

“What do you mean?” asked the therapist, annoyed.

“If your name gets out, you’ll pretend it’s another one’s. Or say the name of whom you hate the most”

Peggy gasped dramatically. “That’s so mean! So mean!!”

“Mean and true. Come on, sit down” ordered Angelica

Peggy went to her previous chair hoofing on the floor, cursing her sister’s name under his breath. She sat down, again beside Laurens, who tried to put a comforting hand on her shoulder, but the youngest Schuyler sister growled at him and bit the air like a rabid dog. Laurens moved his seat a couple of centimetres away from her.

“Burr, you do it” commanded George, after scanning the whole table. “You are more neutral than Spain in the middle of a World War”

Aaron was hesitant at first, but then felt all his workmates looking at him, pressing him. He nodded and got up, standing in front of the bowl. He knew all had Adams’ name, but still… He had to act as if he didn’t know.

He looked at the interior of the bowl for an instant, scanning the little papers, and then started to move the hand above them, pretending to doubt.

“Hm… This one… No, this one… No, not this one… Mmmm… This one gives me the bad vibes… Hum… Let’s see… No. No. No”

Meanwhile, the rest’s eyes began to be half-closed. Some moved their tongues inside their mouths, totally annoyed by the lawyer’s behaviour. Jefferson ended up hitting the table with his two palms.

“Choose one already, mister!” he ordered.
“Exasperating, he’s exasperating…” commented Alexander, shaking his head with impatience.

Aaron took one paper out, ‘randomly’.

“This one” he said, unfolding it with difficulty. “Shit…” he complained.

“Aaron, you’re looking for trouble” threatened Laurens.

“Who was the idiot who folded a little paper like this?!” said Aaron, fighting to unfold the paper without breaking it.

“Take out another one” suggested Maria.

“No” said George, sternly. “The one who is in there is gonna suff…” Another blow from courtesy of Angelica. “…is gonna do CEO stuff”

They all looked at him with eyes half-closed. Madison got up and went to Aaron’s aid.

“It’s about skills, not about force!” he scolded.

Aaron looked at him nastily. “I am the personification of skill…” he said, offended.

Madison took the little paper away from Aaron’s reach and was able to unfold it almost immediately.

“See?” he said, with a cocky smile.

“… … I’ve left it prepared for you…”

“Sure…”

Madison rolled his eyes. Angelica and George held hands, waiting anxiously for the name.

“Adams” read James, with the most casual tone he could do.

Angelica and Washington stopped their squeak of happiness on time, biting their smiling lips. The CEO let go of his vice president’s hand and cleared his throat.
“It is settled, then. That is, if all of you agree?”

“Yes, yes, yes” all but Hamilton – who rolled his eyes – responded rapidly.

“Perfect, then!” Angelica clapped her hand, trying to keep her enthusiasm under control.

“You can go back to work” added Washington, with a nod.

They waited until the whole staff was out of the meeting room. Angelica rushed them a little bit, throwing sideways glares to her boss, who was also looking in her direction, clearly impatient for them all to leave them alone.

And, once they were, they smiled at each other, jumped, celebrated and hugged, almost crying from happiness.

Their enthusiasm wasn’t shared by the elected man.

The fact Adams was woken up by the strident noise of the phone ringing didn’t help to make his already bitter morning mood any better…

“John?”

And neither did when his wife opened the door, letting the natural light of the hallway break the darkness their shared bedroom was sunk into.

“What?” he groaned, under the sheets.

“John, Washington called” informed Abigail, with a frown of worry. “He told me you must go to the company. You are needed in there”

“What for…?” he asked, sitting up on bed slowly.

“He didn’t tell me, but said it was important”

“And when do I have to be there…?”

“You should’ve been there by now…” she muttered. “What if he is going to fire you because this behaviour? I’ve been warning you for a very long time”
“Washington won’t fire me” assured Adams, still not moving from the bed. “He doesn’t have it in him…”

“Maybe. But I am sure his gremlin does… And Thomas is after you as well”

“Hamilton will never get me fired because he needs someone to bully, especially since Thomas and he fought about I-don’t-even-know-why-anymore… And Washington hates Thomas more than me. Don’t know why he hired him in the first place…”

“You two should make amends…” she commented, on the quiet. “Why don’t you try to talk to…?”

“I don’t have anything to talk about with that asshole” retorted Adams, angrily.

“Whatever” spat Abigail, frowning at her husband’s attitude. “Do whatever you want. You are adults, or so I want to think…”

“Mh…”

“You should go”

“Yeah…”

“Before noon, preferably”

“I’m coming…”

Abigail tapped her foot on the carpeted floor, waiting for an action. In the end, she was the one who made the first move, as usual. She hoofed to the bed, grabbed the mattress and raised it up, making her husband roll over it and fall to the floor.

“What the hell, woman!?” complained Adams.

“Move! I refuse to feed this family on my own because you don’t care about anything” she said, putting the mattress back in place.

“I do care… But do I have to care at first thing in the morning as well?”

“Move!” ordered Abigail.

“Yes, I am moving, I am moving!” he said, getting up from the floor slowly. “What a crappy life…” he complained, under his breath.

“God, I can’t stand this man anymore” whined Abigail, walking out the room with a face of pure surfeit.

Adams looked at her leaving with a shocked expression. “She wakes me up, throws me out of the bed literally and now she gets mad… I’ll never understand women…”
Adams arrived at the building between curses and complaints. Abigail had taken the car without waiting for him to drop him off as they were used to. So, having to go to work + using the public bus only made this shitty day even shittier. Yay.

“Washington better have a very good reason to make me come in out of the blue today…” he complained under his breath as he made his way to the front doors. When he raised his glare, he was frozen in the entrance. “What the…?”

Adams blinked a couple of times, thinking he was seeing things. After a couple of tries he decided that no, he was not imagining anything. His workmates and bosses were waiting for him at the entrance, all with smiles on their faces. And… what were Angelica and Washington doing with suitcases and dressed casually?

“Good morning, Mr. Adams” greeted George and Angelica at the same time.

“What’s going on?” he asked, taking one step back, fearfully.

“Do you remember what we talked to you about on Monday?” asked Maria.

“On Monday…?” he repeated, clearly lost.

“The raffle. To decide who was going to substitute Washington while he and Angelica take a little break” explained Alexander, with an unsettling smirk.

“Ah, yes… Who won?”

“Who do you think won?” asked Laurens, rolling his eyes.

After a moment, panic spread across Adams’ chest and he felt his face draining of all colour.

“Me?” he asked, hoping to be wrong.

“You” answered the whole group, nodding.

For one damn time he was right…

“Really?” he asked again, in denial.

“Really” they answered again, nodding.

“Me?”
“You, you”

“… Noooo…” he said, with a sided smile, wanting it to be a joke.

“Yeeeeees” they contradicted, mocking his tone.

“Meeee?”

“Youuu”

“But really?”

“But really, really”

“Nooooo…”

“Yeeees”

“Me?”

“Well, that’s enough, don’t you think?” spat Alexander, fed up.

“You won, put up with it” said Thomas, enjoying his terrified expression.

“I don’t think winning is the right term…” muttered Adams. He looked at George and Angelica with puppy eyes. “When are you coming back?”

“Soon” they both said, walking to the door without hesitation.

“When is soon?” asked Adams, following them with the glare.

“Soon” they repeated.

“But when is that” he insisted.

“Oh, maybe you’d want to take a picture of yourself now” commented Angelica.

“Why?”

“So you’ll be able to see the before and after. Spoiler: it happens the other way around of the shopping channel” she explained, fighting with Washington to get out first.

“Be prepared to lose that hair you’ve got left” warned George, pushing the vice president, desperate to leave the building.

“Hair that falls, hair that never grows back!” shouted Angelica, with an insane laugh in the end.

“Don’t scare the poor man, he’s got enough on his plate already” said Aaron, frowning in concern.

“And more he’s going to have on that plate!” laughed Angelica.

“Better buy yourself a bowl!” joked Washington.

The two laughed cruelly as they finally made their way out of the building, running to their respective cars without looking back. Adams watched them go, feeling numb.
“Fucking existence…” was all he could mutter.

Someone tapped on his shoulder, bringing him back to the real world.

“Mr. Adams” said Maria. “We’ve got the weekly meeting today” she informed, pointing at the meeting room.

Adams watched the closed doors with disgust. “Fucking hell of an existence…” he cursed again, shaking his head.

For the first time in three years, the whole staff agreed on something: that was the shortest meeting they’d ever had. And the most useless one, as well.

It’d only been, literally, seven minutes before Adams ran out of the room, claiming to feel overwhelmed. Maybe they shouldn’t have asked him for things at once, or getting closer to where he was sat, but bad habits are the hardest to overcome.

Like when the head of the company was too busy to watch them, and they decided to leave the building whenever they wanted.

Slowly, the workers started to evacuate the building. Damn, even Alexander left at some point before the established hour. He went to the pub, discussing something with Aaron for the rest of the afternoon. Hercules had decided to stay working, wanting to leverage the calmness of the building for once, and he kissed Lafayette goodbye when the Frenchman came to his office to inform him he needed to be somewhere else.

Hercules turned off his computer and all the lights on his way downstairs. It was already seven and he was starving. He laughed to himself as he walked to the front doors, thinking about how Hamilton would be proud of him for leaving the office later than he did, for a change.

He locked the front doors with the keys Maria had ‘hidden’ under the vase that adorned her counter with flowers and left the building, making a mental note to give those back tomorrow morning. On his way to the car, he saw Adams getting out of the building, not before looking at both
sides to make sure the coast was clear, through Burr’s office’s hole and sprinted his way back to wherever he lived.

Maybe having him as the CEO substitute wasn’t the best option, after all… Hercules could only pray that man wouldn’t be driven crazy before Angelica and Washington were back… Or that he wasn’t there when that happened…

He arrived at home longing for jumping into bed and not knowing about the world until the sun rose again. Who knows, maybe he would take the rest of the week off. It wasn’t like Adams would come in after seeing more than six people screaming in his face and demanding him to do something. He almost felt bad for the man…

He smiled softly when, as soon as he opened the door, Lafayette came to greet him with a grin on his face.

“Johnny, welcome… Oh, it is you…” he stopped mid-sentence, his smile dropping. Hercules’ good mood changed drastically before Laf’s comment. “Yeah, it’s me. You know? Your boyfriend. Your love. Your life?”

“Don’t exaggerate” said the Frenchman, shrugging. “That’s just when you start dating in high school, not when you’ve had more than ten partners”

“It is so wonderful to come home after a day of hard work and…” began to complain Hercules, but stopped when he thought about what Lafayette had said. “Ten partners? But you told me Adrienne was your only ex”

“Well, yes, but I’ve got my single affairs as well”

“Single affairs?”

“I like to experiment”

“… Look, let’s drop the issue here. I’m too tired”

“Bah, what have I said now?” asked Laf, perplexed.

“Drop it, Laf” warned Hercules, taking off his coat and unbuttoning his shirt.

“Seriously, I can’t talk to you anymore. You’re very… How do you say it?” he struggled to find the right word.

“I don’t want to know…”

“Yes, you know… Unlikeable, nasty, unpleasant, a bother to society…”

“Well, thank goodness you didn’t have vocabulary!” complained Hercules, walking straight to the living room.
“I’ve got vocabulary, but I don’t know when I should I use what” excused Lafayette.

“Well, look, I don’t care, I’ve been working like a true Hamilton and the only thing I want to do is… HOLY FUCK, A FUCKING RAT!!”

Hercules jumped back, screaming with disgust, when he saw a little quadruped running from the kitchen to the living room across it. He tried to adjust his vision a bit better, but it moved too fast. And the clothes on the floor didn’t help either.

“How many fucking times will I have to say I don’t want to see clothes on the floor!” he shouted, entering the place cautiously. “Where the fuck is it?! Laf, go fetch the broom!” he urged.

“No, Hercules, don’t!” said Laf, running into the living room. “It’s not a rat, look”

He scrutinized the room until he spotted the little animal, digging some pile of clothes on the side of the room. Smiling widely, Laf took it and turned to his boyfriend, who looked at the animal in shock.

“It’s a dog, do you like it?” asked Laf, hugging the dog, who started to lick his face.

“… Lafayette”

“Yes?”

“Are you out of your goddamned mind!?” exploded Hercules.

“What now???” he asked, more puzzled than before.

“Have you spent money on a dog that is more ears than body!?”

“No! I’ve adopted it. The poor one was abandoned and he’s only seven months old” he explained, caressing the dachshund.

“Why?”

“Because people are mean. Don’t you see the news?”

“No! Why did you adopt a dog!”

“Because I wanted to apologise to John, I think a dog would do him good”

“John?! Out of all the people you know you chose John!?”

“Yes, because…”

“He can barely take care of himself, God damnit!” interrupted Hercules, starting to pace in desperation.

“He’s sad and lonely” kept explaining Laf, staying calm. “And I feel bad for what we did to him”
“What did we do?” asked Hercules, arms in akimbo. “Spending money on a prostitute who is now his friend and comes here to lunch and dine five days a week?”

“You’re obsessed with money” commented Laf, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “You weren’t like this when I knew you”

“Because back then I didn’t have a boyfriend and a squatter who spent it on daily whims”

“Yeah? Well, I didn’t have a boyfriend who threw tantrums over the stupidest reasons, and yet I am not trying to start up a fight at each chance I get…”

“I don’t want to start up fights, excuse me. And I…”

“The hell you don’t. You just came through the door and you’re already making a fuss over a dog”

“Because I don’t see where the need is to spend money on a dog!”

“I told you I adopted him!”

“Yes. And the vet? And the food? And what if he falls ill or something bad happens to him? That’s not…”

“And why would anything happen to him?” asked Lafayette, taking a couple of steps closer to his boyfriend, defiant.

“Because it can happen… And lower your lip* a bit”

“You calm down, mister. Nothing is going to happen to the dog”

“We’ll see. Remember who you are giving it to”

“It’s not an ‘it’, it’s a ‘him’” corrected Laf, upset.

“No, if you call an animal by ‘him’ or ‘her’, you’re treating it like a human and that means you’re starting to like it. I don’t want to know anything about that dog” he declared, turning on his heels to go directly to the bathroom.

“Let’s see if that’s true. I don’t want to hear one single complain from you” warned Lafayette, following him with the glare.

Hercules stopped abruptly and walked back to him. “I am going to complain about whatever the fuck I want” he spat. “This is my house, and if I want to complain about every living thing I bump into, I will”

“This is my house as well!” Laf reminded him, frowning slightly.

“I can’t believe this” complained Hercules, ignoring the Frenchman’s words. “I come home after one hell of a day working and the only thing I see is problems, and problems…”

“What problems, bon sang…?”

“Not even dinner is made because he was very busy pampering that good-for-nothing” kept rambling Hercules.

That made something snap in Lafayette’s head. “Eh, I am not a servant. If I couldn’t make dinner tonight, you make it”
“Why must I make dinner after the tiring day I’ve had just because you were too busy spoiling John?”

“If I spoil someone in here is you”

“Me? But if you’ve spent months ignoring me and what I say”

“Excuse me…?”

“I live gagged in my own house…”


“I can’t say anything because you’re always behind some corner, hushing me…”

“I hush you because I don’t want things to escalate!” Laf defended his actions. “The neighbours don’t need to know…”

“That neighbours crap again? They are not paying our bills, they are not my friends, they do not feed me. I don’t fucking care about what those people say about me”

“Hercules, please…”

“I don’t care” he reassured.

“They are starting to call you names, I’ve heard them” said Laf, quite saddened. “Please, Herc, there’s no need”

“Let them call me names!”

“No, Herc, because it hurts. It hurts to hear how people call your partner ‘The General’ because he’s always in a bad mood, screaming profanities and never smiling”

“I don’t care what they say, Lafayette. I can go out now, bump into any of them and I greet them and shake their hands, as if it was nothing. And I can even sign some autographs, for all I care”

“Seriously, Herc…”

“I’ll write them ‘With love, from your dearest General’” said Hercules, totally serious, while Laf looked at him, shocked. “I don’t care about the neighbours, they can all die for all I care. They do not feed me, I told you”

“And so, you come home to insult the one who feeds you?” asked Lafayette.

“Well, you haven’t fed me today” joked Hercules.

Laf looked at him with a stern look. “Look, go to Hell” he declared, eventually.

“Laaaaf, come on…”

“No, go the hottest Hell” repeated Laf, putting the dog down and walking into the living room.

“It was a joke to lighten the mood”

“No, it was not” Laf shook his head. “I come home tired as well, you know? For one time I didn’t have time to make dinner, you could have the detail to make it yourself, don’t you think?”
“I wouldn’t mind if you haven’t lost your time on unnecessary things”

“I’ve wasted my time on whatever the hell I want to” spat Lafayette, with a harsh tone. “And this is not the first time we’re going through this. The other day, without going any further, I had to make dinner though we both came late”

“I make dinners on weekends, so you can rest”

“Yes, but on the weekends, I keep doing the laundry and cleaning the house. So, I am not resting”

“Tell me to help you”

“I don’t have to tell you. You should have the consideration to volunteer”

“I don’t because the times I’ve done it, you started complaining about how much I was bothering you”

“Because you do it wrong and you refuse to let me…”

“I do it wrong?” interrupted Hercules, dumbfounded. “It’s moping the floor and doing some dishes. How in hell can anyone do that wrong?”

“Well, you do. That’s not the proper way of moping”

“… … Well, what now? Is it necessary a degree to mop now or what?”

“No, but let me explain you…”

“You don’t have to explain me anything!” interrupted Hercules, raising his voice once again. “You just have to let me do it as I like it”

“No! You just let me explain to you how I like it and then…”

“But why must I do it the way you like it?” he interrupted again, frowning upset. “If I am the one moping, I’ll do it the way I like it. And if you are the one moping, you’ll do it the way you like it. Simple as that”

“No. For doing it like that, don’t do it at all”

“I’ll clean if I fucking want to, excuse me. And I’ll do it the way I like it. You won’t see me complaining about your ways of cleaning…”

“That’s because I do it fine” declared Laf, nodding with pride.

“… Okay, Laf, whatever you say”

“No, no, don’t tell I’m right like if I were crazy”

“Well, a man that claims that there is a wrong way to mop is not very sane, in my opinion”

“… … … Why do you always have to insult me?”

“And why do you always have to feel offended by everything?”

“I don’t feel offended by everything. It’s just that you are always throwing digs and I’m starting to get mad”
“I don’t throw digs. I am telling the truth”

“Well, the day you can be told the truth as well, you…”

“Excuse me? What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that nobody can tell you anything. You think to be perfect…”

“You are the one thinking to be perfect”

“No”

“You are the one who is always criticising every little move everybody makes…”

“No”

“With that poor excuse of ‘I do it because I care about you’, you’ve said some things that… Mmmh… I’m going to shut up”

“Yes, you better”

“Yes, I better. Because if I start digging up for dirt…”

“And I do care”

“I never said you didn’t. I said that you use that as an excuse to be able to say whatever you want without consequences”

“I am always prepared for consequences”

Hercules huffing a contained laughter made Lafayette to be silent and look his boyfriend dead in the eye.

“Please…” muttered Hercules, with a sided smile. “You are never prepared for consequences. The second anyone start contradicting you, you start arguing”

“I argue, of course. Because I want to prove my point”

“You…”

“If I say something it’s because I think I’m right. Of course I am not going to change my mind just because someone doesn’t agree with me”

“But do you need to throw past shit in the face? Simply say you are not…”

“I don’t do that”

“… … Laf, dude, seriously…”

“I do not!” he almost shouted, indignant.

“And what did you last time we went out with the gang?”
“What did I do?” asked Laf, totally lost.

“What did you do”

“What did I do”

“… Lafayette, please…”

“What did I do” he demanded to know.

“We were at the pub with Alex, John and some others and you just had to bring up that time I was so wasted that I…”

“August 2016. That was not the last time we met at the pub” contradicted Laf, crossing his arms upon his chest.

“Well, almost two years ago, same thing”

“No, it is not. And I did it not because I wanted to shame you, I did it because you asked for your fourth shot and I didn’t want any of that to happen again, because I care about you”

“See?”

“Well, it is true! I care!”

“But that doesn’t give you the right to…”

“You should be grateful for…”

They started to argue at the same time, Hercules from time to time raising his voice and Lafayette pleading him to keep it down. Eventually, the front door was heard being slammed shut and the fight died down. Laurens walked to the living room, alternating his glare between the two red-faced partners.

“Fighting again?” he asked, with tedium. “Really, go to a marriage counsellor or get a divorce already”

Hercules clicked his tongue and looked at his boyfriend. “See how he doesn’t deserve anything?”

Laf rolled his eyes and ignored his comment. “Johnny, look, I bought you something” he informed, with a cheerful tone.

“What?” asked Laurens, arching one eyebrow.

“Choose one pile of dirty clothes and find out for yourself” spat Hercules.

“My God, I’ve just returned and you’re already bugging me?” complained Laurens.

Hercules’ response was cut off on time by Laf, who walked to his friend with the little dachshund in his arms. Laurens’ eyes lit up at the sight of the curious-looking puppy and lost no time
for holding it himself, with a huge grin on his face.

“Who is this cutie? Who are you, little fella?” he asked, caressing the dog who, after sniffing him for a bit, began to lick his face.

“A companion to your care-free life” said Hercules, watching the scene with anger.

“Tais-toi!” hissed Lafayette.

“What’s his name?” asked Laurens, oblivious to their tension.

“Whatever you like, Johnny. He’s your new friend”

“Let’s see how long he’ll endure him” commented Hercules.

Laurens frowned in his direction. “I will never get bored of this cutie”

“I was talking about the dog”

“Godfred” declared Laurens, suddenly, looking seriously at the dog.

“…”

“One minute in his power, and he’s already guilty of animal cruelty” said Hercules.


“Call him just Freddy, don’t be an asshole”

“No, because that’s not original, duh”

Hercules looked pleadingly at his boyfriend. “Please, call the pound, this is not right”

“Your face is not right” said Laurens, childishly, while putting the dog down. “And dinner?” he asked, looking over his shoulder in the direction of the kitchen.

“Hercules’s in charge of it today” said Lafayette, with a bit of resentment.

Laurens groaned. “Agh, no, man, I’m starving…”

“Why don’t you take care of it, then?” said Hercules, offended. “You take Godfred for a walk and you both go to the Chinese restaurant around the corner”

“Agh, I don’t want to get out now…” complained Laurens.

“Well, you’ll have to change that chip” warned Hercules. “Because dogs need to get out the house and walk and run…”

“Yeeeee” cut off Laurens. “My God, I just came and he’s already talking my ear right off! I’ll take the dog out and bring you food!”

“Good” nodded Hercules.

“I’ve got to do it all in this house” said Laurens, walking in the living room.
Laurens called the dog a few times, while Hercules made breathing exercises to not kill him just there and then.

"Hercules” Laurens called, suddenly.

“What”

“Godfred shat on the carpet” he informed, casually.

“… What carpet? The one my mother made for us for our anniversary?!” asked Hercules, enraged, pointing at him and Laf.

“No, the red one we have reserved for the Oscars. How many carpets do we have?” said Laurens, with sarcasm.

Hercules dedicated his boyfriend a hateful glare before storming into the living room. “See? Problems already!”

“Because he’s little! We’ve got to train him!” Laf defended the animal.

“We shouldn’t have to train anything if…!”

“He is not a thing!” shouted Laf.

“And now who is shouting?” he asked, mockingly. “Pass me something to clean this mess!”

“Talk to me with some manners” spat Laf. “And I’ll clean that”

“Yes, I almost forgot you’re the only one with a degree in cleaning. Yes, yes” nodded Hercules.

“You know what? Why don’t you go for a walk with Godfred and go to the Chinese restaurant? Really, get out to get some fresh air”

“I don’t want to get out, I just came back!”

“Just like John!”

“But that’s his fucking dog!”

“Hercules Mulligan, go take the dog out and leave this house! And come back when you have calmed down!” ordered the Frenchman, losing his cool.

Hercules looked at his boyfriend in bewilderment and then took the dog from the floor, walking straight to the front door.

“Unbelievable” he said, while he put his jacket on. “Unbelievable” And when he put the leash on the dog. “Unbelievable” And a third time before slamming the door shut.
Lafayette immediately closed the pantry door just with the same fury. “Putain!” he swore.

Laurens saw the whole ordeal and then shrugged, not understanding a thing. “You are crazy. I am going to take a shower” he stated, walking directly to the bathroom.

By the time Hercules was back he had cooled down and was able to talk things out with Lafayette calmly.

That was until he opened the front door and an odour invaded his nostrils.

“Fucking hell…” he complained, under his breath. “He didn’t…”

He took the leash off the dog, who ran freely to the living room, where Lafayette was, watching some TV totally serious. Hercules scanned the whole house with a frown until he heard the hairdryer from the closed bathroom door.

“He did” said Hercules, feeling the anger coming back to him at full speed. “He freaking did”

He marched to the bathroom and swung the door open. Hercules felt a tic in his left eyebrow when he saw the state the bathroom was in: a puddle on the floor next to the bathtub; a wet towel wrinkled by Laurens’ feet and another one hanging on the sink, just as soaked; the toothpaste at least was untouched but that odour… That damned odour.

Laurens was startled at first by his friend’s entrance, but when he saw him with a frown and arms in akimbo, scrutinizing the whole room, John simply rolled his eyes and kept drying his hair.

“You’ll never listen to people or what?” spat Hercules, now with arms crossed.

“What now…” asked Laurens, with tedium.

“How many times will I have to tell you I don’t want you to use that shampoo?” inquired Hercules, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “The whole house is stinking of Coke now…”

“Open a window, what I’ve gotta do with that…”

“I don’t want to open the window because mosquitos will get in!”
“We’re in the middle of February, mosquitos are not here”

“Yes, they are! Along with other bugs!”

“So what? Are those bugs waiting for you to open the window or something?”

“John, man, I’ve told you countless times to…”

“I’ll wash my hair with whatever the fuck I want!” shouted Laurens.

“No, because you let the house stinking!” Hercules shouted back. He thought he heard Laf muttering something in French, but decided to ignore it.

“I live here as well, huh?” argued Laurens, now turning in the angry man’s direction. “And if I want to stink the house, I’ll do it”

“No, if you don’t pay for anything, you won’t”

“The money thing again?”

“You are living here as a favour, you can’t…”

“Who do you think you are now? Only for owning a house. I’ve known people who don’t and who are better than you”

“Go live with them then!”

“How? I’ve told you they don’t have one!”

“You go, hand in hand, to live under a bridge. Happy ending for everyone”

“You’re raving already. I’ll ignore you” decided Laurens, turning to face his reflection again.

“I do not rave, excuse me”

“Yeah, yeah…”

“And I want this to be the last time you use that Coke shampoo”

“I won’t” refused Laurens, turning around to frown at his friend. “I’ll use that one because there’s no other”

“No, I bought one the other day. That L’Oréal one…”

“I don’t like that one”

“I don’t care, I don’t want the house stinking of Coke because you’re unable to wash your hair with a normal thing like normal people do”

“Look, man, you can be the boss of your house, but I am the boss of my body. If I want to use that shampoo, I’ll do it. I bought it for a reason”

“You can be the boss of your body all you want, but your freedom stops where mine begins, and mine begins when my whole house is stinking”

“It is not. You’re an exaggerated”
“I am not”

“Look what a fuss because I showered”

“No, because you used a thing I told you not to”

“And more I’m gonna use it” swore Laurens, unplugging the hairdryer with more force than necessary.

“Damned the idiot who thought that was a good idea to hell” cursed Hercules, while Laurens passed him by to get out of the room. “You drink Coke, you don’t wash your hair with it. Always with strange likings…”

“You’re very disrespectful!” accused Laurens, from his bedroom.

“No, you are the one who can follow a simple order or respect that I don’t like that” retorted Hercules, walking to the room.

“But I don’t call you names or judge because of it!” argued Laurens, throwing clothes on the bed as he looked for an outfit he liked.

“And where are you going now?” asked Hercules, after a sigh of boredom at the sight of John’s disorganisation.

“Out” replied Laurens, automatically, choosing a light-blue shirt and a pair of black pants.

“Where is out?” insisted Hercules.

“Out of the house” answered John, through clenched teeth as he changed.

“Are you going to keep going on like this?”

“Like how?”

“Like this. Going out all nights and then coming in to work late or not at all. When are you going to grow up?”

“Hercules, if I wanted a man beside me who criticises all my life choices, I’d go back to living with my father”

“I am not criticising, it’s just that I think you’re old enough…”

“Adams is more than old enough than me, and look at him”

“Is that what you want to turn into? A man who hides himself in the restroom until the building is vacant?”

“Man, what’s gotten into you today?” asked Laurens, now full dressed up and tying his hair in a ponytail. “You’re more unbearable than ever”

“That now you have a responsibility, John” explained Hercules. “I am not going to walk the dog at first thing in the morning because the toff is too tired for partying all night”

“I’ll take Godfred tomorrow as soon as the sun rises. Happy now?” spat Laurens, walking out his bedroom and down the hallway. “Jesus!” he complained, under his breath.
“I am serious, John. Dogs are not toys”

“I knooooooow” said John, rolling his eyes while putting a jacket on.

“Don’t be too late and be careful” said Hercules, with a hint of worry.

“Leave me alooone already!” he complained one last time before slamming the door shut.

Hercules looked at the door for a moment before sighing. He was about to walk in the living room when he found it empty. Lafayette came from their bedroom, with blankets and Hercules’ pillow in his hands. He threw them to the couch and then locked himself in their bedroom, without another word.

“And now I’ve got to sleep in the couch because nobody can tells that man anything…” muttered Hercules, frowning. He looked down at the bag of Chinese food he was still holding. “And this to the hell. More wasted money because nobody’s serious in this damned house…”

He went to put the food in the fridge and turned off the lights there and in the hallway. He stopped at the living room doorway when he saw Godfred on the top of the couch, curled up and about to fall asleep.

“Yo, get off” he ordered. He frowned once again when the dog ignored him. “Godfred, off the couch, come on” he insisted, now leaning closer to pick him up. The dog showed his teeth while growling and Hercules stepped back, afraid. “Even the fucking dog orders more in here than I do…”

He muttered a few curses as he collected his blankets and pillow, throwing them to the floor with rage.

“Now, to sleep on the floor. Fuck ‘em!”

Hercules cursed them all until he fell asleep that night.

Chapter End Notes

I forgot to put this on the last chapter: "To be weirder than a green dog": Don't know if this is said in English, but in Spanish we use this idiom to describe someone who is extremely odd.

"To be a crazy goat": Don't know if this is said the same way in English, but in Spanish,
we call this to someone who is nuts.

"To pin medals (to oneself)" : "Ponerse medallitas", it's when somebody shows off their own merits.

"To reach good harbour" : To end things on a good note.

"Lower your lip (Baja el labio)" : I don't even know if this is a Spanish idiom, but there was a moment when everyone (young people especially) would say this as a threaten. Like, when someone is acting all cocky and you tell them to 'lower their lip' (que bajen el labio), aka: calm down or else.
The next morning, Jefferson was woken up by the loud ringtone of his phone. He turned around on bed, half-awake, seeing some unknown number had decided to wake him one hour before he was supposed to. Groaning, he decided to answer.

“‘Yes?’” he said, after clearing his throat. He arched one eyebrow when he heard the explanation of the man on the other side of the line. “Excuse me, sir, but I think you are confused… Yes, I am Mr. Jefferson, but…” Thomas froze when he heard the man’s response, and he squinted his eyes in contained anger. “Is that so? Alright, then, I suppose I'll be there in a bit. […] Sir, I wasn’t told that you were coming today, my work day does not start till… Well, I’m sorry, sir, but… …Sir, I don’t think it is necessary to raise your voice… S-Sir… Sir. Sir, I’ll be there in a moment, alright? Good… Good morning, sir, I’ll be there in a moment!”

Thomas cut the angry man off by pressing ‘end call’ and he groaned under his breath, burying his face in his hands. He complained under his breath, trying to control his anger. The door was swung open then, revealing a worried Madison, one hand with a tight grip on his robe.

“What happened? Who called?” he asked.

“Nobody, go back to sleep” said Thomas, rubbing his temples. A headache was about to come, and he had only woken up… Perfect.

“They’re bad news, aren’t they?” kept insisting James.

Thomas sighed, tired. “We are going to get the fucking projector Hamilton’s been asking for this morning. The workers are waiting back at the company” he explained, tossing his blankets aside with fury and getting out of bed. “Adams told them I was going to be the one supervising and
“I knew it, I was dreaming with flying hedgehogs” nodded James, as if he had discovered the meaning of life.

“And what does that have to do with anything I just said?” asked Thomas, opening the blinds and frowned at the dim natural light the rising sun was able to provide at that hour. “You know what?” he cut his friend off, just when he was about to explain. “I don’t want to know”

“No, stay here and drive the girls to school. I’ll take care of it” said Thomas, turning on the lights and going directly to his wardrobe. “Fucking Hamilton and fucking Adams, they won’t stop until I’m six feet under”

“Don’t even joke with that” said James, supporting his side with the doorway. “You’ve still got a lot of heartaches to give me” He tilted his head at the second sight of Thomas rubbing his forehead. “Is your head bothering you again? Do you want me to prepare you some tea for the ride?” he proposed.

“What I want is you all to stop fucking my frikin’ life up” muttered Thomas, starting to change his clothes reluctantly.

James looked straight at him, with a serious expression. “Mmmh, Thomas… Do you think I deserve so much disrespect from you?”

“Oh, my gosh…” complained Thomas, letting his head fall against the wardrobe door he’d just closed.

“Seriously, I’m trying to help and all you do is insulting me”

“Insulting you when?”

“When…”

“Look, shut up” cut off Thomas, with a frown of boredom.

“…”

“My head is hurting enough already without one of your ramblings about how the world is against you”

“That’s why I offered to make you a tea, and you answered me in bad manners” explained James, calmly.

“I told you to go to bed, and you kept pestering me…”

“Now trying to help a friend is ‘pestering’?” asked James, eyeing him up and down. “Man, if you’re angry at Adams, take it out on him, but leave me alone”

“If you want to be left alone, leave me alone first”

“Okay, good” nodded James, upset. “Remember those words when you are having one of your crisis, when you are feeling your headache unbearable to put up with. Just remember them”

“It’s not that either” said Thomas, walking to the door.
“You still want me to drive your daughters to school, though” he threw in his face.

“And what do you want me to do? To teleport?”

“To be more grateful”

“You’re living in my house without me demanding you anything” said Thomas, frowning in anger and pain. “You do and undo as you please and I’m doing my outmost for you… And let me through, I’m late already!” he hurried, when he saw his friend not moving from the doorway.

“What does ‘doing your outmost’ mean to you exactly? Because the only thing you’ve done for us is throwing in our faces how much you’re doing for us”

“Because I do. Let me through, James” he asked once again, arms in akimbo in exasperation.

“When you do something for someone is because you care, not so you can have something to hold against…”

Thomas interrupted him again, fed up. “Gosh. Yes, yes, darling, you are absolutely right about everything. You’re right even when you’re not right. Now, let me through”

And before James could retort, Thomas lifted him up and threw him on his bed. James looked around him, with a shocked expression.

“There, go to sleep”

Thomas slammed his bedroom door shut and closed his eyes to calm the pounding of his forehead and remember where the bathroom was in that house. He sighed when he remembered the two bathrooms that house had were in front of his new bedroom. He still didn’t remember which one was the small one. He decided to try the door at his right, sighing when he saw the small bathroom in front of his eyes.

He groaned under his breath when the door of his bedroom was swung open at his backs.

“First and last time you pick me up and throw me as if I were a rag doll” said James, death serious.

“Second”

“Eh?”

“This was the second time” said Thomas, with a smirk as he turned the bathroom lights on.

“When was the first time?” asked James, perplexed.

“Do you remember that party my mother threw a few years ago? That she invited you and your family for the sake of appearances, and you wanted to make good impressions on people, as usual,
and started drinking all the wine they offered you because you are unable to decline?”

“… It didn’t happen like that” said James, with a slight blush spreading on his cheeks.

“Well, there was a moment when you simply started to wobble, blackout drunk, and my sister and I noticed and decided to lie you down in one of the bedrooms upstairs before you could hurt yourself. We were feeling a very strong second-hand shame”

“So it was you?” asked James, after an uncomfortably cough.

“Who else?”

“Someone nicer” responded James immediately. When he saw his friend arching one eyebrow. “No offence, but, back then, I thought of you as a big asshole”

Thomas eyed him with his lips as a thin line. “Go back to sleep, James. Now, for your own good” he warned, turning around to finally get in the bathroom.

“I said ‘no offence’!” said the shorter man, with a frown.

The door at the end of the hallway opened all of a sudden, showing a very tired-looking Patsy, who supported herself with the doorframe.

“Isn’t it too early to start one of your marital quarrels?” she complained, rubbing one eye.

“Isn’t it too early to start being a pain in the neck?” said Thomas, mocking his tone and pose.

“Said the joy of the house” she retorted, frowning groggily.

“Go to sleep you two” he ordered, walking in the bathroom with a heavy sigh.

“You woke us…” complained Patsy.

“Go to sleep” repeated Thomas, with a harsher tone.

“Gee, I’ve only talked to you for one minute and you’re already sending me away”

“Because you only talk to me to complain like a spoiled brat”

“Thomas” said James with a scolding tone.

“Bah!” said Patsy, offended, before slamming the door shut.

Thomas walked directly to her room, being closely followed by James, who was muttering curses under his breath. Thomas opened his daughter’s door with vehemence, making her stop midway of her bed.

“Keep it down, brat, you’re going to wake your sister up” he hissed.
“I don’t care” said Patsy, in a normal tone of voice.

“Hush!”

“You were the one who started making noise at six in the morning!”

Polly’s complaint was heard from the other side of the hallway. “Ooooh, stop it, please!”

“Sorry, sweetheart!” said Thomas, immediately. Looking at her oldest daughter with fury, he replied. “See what you’ve done, you fucking good-for-nothing?”

“Leave me alone” said Patsy, burying herself under the blankets again.

Thomas groaned while massaging his forehead. “Gosh, you’re going to kill me”

“What a nightmare this man is…” complained Patsy.

“Don’t call me that, have some respect!” reprimanded Thomas.

“Wonder where she took it from” commented James, ironically.

“Do you want to go back to sleep?” asked Thomas, walking out Patsy’s bedroom and closing the door quietly.

“No, I won’t be able to now” said James, following his friend back to the bathroom.

“Well, do whatever you prefer, then! What a hell!” exploded Thomas, closing the bathroom door in his friend’s noses.

“… Then, you’ll say you are not disagreeable” he commented, rolling his eyes. “And now you just ruined my morning… What the fuck do I do now…”

“Get lost, for example” replied Thomas, from the other side.

“I’ll remember this” swore James, with a bitter tone.

“Laurens came back at 5.30, you know how I know? Because he woke me up. And I couldn’t go back to sleep because he had the kitchen lights on and… You’ve been to our house, the kitchen and the living room are across each other. You remember, right?”

“Aha”

“Well, I am rolling and trying to go back to sleep, but I can’t. And I couldn’t even tell him off because he would scream, and I’d scream back, and, eventually, saint Laf would’ve come out his bedroom and I’d be the bad guy. Again”

“Aha”

“And he went to his bedroom without cleaning. I had to clean the counter and the table and the sink. How in hell that man was able to throw breadcrumbs in there is beyond my reasoning. And he left
the lights on as well!”

“Yeah, he kinda did that when we lived together…”

“So, I’ve been awake since something to six. And I had to walk the dog because Laurens refused to wake up. He hasn’t come in today. He sent a few texts through the group chat and he’ll think he’s made his part. No, Life is not like that”

“Nope”

“Man… And the other one doesn’t talk to me. Then he’d say he is always up to face consequences. I hope he doesn’t hold his breath while waiting for an apology on my part, because it’s not happening”

“Aha”

“It’s not like I’ve got something against the animal”

“I know”

“You know I like them, but that’s why I’m responsible. If someone can’t have an animal, they shouldn’t be given one”

“Yeah”

“Laurens knows shit about responsibility. Now, he’s excited, but give him a few days. Godfred would be left into oblivion and I would be the one taking care of him”

“Godfred?”

“Freddy for friends”

“With that name, he won’t have any friends”

“Make sure not to tell him, it could hurt his delicate feelings”

“I know. We once had a pet turtle. He called her Segismunda*…”

“But that’s real?”

“It’s German, but I think he found it on a Spanish book… Or was it a play? I don’t remember the title, so I can’t tell right now”

“Poor turtle”

Alexander nodded in his friend’s direction as he kept writing and frowning at the numbers in front of him. He growled at his own reminder of Adams’ absence. If he had to go to the man’s house and drag him out, he would do it. He had once, and he wouldn’t doubt about repeat the action if necessary.

He then noticed Hercules had kept rambling about the fight he and Laf had had yesterday. Alexander nodded, to make him see he was listening, though he wasn’t catching everything, but it was better to let Hercules talk until he was satisfied. He knew the man too well, he was the first
friend he had when he went to college and knew what he needed when angry and upset. Alexander still felt a sting of guilt for being unable to help him with anything more than a few monosyllables (Burr would be very proud of him if he were seeing their interaction) and nods. But, really, comforting upset people wasn’t his strong suit. Or people crying. Those were the worst. Thank God all his friends were more of getting angry than crying when a fight happened.

Hercules ended his sentence with an asking tone, and Alex nodded, making him go on about another thing. Thinking about how this happened just because Alexander had greeted the man when they bumped into each other at the break room… He could only pray for Laf to not come to him after Hercules was finished.

The knock on his office door sounded like music to his ears.

“Alex?” asked Burr, stopping the conversation abruptly. “Can I talk to you for a second?”

“Yes, come in” said the CFO, setting the papers he’d been working on all morning aside. “What’s wrong?”

“No, but… in private” added Aaron, throwing an apologetic look in Hercules’ direction.

“I’ll leave, it’s alright” said Hercules, with an understanding smile. “Thanks for everything, Alex” he added, while heading to the door. “If you ever need anything as well”

“I know” nodded Alexander, almost automatically. “And just give him time. Until the three of you cool down” he advised, wanting to make himself useful.

“Yes. Bye. Have a nice day, Burr”

“You too” replied the lawyer, throwing a grateful smile in his direction.

Aaron waited until the man had gone upstairs to close the door and walked to Alexander’s desk. Alex frowned at the concern in his friend’s face. It wasn’t easy to see, but through the days he had become almost an expert to read Aaron’s unnoticeable and seemingly unchangeable expressions.

“What’s wrong?” he asked again, in a more worried tone.

Aaron gave him a sheet he’d been holding the entire time. “Prevost sent this” he explained, with an uncertain tone. “He changed the place to meet. A ‘last hour inconvenience’ he said”

“Where will we meet?” asked Alexander, skimming the document. “Boston?” he read, with a raised eyebrow.

“He lives there”

“That’s an almost 5-hour ride” commented Alexander to himself. “Still the same hour?”
“Yes, at nine. I’m sorry, Alex, you don’t have to accompany me if it’s too much trouble…” began to say Aaron.

“I guess we’ll have to wake up pretty early to be there on time” concluded Alexander, handing his friend the document back.

“Alex, we should wake up at four at much”

“Change your alarm for tomorrow, so you won’t forget” said Alex, resuming his work on the previous document, before Aaron arrived. “Really, Aaron, you’ve been making jokes about me having owl’s DNA in my veins, and now you really think I’ll have trouble…?”

“Alexander” interrupted Aaron, with a quite harsh tone. He tossed the sheet back at his face. “Have you read where he wants us to meet?”

Alexander took the sheet again and read more calmly the words. His heart dropped when he read the address and the name of the law firm they were supposed to meet with Theodosia’s ex-husband and his lawyer. He swallowed the bitter taste in his mouth and gave the sheet back to a frowning Burr.

“I know the place, so do you” he replied, avoiding his glare. “So, it will not cost us much to find it”

“We know it because it’s where we fought against Reynolds’ lawyer before everything…” Aaron stopped abruptly, as if thinking how to word his thoughts better.

“Before I screwed everything up?” suggested Alexander, finally looking him death in the eye.

“No, I wasn’t going to say that” frowned Aaron.

“Then, what were you going to say?” asked Alex, with a challenging tone.

Aaron hesitated for a moment. “I was going to say… before everything went down to an unexpected road”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Sure…”

“Alexander, seriously…” tried Aaron.

“I will go with you tomorrow morning. Or at dawn” interrupted Alexander, with a cutting tone.

“You don’t need to…”

“I am your assistant counsel in this case” Alex reminded him, squinting his eyes in his direction. “I need to and I will go with you”

“Alexander, what you need to do is to cut your nonsense”

Aaron squeezed the grip he had on that damned sheet. If it was just a coincidence or Prevost really knew about what happened to Alexander for some reason, Aaron didn’t know. But it was one of those moments when he thought he was going to lose his characteristic cool demeanour.
“Now wanting to get the job done is making no sense?” argued Alexander, because, when did he not?

“No. You pushing yourself to the limit is” Aaron had to bite his tongue for not adding ‘again’.

“I think I know my own limit better than you”

“Yes, that was why I had to take care of Maria’s case all alone at last hour, blaming her on why we had to postpone the date of the trial, risking her and her daughter!”

And that was why Aaron’s uncle made sure to teach his nephew to talk less and smile more. Once you say something, you could not take it back. And when you said it to Alexander Hamilton, who had a mental file of all the nasty things people had done or said to him, you were doomed.

Aaron already knew this by the time he had blurted out, raising his voice considerably but still with the certainty that no one in there could’ve heard him. But only when he saw the fire in Alexander’s glare it became real.

“Okay” said Alexander, getting up while collecting a few sheets and making more noise than necessary with the action. “Good luck then with your defence that I wrote because you were too anxious to come with one proper sentence in more than a month”

Aaron was fast enough to make way for Alexander before he stormed out he office. He frowned in the shorter man’s direction. True, when he was working on the case by his own, he wasn’t able to do much for growing anxiety before the possibility of failing Theodosia once again; but he wasn’t going to tolerate Alexander to think he had done it all.


“This is my case!” exploded Aaron, losing the control of his voice slightly. That shocked both men, as Aaron doubted about keep going or not and Alexander stopped by the doorframe. “I’ve got enough on my plate already, I don’t need to babysit my assistant!”

Really, Aaron, put it together already. Talk a lot less. But he was unable to stop for some reason. Hamilton’s redder face this time did nothing to shut him up.

“I won’t let you play with Theodosia’s only chance to have her son back because you want to see if you are able to put a foot in court without getting too anxious” he threw his previous words in his
face before storming out of the office as well.

For his not-very-pleasant surprise, Alexander didn’t reply that time. Not that he would’ve listened to him. He had said what he wanted to say and now the conversation was over. Aaron even slammed his own office door shut to emphasise the point.

The regret came later.

And the cruel voice of his uncle, reprimanding him as if he were a little child again, came right after.

“And he goes and tells me that I use my care for people to be able to reprimand everyone. *Mais c’est quoi ce bordel?* I’m unable to do what he does, only looking for myself and letting people on their own devices. If I can help somebody to see reason, I will do it. What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing…”

“All started because of the dog, and before I even know what’s happening, we’re talking about things that are two years old. And then, I am the resentful one. If he talks things calmly when needed, half of all his fusses wouldn’t happen! Or all of them, even!”

“Yeah”

“*Mon Dieu.* Can you believe he told me he feels gagged back at home? He’s the one gagging every living thing that gets closer to him. It’s always what he says. He holds the Truth. The Truth with capitol T”

“Capital”

“That. I am sick of the way he treats John, but do I say anything? Only when I think he’s going too far, which is starting to be every day. Really, you haven’t seen him. Last night he also made a fuss because the man showered. Do I like that Coke shampoo? *Non.* But do I say something about it? *Non!*”

“Coke shampoo? Is that thing real?”

“*Oui*”

“They don’t know what to invent anymore”

“But those are his likings”

“Yes, yes, but…”
“Nobody tells him a thing about that cologne he has, that smells like a Maths teacher. Like the nasty ones, the ones that looked at you with disgust just for existing”

“Yes, I who you’re referring to”

“But he uses it. And he stinks the house every time he goes out. And I don’t complain or make a fuss or follow him throughout the house!”

“Well, but if it’s bothering you, tell him”

“I can’t. Nobody can tell him anything”

“I used to talk things like that with Martha, and she had quite the temper. Start the conversation slowly and with tact…”

“I start all my conversations like that, you know how I am. But he’s like… thinking the world is against him. Man, live your life, stop picking up fights for everything. If he is not well, he can always go to a therapist or to hell, but stop pestering people around you”

“Yeah”

Thomas nodded at his friend’s words as he lowered his glare again to the papers he’d been trying to read and order since he started working at 7.12 in the freaking morning. Meanwhile Adams hadn’t had the decency to show up to work that day. The little asshole. There were things Thomas needed to discuss with him now that he was in charge of everything. Damned Maria for her stupid idea. Damned Angelica for being a brat. Damned Washington for becoming crazy. Damned Hamilton and his fucking projector, which bill he still have to pass him. Thomas drowned the urge to call Adams for the third time that morning. That call wasn’t going to end well, and, honestly, Thomas didn’t want to go to the man’s house to drag him out. He’d done that once back in college when Adams didn’t give any signs of being alive the same week they had an important essay to do. If Thomas had to repeat the action to make that man take some responsibility, he would.

Gilbert’s rambling was white noise by then, and Thomas reminded himself to nod at whatever he was talking about now. He had only seen Gilbert like this twice: back when they met at France after he’d come out to his family and another time when his boyfriend drank so much he hit a tree while driving back home. But those two times, Gilbert counted with Adrienne and Laurens and Hamilton respectively. Now it was only him and a stressed friend. Who had started rambling in frenchenglish, as Thomas and he had called it. It wouldn’t be long until Gilbert started talking completely in French, his accent was getting stronger as the rambling went on.

Thomas didn’t know how they’d come to this situation. All started only because he’d greeted the Frenchman when they bumped into his way to the restroom and, next thing he knew, Gilbert was at his office, venting about some fight he’d had with Mulligan last night over a dog. It was kind of comforting knowing that kind of craziness weren’t only a thing that happened back at his house.

He heard Gilbert ending the sentence as a question, and a pause followed. Thomas nodded intuitively, and the vent continued. He felt bad, but he knew it was for the best. He didn’t know how
to comfort or act towards upset people. And if those people started to cry or something like that, then it would be a lost battle. Thank goodness the majority of his acquaintances tended to get angry after a fight. Thomas would always disappear until the storm had died down. He felt a bit guilty, but if he tried to do something, he would make it worse. That was James’ role, actually. But he had left to the break room before Gilbert even came, and he wasn’t back yet. Surely, he had bumped into Maria and they were talking as well. At least, Thomas was glad he didn’t know Mulligan, or else the man may come to him as well to vent.

The distraction of seeing Burr storming off Hamilton’s office seemed heaven-sent. The very unusual sight made Gilbert to stop talking and Thomas to stop ordering and copying documents. They exchanged a curious look.

“Told you that man could exhaust a saint’s patience” commented Thomas, going back to work.

“I think you two should talk things out” advised Gilbert, in a quieter tone.

“That’s not going to happen and you know it” Thomas rubbed his forehead and sighed as he considered calling Adams again. There were things that needed to be discussed, but just the thought of it made his headache to go worse.

“Thomas…” tried Gilbert, in a conciliatory tone.

“It won’t do, Gilbert. Quoting the infamous George King, Hamilton clings to his pride as a koala to its eucalyptus”

“He really said that?” asked the Frenchman, blinking perplexed.

“He says it about himself, which is more worrisome”

“Mon Dieu…”

Riiing, riiing, riiing…

“THE PHONE, GOD DAMNIT!” howled Peggy from her closed office, as groggily as upset.

“It’s the phone of the company” commented Lafayette, on the quiet.

Jefferson sighed and got up, listlessly, knowing no one else was going to pick it up in that law firm full of…

“Washington and Co., what can we do for you?”
Surprisingly, Thomas heard Hamilton’s voice chatting with whoever had called, keeping a civil tone, despite the previous quarrel with Burr. He sat down again and kept going with his paperwork. He couldn’t do much, as Gilbert’s intense glare kept him unfocused. He knew what the Frenchman was thinking.

“Just because I can admit he is the only one in here who works willingly to make the company function, means I have to tell him” said Thomas, without raising his glare.

He felt the shrug of his friend. “Never said you have to”

“Good”

“Everybody else seems to say the same, anyways”

Thomas did lift his glare this time. “For saying you barely know English, you never do owt for nowt”

Gilbert was shocked at first, and then started to laugh.

“What?” asked Thomas, with a cocked eyebrow and the beginning of a smile.

“You just reminded of someone” answered the immigrant, waving one hand nonchalantly.

Knock, knock.

“Thomas, Hamilton wants to talk to you”

James made his way in the room and sat on his usual chair, beside him. He threw a nod to Gilbert, who imitated the gesture with a polite smile.

“What for?” asked Thomas.

“Don’t know. I was coming back and he made me a gesture to let you know” informed James, shrugging. “He seems pretty pissed off” he added, with a warning tone.

“When he isn’t?” asked Thomas rhetorically while getting up. Addressing Gilbert, he added: “See why I don’t tell him anything?”

Gilbert simply shrugged, still not sharing his opinion, but letting him go. Thomas made his way down the hallway, where he found the CFO talking – more heatedly than at the beginning of
the conversation – with the caller. He made his way faster to where the shorter man was standing, fearing they would have to spend money on another new phone.

“Sir, please, do not disrespect my workmate. I’m sure there’s a confusion” said Hamilton, throwing him a sideways glare when he was by his side. “Look… Sir, I’ve got him here with me, alright? Let me ask him, I’ll be with you in a moment” Hamilton tapped the microphone to maintain their conversation private. “Jefferson, it’s the assistant of the CEO of the law firm Washington wanted to meet for a time now” he explained, with a frown of bother. “He says you were supposed to meet him and his boss…”

“I wasn’t told anything” interrupted Thomas, right away, having a hunch about the whole misunderstanding.

“Well, as long as I’ve been told…” continued Hamilton, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Hamilton, I didn’t have to meet with anyone today” assured Thomas, frowning in his direction.

“I’m just saying that you forgot about the projector this morning and…”

“I didn’t forget” interrupted Thomas, now squinting his eyes with suppressed anger. “I wasn’t informed”

Hamilton looked at him, unconvinced. “Whatever you say” He untapped the microphone and continued to talk with the infuriated assistant from the other side. “Sir, there was a confusion with the date. Would you mind if you change the meeting for this afternoon?” he asked, trying to be conciliatory and ignoring the enraged glare Thomas threw in his direction with great ease. “Alright, aha. At half past two, then?”

“Hamilton…” said Thomas right after hearing the agreed time.

“Wait a moment, please?” Hamilton tapped the microphone again and his tone turned harsher when it was directed to the secretary. “What?”

“I can’t at that hour” explained Thomas.

“I don’t think you are in a position to demand…” started to reprimand Hamilton.

“I’ve got to meet Martha’s tutor today” admitted Thomas, unwillingly.

Hamilton was silent for a moment. He sighed heavily and returned to talk to the assistant. “Um… Sir? I’m sorry, I’m afraid our secretary can’t meet with you at that hour, he… He has to assist a few clients around that hour today. My mistake”

Thomas moved uncomfortably in his spot when he heard Hamilton making up a story for him, blaming himself and, especially, when he heard the assistant’s angered tone from the receiver.

“Sir, please, I told you not to insult my workmate. I think it’s not necessary” Hamilton cut the man off, frowning exasperated. “Could you meet with him at any other hour today or any other…? Alright, yes… I think half past five sounds…” he threw a glare to Jefferson, who nodded. “…good.
Yes, thank you… And apologies for the confusion. Have a good d…”

Hamilton stopped mid-sentence and looked at the phone, from which came a series of ‘beep’, indicating the other man had hung up. The CFO managed to hang up without breaking the phone, which was really impressive after such a conversation.

“Last time I have to face this because you can’t take your job seriously” spat Hamilton, walking straight back to his office.

“I told you I wasn’t informed of…” Thomas tried to defend himself, following the man.

“First the incident of this morning and now this” continued Hamilton, throwing another tired sigh to the air while ordering some papers he had on his desk.

“I didn’t forget any of these two things!” Thomas defended himself. “Adams hasn’t informed me, he just pins the blame on me! He should be the one meeting with those people”

“Look, call Adams and tell him. Leave me alone for the day” said Hamilton, taking a seat and rubbing his temples.

“He isn’t answering his phone” explained Thomas.

“Well, then go to his house and be unproductive together” snapped the immigrant.

“Hamilton, I did not…”

“Mr. Porter’s assistant told me you were supposed to…”

“Why do you believe a man you don’t know at all before me?” exploded Thomas.

“Because he hasn’t lied to me and acted behind my backs” answered Hamilton, right away.

“I did not…” he tried to contradict.

“Now, please, go to do whatever you were doing and let me work” interrupted Hamilton, passing a hand through his hair.

“Thomas…” James’ tiny voice sounded by his right.

He turned his head, seeing his two remaining friends standing at his doorway, frowning in concern. Thomas finally sighed and made his way back to his office, deciding it was useless.

And if he felt a sting of guilt, he did his best to ignore it.
“I told you to improve your marks back at December, and two months later I have to meet with Mr. Sherry* so he can tell me you’re about to fail three”

“But not five as last trimester”

“But three is still too much!”

“But three is less than five”

“I know, I’m from Arts*, but I know that much, Martha”

“Good”

Thomas parked with more force than necessary in front of the closed garage door when he heard the mockery in his oldest daughter tone. He heard the youngest girl sighing while she tried to focus only on drawing.

“Martha, this is your last year” started to reprimand Thomas.

“That’s unsure” commented Polly under her breath.

“I really hope your bubble burst once you’re in high school” spat Patsy, with venom.

“Don’t say those things to your sister!” reprehended Thomas, unbuckling his seatbelt. “For one daughter I’ve got who likes to study”

“Why do you tell me off but not her? She was the one who threw the dig first!” complained the girl.

“Because Polly had to wait hour and half because her oldest sister doesn’t take life seriously” answered Thomas, opening the door to his youngest daughter, who jumped out the car and trotted to the front door.

“I take life seriously!” complained Patsy.

“A girl who is about to fail and repeat a year can’t say that”

“Well…”

“Shut up” Thomas cut her off, locking his car at the same time he looked at his watch. “I have to leave soon or I’ll be late for a meeting”

“I thought you had those on Wednesdays?” asked Patsy, with a cocked eyebrow while she followed her father to the front door, where her sister was waiting for them.

“Another kind of meeting” he clarified, opening the door for them.

“Daddy, I’m hungry” complained Polly.

“Huh, I was wondering why you were being more insufferable than usual” commented Patsy.

“Said the joy of the house” said Thomas, closing the door with a thump.
The door at the other side of the hallway opened, and James’ head stuck out.

“You’ve just arrived and are already fighting?” he asked, getting out of his room.

“What are you doing in here?” asked Thomas.

“I live here”

“I know, I couldn’t forget. Believe me, I’ve tried”

“…”

“I meant what are you doing in here? It’s only three”

“I left. Too many bad vibes in that building”

“Huh, and then you tell me off about not taking life seriously…” said Patsy, gaining a dirty look from her father.

“Do you want me to make something to eat?” proposed James.

“Yes!” nodded Polly, running in his direction with eyes bright.

“I don’t want anything, James” said Thomas, going upstairs.

“Really?” inquired the accountant. “I can make you something for the drive… At what hour are you supposed to meet with those men?”

“5.30. But I don’t want anything, really. I’m not hungry” insisted Thomas.

“Are you…?”

“I’m alright, not hungry” he cut his friend off.

“Okay, then… Come on, girls”

Thomas decided to ignore James’ worried glare as well as he walked upstairs.

And if his stomach complained from hunger at the same time he felt the need to vomit, Thomas ignored that as well.

“Adams, this is the eighth voice mail I’m leaving you. Answer the phone, we’ve got to meet with
Mr. Porter and his assistant in less than an hour. I am not going to go all by myself, you need to be there, and I will not make up some excuse for you”

James slid the wooden door of his friend’s new workroom after a small sigh when he heard what Thomas was talking at the other side. He made his way into the room, being watched by Thomas, who raised an eyebrow at the plastic bag he put on his desk. After ending the call, Thomas asked.

“What is this?”

“A sandwich. You need to eat something before that meeting”

“James, I’m not…”

“Better have something to eat just in case” he interrupted, stubbornly.

“James…”

“I am not going to back down” James pushed the bag closer to Thomas. “Please, don’t make it worse by not having anything in your stomach”

_It aka: the social anxiety you haven’t overcome for more than a decade and you’re bothering everyone around you with. The guilt made another knot inside his empty stomach and Thomas took the bag reluctantly and put it inside his briefcase._

“I make no promises” he said.

“You have it, though” said James, walking to be by his side. “I’ve sent a text to Abigail”

“James, I’ve told you…”

“You are not going alone to that. That man is making it on purpose”

“I know, but his wife has…”

“James”

Patsy appeared at the door then, dressed up with a purple shift dress, clutch in hand and a pair of black heels.

“Can I borrow your keys?” she asked.

“What’s wrong with your keys?” asked Thomas, leveraging the moment James was silent, thinking where he had left his.
“That I lost them” replied the girl, uninterested.

“You what?”

“I lost them”

“You lost them where!” inquired her father, raising his voice.

“If I knew, they wouldn’t be lost”

“Don’t get smart with me, young lady” Thomas buried his face in his hands while he breathed in and out a few times to calm himself.

“Mines are…” tried to answer James.

“No! Don’t give her yours!” said Thomas, frowning in his friend’s direction.

“But…”

“Where are your keys!!”

“Somewhere”

“How could you lose your keys!?”

“The world is wide and the keys are little”

“But, gal, how can you speak like that about a key? The house key”

“Bfff…” complained the girl, resting her right side on the doorframe.

“Patsy, really, you need to…”

“They are here” interrupted the girl.

“Here?”

“Yeah”

“And why don’t you look for them, instead of asking for someone else’s?”

“Because I’m late”

“Late to what?” he spat. “Are you gonna clock in or something?”

“No, but my friends don’t have to wait for me”

“And with who do you have to meet? With a minister?”

“No. With my usual friends”

“Who are those?”

“Who do you think they are? The ones I usually hang out with”

“Gal, seriously, why don’t settle down a bit? Why don’t you put that will you have over meeting up with friends into studying? Or into looking for your keys, for starters?”
“I’ll look for them later”

“Later, *when* is later?”

“Bf, man, what a horrible nightmaaaareee…” muttered Patsy.

“Don’t ‘nightmare’ me, gal. When did you lose the keys?”

“A week or so”

“A week or so? And that’s it?”

“What?”

“How can you act so nonchalantly over the keys of the *house*?”

“Because I know they are in here!”

“They can’t be here because I clean your room every day and I haven’t seen them”

“Maybe you asked for a friend to keep them for you and you forgot?” asked James, gentler.

“No, no, of course not” denied Patsy.

“She lost them *outdoors* and she doesn’t want to admit it” said Thomas.

Patsy frowned in his direction. “No. I know they are in here. Maybe I forgot them in one pocket and James didn’t realise when he did the laundry”

“Now it’s James’ fault. James’. Not hers, though she, despite being sixteen, doesn’t make her own bed or clean her room…”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with this conversation”

“Yeah, because it’s not to your advantage…”

“I know it has to be that theory because I can’t find my piercing either”

“Your what?”

“My piercing” she said, caressing the ear piercing she had to clarify her point better.

“Your earring?”

“*Piercing*” she repeated, now quite indignant.

“And what do you want now?”

“Nothing. I just lost it as well”

“… Mmmh, go hang wanted posters in the streets with a photo of it, to see if somebody’s seen it” proposed Thomas, uninterested. “I want to know where the keys…”

“Yes, Dad, yes, fuck! I am telling you this because I put my piercing in the same pocket I put the fucking keys! Maybe James, while doing the laundry…”!

“Do not swear or raise your voice!” shouted Thomas, interrupting his daughter.
“You just shouted at me!” complained the teenager.

“I can!”

“How fair!”

“And stop blaming James, he’s not your maid, got it?! If you refuse to do your laundry as an adult, and if you want to be treated as a Queen in here, at least be responsible with something! Even if it’s just a fucking stud!”

“Piercing!”

“That shit, yes. I only mind about where the house keys…”

Patsy talked over her father. “Well, when I look for the piercing…”

“I’ve told you that I don’t give a freaking fuck about your shitty earring!” screamed Thomas, beyond angry. “I am asking for the house keys! Where are they?! Fourth time I’m asking you!”

“Buuuuuuuuuuuuufff… …” she buried her face in her hands and threw a muffled whine.

“Martha, where…?”

“HERE!” exploded the girl, looking enraged at her father. “The freaking keys must be here! If you’d let me explain properly, I could tell you that the keys must be here! Maybe they fell in the washing machine or the dryer, I don’t know! But they were in one of my pockets!”

“That is not true, Martha” contradicted Thomas. “I’ve told you I clean your room, I clean the whole house and I haven’t seen any keys in all the past week. And just yesterday James spent the whole afternoon cleaning the washing machine and dryer and he hasn’t seen anything. Have you seen anything?” he asked, looking at his friend.

“No, no” James shook his head.

“See? You lost the keys, Martha”

“Mmh…”

“You lost the keys, Martha, the house keys, gal. And I swear to God above that we are going to have it as we’ve never had if someone comes and gets in the house one day”

“How would anyone know, by only a key, where that aforementioned key comes from?” asked Patsy, calmer. “There are very little chances”

“They follow you, darling…” said James.

Patsy looked at him as if he were an idiot. “Do you think I’m not aware if someone follows me or not in the street?”

“A girl with your grounds is aware of very little” said Thomas, getting up from his chair and making sure he had all he needed inside his briefcase. Patsy huffed, offended. He looked at her, very serious. “You don’t have keys. And you’re not going to use anyone else’s. Get that into your head”

Patsy frowned at her father. “And how I am supposed to come in the house?”

“Ring the doorbell or knock. Whatever you like the most”
“So, I have to wake everybody up? Then, don’t complain about me waking you up”

“I’ll complain about whatever I want, excuse me. And what do you mean ‘waking us up’? It’s four in the afternoon, almost five. At what hour were you planning to come back?”

“When I’m finished”

“Finished with what?”

“Finished”

Thomas looked at his daughter for a moment. He shook his head and put the swivel chair back in place before heading to the door.

“Don’t worry, you won’t wake anyone up. You are not getting out” he declared, passing an enraged Patsy by.

“What?! Why!” she asked, indignant.

“Because you haven’t earned the right to have fun”

Thomas gestured the two persons to get out the room and, once they obliged, he closed the sliding doors and went straight to the staircase.

“Mr. Sherry told me you’re still failing at school, skipping classes…”

“Not as much as before!” Patsy defended herself.

“You shouldn’t skip a single one, Martha” snapped his father, stopping midway to look at her. “I am doing my best so you and your sister could still have a proper education. Not as good as you were used to, but still a proper one, and you are not taking advantage of it. I’ve paid…”

“That’s your solution and defence for everything” interrupted Patsy. “Pay, pay, pay… Life is other things”

“Your life is that. Still is that, thankfully. Mine is not, mine is…”

“But yours used to be like mine until a few years ago”

“Patsy…” said James, walking to be between father and daughter, just in case.

The girl looked at him dead in the eyes. “No. He comes here and says things, pretending he is some role model…”

“I am not saying that” said Thomas. “I am just asking you to be serious and to do something with your life. You’re old enough to…”

“But how can you demand me that?” interrupted Patsy with a sharp tone. “When you, at my age,
"looked only for yourself"

"Martha…"

"You’ve got three siblings and none of them talk to you. Aunt Sally doesn’t talk to you either. The same goes for Alex. There has to be a reason why"

"Sally* was a different story and I know I did it wrong, same with Hamilton; but your uncle and aunts are…”

"You are just reaping what you sowed"

"Well, let’s see if my siblings reap something one day as well” complained Thomas. “And let’s see when you stop defending them, when none of them know how you look like because they don’t care about you. As much, Lucy does, but for her own interest. One day, I’ll tell you the whole story and maybe you’ll stop defending…”

"I am not defending her. I know she’s a witch and a shrew and I hate her. But I don’t know who you think you are to come here and tell me…”

"I am your father!” shouted Thomas, dead serious.

"Now you are because you don’t have a better thing to do” spat Patsy, without thinking.

Thomas clicked his tongue. “You are not getting out today. Or this weekend. That’s it” he declared, turning around.

He made his way to the front door, ignoring the growing guilt in his stomach. When he was about to open the door, he heard his daughter sighing heavily and turning around, hoofing over the steps.

“Y’all are fucking pissing me off…” she muttered, enraged.

Thomas turned his head, managing to see her before she turned around to go to her room. “Yes? Couldn’t it be because you’re reaping what you’re sowing?” he asked, mockingly.

“Thomas…” said James.

“Reaping what I sow my ass!” screamed the girl.

“Patsy!” reprimanded James, with a louder tone.

The only response he was given were two thumps when both father and daughter slammed their doors shut.

“There, now the neighbours know us…” complained James, passing a hand through his face.
Thomas wouldn’t say the tension could’ve been cut with a knife; the best way to define the sensation inside that meting room would be that the tension wouldn’t have even been cut with a knife. That was how dense the air felt. And his constricted throat didn’t help him to breathe more easily. Thomas’ stomach complained about being vacant at the same time the annoying need of vomiting obstructed any food he would want to swallow. A brief reminder of the sandwich, *untouched* sandwich, that he had inside his briefcase came to him and Thomas was between being sick with its memory and devouring it as soon as he could get the *hell out of this room*…

“Mr. Jefferson, do you know if it will take Mr. Adams too long to arrive?” asked Mr. Porter, trying to conceal the impatient in his voice, and failing miserably, in Thomas’ honest opinion.

“I’m sure he’s on his way. We’ve been having a few inconveniences this week” explained Thomas, apologetically.

“Obviously” chimed in the assistant, looking down at him with a raised eyebrow. “If you couldn’t meet with us today, you should’ve let us know sooner. It was your boss the one who wanted to create an alliance with us in the first place”

“I’m sure Mr. Adams is about to arrive” replicated Thomas, trying not to throw any disgusted look in the youngest boy’s direction and keep his eyes on the important man out of the two. “Back at the law firm, we’ve all been looking for this for a long time”

It couldn’t be counted as a lie. Maybe if someone back there paid attention to the meetings and the things they discussed, they would be as keen to be part of a bigger company that would help them grow in the law field as Thomas had just claimed. But that would be the last thing he’d admit to any of those men. The mistrust was already palpable and there was no need to make it worse.

“And we feel very flattered for your interest” said Porter, mirroring Thomas’ fake smile. “But you must understand that my law firm has a few years on its backs and has a reputation to keep”

“I promise this was just a bad week, full of a series of misfortunes, Mr. Porter” assured Thomas, trying to swallow the lump in his throat afterwards with no avail.

“I think you should call your boss, then, Mr. Jefferson” proposed the assistant, with a fake tone of understanding. “Wouldn’t want another misunderstanding to occur”

“I agree” nodded Mr. Porter, as he took off his glasses and reclined in his seat.

Thomas nodded as he fished his phone out his pocket. “With your permission…”

Porter waved his hand nonchalantly while he turned his head to the younger man, who threw some sideways glares in his direction that helped his anxiety to grow a bit stronger. Thomas could
only pray his voice wouldn’t falter when he spoke.

He pressed the phone against his ear, feeling a bit relieved to feel the cold sensation of the screen against his skin. Each ‘beep’ heard at the other side of the receiver made his heart beat faster and what would Thomas not give to just spat to that assistant to stop looking at him with those airs.

“Yeah…?” The groggy tone in Adams’ voice made him come back to reality and helped him to focus on another thing that would, hopefully, take his anxiety down a notch.

“Mr. Adams?” said Thomas, calling the attention of the other two men completely on him. “I…”

“Who is it?” asked a disoriented Adams.

“Thomas, sir. I am assembled with Mr. Porter and Mr. Davis…”

“Who???”

Thomas breathed in through his nostrils and squeezed the phone in his hand. “Yes, the CEO of the law firm Mr. Washington wanted to meet with, sir”

Well, it was clear Thomas was losing his dignity. Not only he had left an unexpected as Davis to disrespect him at each chance he got and put up with Porter’s scolding – that should’ve been directed to Adams, and to Washington for forgetting such an important date, honestly – but he was talking respectfully to the man that had left him alone to endure those two things, plus the incident of that morning, plus the ex-friend who had decided to take Lucy’s side when he tried to ask for his help.

You haven’t lost your dignity, you’ve murdered it.
For people who don’t deserve it.
And that is the worst part.

Oh, freaking hell… Not this now…

“And, yes, how did that go?” asked Adams, now sounding a bit more focused.

“We’re here waiting for you” replied Thomas.

He was doing it for the law firm, not for Adams. Thomas tried to even his breathing as discreetly as he could, annoyed by the two pairs of eyes fixated on him.
“For me? Why?”

Thomas had to bite his tongue in order not to click it. “Yes, I think you made the right choice by bringing those files with the information needed to reach an agreement between the two companies, sir” he made up, quite easily.

“I don’t know what files you’re talking about”

“Yes, I’ve got them here, with me”

“Sign them or whatever, then”

This man needed some classes about taking hints, seriously…

At least he finished his studies.
You had to drop out.

Shut up.

“Mr. Porter also brought his conditions that he’d like you to read, sir. So, if you please could tell us when you’d be here…”

“… But like now?”

“Oh, I understand. I’ll let them know”

“Why are you saying things that have nothing to do with what I’m talking about?”

“How long will it take you to come, then, sir?”

“Man, you just woke me up. I’m in my pyjamas”

“… … …”

Breathe. Remember what Consuelo and Martha taught you. In, uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco; out, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, diez…

Feeling lightheaded, Thomas turned his a bit blurred vision to the two curious and judgmental men across him.

“Hm… Would you mind…?” he cleared his throat, and his cheeks burnt with a blush of embarrassment at how tiny his voice sounded. “Would you mind if I get out for a moment? The call is…”
“Yes, Mr. Jefferson. We’ll wait” nodded – and interrupted – Porter, pressing his lips in a thin line at the end of the conversation.

“Thank you”

Thomas got up as slowly as casual as he could.

You’re making a scene.

He managed to get out of the meeting room and walked to the middle of the large – and, thankfully, deserted – hallway. He pressed his back against the white wall and tried to focus his attention on the outside world the window across him offered. But it only made him more anxious. It was a reminder of how much he wanted to get out and how he couldn’t.

“Adams…” he started, passing a hand through his curls and trying to keep his voice at a low volume. “What the hell are you doing in your pyjamas at six in the afternoon?!?” he asked, enraged.

“I…”

“You were supposed to be here” interrupted Thomas, his blood boiling. “I don’t know why you wanted me here, but I refuse to be here on my own with those two snakes”

“You shouldn’t be talking that way about the people we want to work with” commented Adams.

“Oh, but you care? Because your attitude doesn’t show it!”

“Man, I sent you there for a reason. Can’t you have a proper conversation with two adults?”

“And can’t you act like an adult for a goddamned day!”?

As his luck would want it, two persons got out from the room that was a few meters way from him. Both the man and the woman stopped in their tracks and threw a curious look in his direction. Thomas faked a smile and greeted them as respectfully as he could. They imitated the gesture, but once they kept going their way in the opposite direction, Thomas saw them glaring back at him from time to time, and then laughing under their breaths.

Nice, he was the talk of the law firm he was trying to be part of.

Of course.
Returning his whole attention to Adams, he noticed the man had been talking, surely making some poor excuse.

“Adams” Thomas cut him off, with a dry tone. “I don’t care. Just come here, as soon as you can. Porter is starting to lose his patience and his toy boy is not helping”

Adams huffed in annoyance. “And can’t we meet any other day?”

“… Do you know how many problems did I have to face today just for this stupid meeting? You knew the date, while I did not. And yet, here I am, waiting for you!”

“Because you were supposed to…”

“In which world a secretary takes care, all alone, of something like this?” spat Thomas. “These are things that have to be arranged by the heads of the company, who, sadly, happens to be you until further notice!”

“Hey, I didn’t choose this”

“But you must be responsible until Washington comes back!”

“I won’t be there on time”

“I know. For being on time you should’ve been here an hour ago”

“Just… Can’t you arrange another date? Does that fall within your responsibilities, mister secretary?” asked Adams, with mockery.

Thomas clicked his tongue. “Yes, but that’s not the matter…”

“All settled then”

“Adams, don’t…”

“Give Porter and the other man my regards”

“Adams, don’t you dare…!”

Beep, beep, beep…

“… Hanging up the phone…”

Well, if this meeting was a lost battle before, now it was a lost war.

Not that you made anything to help to win it.
Thomas rolled his eyes and made his way back to the meeting room.

At least, you won’t have to be the laughingstock of another place.

Whatever those two would tell him, it was never worse than what his own mother had told him in life… or after death.

“It went wrong, didn’t it?”

James had known Thomas for a decade, enough time to know when something was wrong. The fact that he was always good at reading between lines was very useful, because Thomas wasn’t very talkative when it came to his problems. He was already used to receive more information from Thomas’ silences than from his words. When he heard the front door being slammed shut and saw Thomas coming in the dining room with an exhausted sigh and dragging himself to the kitchen, James knew his friend’s day had gone from bad to horrible.

“What do you think?” asked Thomas, before coming in the kitchen.

James got up from the couch, turned the TV off and followed his friend. “I think various trucks mowed you down on your way back”

“That’s a close definition” laughed Thomas half-heartedly, as he opened the cabinets one by one. “Where’s the tea?” he muttered. And if he’d been less tired, he’d have sounded as angry as James knew he was feeling.

“Let me” he said, walking by his side. “Is your head bothering you again?”

“It never stopped” he admitted, taking a seat at the kitchen table while he massaged his temples. “Adams didn’t show up to the meeting” he explained, receiving a sigh of contained anger from his friend. “And needless to say, I don’t think Mr. Porter would want to meet with us any other day”

“Why is that?”

“Because Mr. Porter said he would call to arrange a meeting on another day. Which means he will not call”

Maybe he just needs to see his…”

“He won’t” interrupted Thomas. “That always means you will never call” He let out a shaky breath as he put one elbow on the table to support his aching head. “I can’t say I feel sorry or bad. I’ve endured enough stuck-ups my whole student life, I don’t want the same for my working life”
“See? Not everything was so bad. I’m sure there are lots of better companies out there. And that’s Adams’ responsibility and Washington’s problem”

Thomas nodded, thankful for his friend’s words. It helped him not to let that dreadful memory loose. That would be the last straw that’d break the camel’s back.

“Did the lost key appear?”

He saw James shaking his head with his peripheral.

“Missing in action, isn’t it?”

“For what it seems…”

Thomas let out a sigh-groan of frustration. “Now, I’d have to ask Hamilton for another spare… Or ask for permission to change the lock”

“Give it a few days, maybe it’s in here” tried to propose James.

“No, that girl lost it in the street, I know”

He moaned in pain when he felt another shooting pain pass across his forehead. Thank goodness, the sound of James putting the teacup in front of him silenced her mother’s remark about how it was his fault that he could never talk with any of his landlords.

“You should take the meds the doctor prescribed you” commented James, resting his hip against the table.

Thomas shook his head while taking the cup of steaming beverage. “No, I’ll be fine after some sleep”

James rolled his eyes. “Since when sleeping has been enough for your migraines?”

“It makes them a bit better”

“Thomas, you need…”

“No” he cut off sharply.

“Why not?” inquired James, quite upset. “You can’t keep going on like this, enduring migraines for weeks”

“I’ll be living like this since I was a child, James. I think I can handle it”

“But there will be a day when…”
“I don’t want to take meds for my migraines, James. It will do my sister more good than me”

James half-closed his eyes in his direction. “At least, take the day off tomorrow”

“No”

“You’re going…”

“Hamilton leaves tomorrow with Burr to I-don’t-remember-when, so maybe Adams will come, and I still need to talk a few things out with him”

“Why can’t you wait until Washington comes back with Angelica?”

“Because I don’t want to postpone this any longer. Besides, I want to take advantage of Hamilton’s absence, it’s not an everyday occurrence”

“When are you going to make amends?” asked James, with tedium.

“Hamilton won’t talk to me, it’s a nonstarter”

“Talk to him first” he proposed.

“No”

“Well, you’ll have to talk to him first in order to change that lock… Which I still think is unnecessary”

“Damned Patsy and her disorganised way of living” muttered Thomas, under his breath, before taking a sip of his mint tea.

“Give it a few days, the key will appear. That’s what happened with mine”

“You lost your key as well?” asked Thomas, raising his glare for the first time since he sat down.

“A million times since Hamilton gave ‘em to us”

Thomas would’ve rolled his eyes if it weren’t for the beating pain.

“So, listen to me when it comes to this. The less you look for one thing, the more chances you’ll have to finally find it” advised James.

“If you say so… I’ll give it till Monday. That way I can rest all weekend without talking to the gremlin… Is she in her room?”

“Who?”

“Patsy”

“I think so, she locked up in there. Will it kill you to apologise to her as well?”

“I’ll talk to her later, after I’ve relaxed a bit”

“Good” James hugged his friend by the shoulder before heading to the door at their left side. “I’ll go
to sleep, but call me if you need something”

“I’m fine” responded Thomas automatically. “Goodnight” he said quickly before James could contradict him again.

“Night” said James, deciding the best was to call it a night.

Aaron was used to wake up early. He didn’t like it, but he was used to. One of the little few things he had learnt from his uncle that could be useful in his daily life. Though he was trying not to think about Timothy that morning. He needed some mental peace for the day that was ahead.

Theodosia woke a bit after him, but Aaron knew she’d been up before him. She hadn’t seen her son since the divorce, and she was under as much pressure as him. It could be her only chance to be a part in Augustine’s life, as she had always wanted to. Aaron could only hope the boy hadn’t been poisoned with bad ideas of her mother by Jacques. Kids at that age were very influential. Aaron knew because…

“Don’t think about that, God…” he complained under his breath.

“Did you say something, dear?” asked Theodosia, rubbing her bleary eyes.

“Nothing, just muttering things to myself”

With a tired smile, she walked to him and hugged him by the waist, from behind. “Everything will be fine, Aaron” she reassured. “You’ve always been one of the best lawyers of any law firm you worked in”

Aaron smiled softly at that. “Being nervous before a trial is occupational hazard”

Theodosia walked to be by his side then and peeked him on the cheek. “It’ll be fine. You’re not alone today. And Alex is also one hell of a lawyer for what Eliza told me”

Aaron’s heart dropped at that reminder. He hadn’t told Theodosia anything about the quarrel he had with Alexander yesterday. At first, it was because he didn’t want to talk about it – a very common thing from him, that was why, though his wife sensed something was up, didn’t ask anything – but, as the day went by, he had remained silent because he could also feel how nervous Theodosia grew as the hands of the clock advanced.

“Aaron?” said Theodosia, with a frown of worry. “Is something wrong?”
Why did he have to marry with the only person in the world who could read him so easily? It was both a curse and a blessing.

“I should’ve told you something yesterday” he admitted. He didn’t want to leave the house with a lie.

“What’s wrong?”

“Yesterday…”

A series of honks interrupted his explanation. Theodosia smiled at the sound and she ran to the living room, where she could see the street across their house. Aaron followed her. Aaron didn’t want to name the sensation he felt when he saw Alexander’s car parked in front of the house, waiting.

“Alex’s here” declared Theodosia. She turned around, her smile a bit weaker than before. “Tell me what you are worried about quickly, you know three honks means out” she joked.

Aaron alternated his glare between the car outside and his anxious wife. Eventually, he sighed. Why fixing something that wasn’t broken?

“Nothing, you know how I can get when I get nervous”

It wasn’t a lie. Theodosia’s laugh corroborated it. Aaron tended to be quite paranoid when he was worried over something. The Burr marriage was used to it.

“Don’t be harsh on yourself today, dear” said Theodosia. “If you need anything, call me, I’ll be here”

“I know”

They kissed goodbye and Aaron made his way to the car, in which Alexander was waiting, disturbingly patiently. He sat beside him and waved goodbye to his wife, who was watching them through the living room window. Alexander also imitated the gesture, managing to give the woman a wee smile before driving both away.

The sun wasn’t up yet, and almost nobody was leaving their houses to go to work yet. It was four thirty in the morning, they were driving on a quiet dark road in a vehicle filled with tensed silence. Aaron moved uncomfortably in his seat for a bit, entertaining his hands with the seatbelt. He
stopped when he felt the sideways (and annoyed) looks from Alexander.

“Thank you for coming” said Aaron, breaking the silence, for a change. “I wasn’t expecting you to, honestly”

Alexander shrugged, not meeting his glare. “I’ve promised you I’d accompany you today”

“Yes, but after what happened yesterday…”

“I promised before any of that happened”

“Thank you”

That created another silence between the two, but not as tensed as the one prior. Aaron found himself breathing more easily, especially after he added:

“And I’m sorry for what I said yesterday”

“Forget it”

“But…”

“You are stressed, I get even worse when stressed. Let’s just forget it. We’re cool”

“Sure?”

Alex wasn’t someone who forget things quite easily, especially an offense. But Aaron felt a sincerity in Alexander’s words.

“Sure. I know you didn’t mean anything”

“No” nodded Aaron.

“Then, it’s okay”

Aaron let himself relax on his seat after hearing that. The nervousness for the upcoming meeting with his wife’s ex husband was still there, but now it wasn’t mixed up with guilt for the words he dedicated his workmate yesterday.

For pure habit, he leaned to the radio, unable to be on the road without music in the background. Alex slapped his hand and he withdrew it, rubbing it with a cocked eyebrow.
“Don’t touch my radio, I got it set up just yesterday” explained Alexander, upset. “I don’t want to get over all that again, Aaron”

“Sorry…”

“Always the same with you when you get into my car, Aaron”

“Sorry”

“I think I’ve told you this a good couple of times before, Aa…”

“If you say my name again…” tried to threaten Aaron, frowning in the driver’s direction.

“Well, it’s true. You’re worse than the kids with the fucking radio”

“I said sorry already! Gee! Why… Wait, why are you pulling over here?” he asked, looking around the vehicle. He saw the CFO smiling slightly as he looked at the house they had by the right.

“Alexander, why…?”

His question was muted by the horn, which sounded even louder due to the quietness of the street. Aaron winced at the sudden noise, that didn’t stop until one of the windows of that house opened. Aaron rolled his eyes, understanding everything, when John Adams appeared at that window, with a sullen face.

“Knock it off!” screamed the man.

Aaron thought he heard Abigail’s scolding her husband’s shouting, but didn’t pay attention as he was looking at Alexander, who rolled down his window to stuck his head out.

“Maria and Laurens are going to inform me if you go to work today or not! And you better go! I may not be there today, but I’ll be tomorrow, and tomorrow will not be pretty if you don’t come in today, mister!” swore Alexander, before driving away at high speed.

“Was that necessary?”

Aaron watched, with a shy smile on his lips, as Adams almost fell down the window for how much he was gesticulating while he insulted Alexander’s name in the distance. He sighed a bit relieved when he saw Abigail’s hands coming from inside room, grabbing her husband by the hips to throw him inside their bedroom.

“Yes, yes, it was. Now, I’ll be in a better mood” answered Alexander.

“Then, do it as many times as you need it” laughed Aaron.
Hercules made breakfast while he heard Lafayette taking his usual long shower, but that morning he decided against turning the hot water off. He wanted to make amends and thought that would only make matters worse. As well as that Lafayette sometimes needed a hot shower to clear his ideas.

By the time he was finishing his ration of food, his boyfriend entered the kitchen already dressed up and prepared for their day. Lafayette took a seat at the side of the table, as usual, and ate the toasts Hercules had made for him.

“Thank you” he said, after he swallowed the first bite.

“You’re welcome” responded Hercules, sipping at his coffee.

None of them looked at each other directly but threw some glares in each other’s direction during all breakfast. It wasn’t until Hercules got up to wash his dishes and mug when Lafayette cleared his throat.

“I should’ve discussed the pet issue before bringing Godfred here” he admitted, with his eyes fixated on the empty plate in front of him. “I’m sorry”

“I should’ve talked to you more calmly about it” said Hercules, after he turned off the tap. “I’m sorry as well”

Laf nodded and waited until his boyfriend had turned around to look at him. “We can try to set a timetable for Godfred’s walks and baths. If after a few weeks we see it won’t work, I’ll look for a better home for him”

Hercules agreed. “Sounds fair for me”

“Good. Maybe we should make a raffle, like the one in the law firm, to choose another name for the poor dog” he added, with a sided smile.

Hercules laugh. “As long as it’s just as fair as back there. With Laurens’ luck, maybe we make it worse for the poor animal”

“You’re right”

Lafayette surprised his boyfriend with a peek on the cheek.
“I’ll wake John up, so he can have time to walk Godfred and go to work” he said.

“Alright. I’ll take care of those dishes for you, then” he said, pointing at the plate and glass Laf had used.

“Thank you”

Hercules hadn’t even had time to rinse the dish by the time Lafayette was back, with a sticky note in his hand.

“Turns out Johnny decided to walk the dog before we woke up” he explained, showing him the note.

“Uh. Miracles happen, I guess” commented Hercules. “Hope he doesn’t take a long walk as an excuse to miss work”

Laf rolled his eyes. “Can’t you have a bit of faith in the man for once?” he asked, crossing both arms.

“It’s difficult after all the disappointments”

“Well, he raised early today for the dog. It’s a beginning” said Laf, with a smile, always positive.

__________________________________________________________________________

Hercules and Lafayette waved hello to Maria when they arrived at the company, while she kept writing lively.

“How is the book going?” asked Lafayette.

“Nice” she replied, glaring up. “Today I’ve got an extra help” she added, taking out her phone to pass it to the couple.

Hercules was already laughing out loud at the middle of the text the girl showed them. “Is this real?”

“Aaron sent me that” she replied, giggling a bit. “So, I believe it”

Lafayette shook his head and gave the phone back to her. “And did Adams come in today?”

“Yep, but I think he locked himself up in his office” she explained, pointing up with her pen. “I’ve not seen him since this morning. And he doesn’t seem to be in the best mood either”

“If Alexander did what Aaron told you he did – which I absolutely believe – I can’t blame him entirely” said the Frenchman.
“That man deserves his own show” commented Hercules, still trying to control his fit of laughter.

“Step by step. First, let me finish this” said the girl, pointing at the papers scattered all over her counter.

The first door by the receptionist’s left opened, revealing a dishevelled and quite sleepy Peggy.

“Isn’t it a bit late to be chattering?” she complained.

“It’s 7.40, Pegs” commented Laf, with a cocked eyebrow.

“… But 7.40 in the morning or in the afternoon?” she asked.

“What do you think?” asked back the Frenchman, with both eyes half-closed.

“I don’t know, my watch broke two years ago and I haven’t got it fixed yet”

“In two years??” repeated Maria, blinking perplexed.

“Time is one of the chains from today’s slavery”

“Uuuh, ‘today’s slavery’” mocked Hercules. “Some liberal girl got laid several times back in college”

“Yes, I did” nodded the therapist.

“It’s 7.40 in the morning, Peggy” answered Lafayette, finally.

Peggy’s eyes grew wide. “Whaat? Really?? I’ve been sleeping the whole day of yesterday since I arrived?” She took out her phone. “Oh, my gosh, poor Betsey and Alex! They must be worried sick! I’m sure they’ve called like thousands…” Her face turned deadly serious as she looked at her phone. “Zero calls and texts” she said, out loud, with a hint of annoyance. “It’s good to see people love you”

“I’m sure they knew you were here” tried to comfort Laf.

“Yes, all alone in a building with a hole where robbers and other dangerous people could get in” commented Hercules, with a sided smile. His boyfriend elbowed his ribs. “Ow!”

“Don’t take him seriously, Pegs”

“What you should take seriously is that sleeping habit” commented Maria, with a frown. “It is not very normal, in my humble opinion”

“Yep, you’ve been sleeping more than you normally do. And I didn’t know that could be possible” agreed Hercules.

Peggy frowned in their direction. “That might be because now I must sleep for two!” she said, pointing at her belly.

“When do we have the next doctor’s appointment?” asked Lafayette.
“Why would I know?”

“Because you’re the pregnant woman!”

“She’s spent two years without watch, do you really think she knows in which day she lives in?” asked Maria.

“My God! What a bullying in the middle of the morning! I am going to make myself some breakfast” declared the girl, walking to her brother-in-law’s office. She knocked on his door.

“Alex is not there” explained Maria.

“Why? Is he dying?”

“Why do you say something like that with that nonchalantly attitude?” asked Lafayette, squinting his eyes with a bit of fear.

“He’s in a case with Aaron” explained Maria, returning her attention to her writings.

“And who is going to make me breakfast?”

“Youself?” asked Hercules, rhetorically.

“I’ll do it, Pegs, don’t worry” offered Lafayette.

“But let her make her own breakfast!” complained Hercules.

“It costs me nothing!” Laf defended himself, while waling to the break room with the girl.

Hercules shook his head. “There he goes again” he complained to Maria. “Just like with other man”

“Who? Laurens?” asked the girl.

“Who else?”

“I don’t know. Relationships are such a vast field nowadays, I thought maybe you were trying something new”

“No…”

Maria interrupted him, tapping her chin with the pen and with melancholy in her voice. “Oh, I remember that year of high school when I tried out a polyamorous relationship, ’cause I caught my then boyfriend cheating on me with that bitch cheerleader and I wanted to give them both a lesson”

“What did you do?” asked a fearful Hercules.

“Well, let’s say it wasn’t their best relationship, but it was one of the best years in high school for me” smirked Maria.

“… … I didn’t know that dark side of yours, Mari”

“There are plenty of things you don’t know about me, Herc” she said, wiggling her eyebrows.

Hercules took a few steps back and decided to go to his own office, without looking back. He stopped right in his tracks when he heard barking from the entrance.
“He didn’t…” he muttered, running downstairs. “He did not”

Hercules stood at the end of the stairs, his two arms hanging by his sides and his mind completely blank. Laurens had come to work with Godfred, who was now licking Maria’s face while she giggled.

“He’s so cute!” commented Maria, hugging the happy dog. “I don’t know you and I already love you!”

“He takes that from me” said Laurens, with a smile.

Hercules rolled his eyes and made his way to the both of them.

“What’s his name?” asked Maria, petting the dog’s head.

“Godfred”

“… … I think I love him a bit less” she commented, with a forced giggle.


“And why don’t you call him just Freddy, then?”

“Because that’s not original, duh!”

Laurens threw a whine when he felt the blow Hercules gave him right in the back of the neck. He rubbed the hurt part and threw daggers with the glare to his friend, while Maria contained her laughter. She looked at the dog, who was looking back at her with a funny glare as well.

“Why did you do that?!?” exclaimed Laurens.

“Because you’re unbelievable!” answered Hercules, raising both arms in the air.

“With a tap in the back it’d have been enough, gee!”

“What kind of man brings his dog to the office!”

“I felt bad for him when I thought about him all alone back at home. What did you want me to do? To miss another day of work?” Laurens shook his head and crossed his arms. “You’re disappointing me”

“Me?? Disappointing you?!” repeated Hercules, eyes wide. “You… You… This…” he stuttered, lost at words. He threw a complaint to the air. “Laf! Come here and help me out!”
There was a muffled sound from the break room. Peggy appeared at the door, with an uninterested face.

“Em… Your boyfriend says he can’t, he’s eating and he can’t talk with his mouth full” she explained in the Frenchman’s behalf.

“What???” shouted Hercules.

Peggy shrugged. “Don’t know. European posh shit?” she said, turning on her heels and entering the room again.

Hercules buried his face in his hands. “I feel so alone” he complained, hoofing back to the staircase. “So alone!” he screamed in his way up.

Laurens looked down at Maria. “I don’t get a single one right with this man…”

Maria got back up, the dog in her arms as she caressed him, nodding in fake understanding. She smiled brightly at the two men who got in the building.

“Good morning, James! Mr. Jefferson”

“Morning, Maria” nodded James. He looked surprised at the dog in her arms. “Did you get a dog?”

“It’s Johnny’s” she clarified.

“He’s Godfred” introduced Laurens.

“Ah… Nice…” said James, for the sake of good manners.

Thomas arched one eyebrow at the HR manager. “Nice? That’s a name proper of those priests who hit you in the back of the head with the hand they had a ring on”

“Gee, Thomas…” said James, rolling his eyes.

Laurens frowned in his direction. “Missing good old times, Lemongrab?”

“Stop calling me that, good-for-nothing” he complained, walking to his office.

“Stop being bitter, then” retorted Laurens.

“Jefferson, Mr. Adams let some documents on your desk. He told me he wanted you to do those” explained Maria.

“What documents?” asked Thomas, suspiciously.

“I don’t know, I am not a scientist*” said the girl, shrugging.
Thomas moved his tongue inside his mouth and the clicked it before storming in his office.

“Leave him be for today, his head’s bothering him” asked James to his two workmates.

“James, don’t tell things!” complained Thomas from the office. He got out with the stack of papers in his hands. “What is this?”

“The documents I talked to you about” answered Maria, boringly.

“I know! But I don’t have to do these! These are the CEO’s responsibility!”

“Thomas, don’t stress yourself” advised James.

“I was relaxed until this son of a bitch tried to spoil me another day! This ends here!” swore Thomas, running upstairs.

“Thomas, come back here!” called James, following him.

“Hullabaloo! Hullabaloo!” screamed Laurens, running upstairs as well.

Maria followed suit, putting the dog down and giving him a caress. She took her phone and disappeared from the dog’s eyeshot. Godfred turned his attention to Peggy’s door, wide open, and made his way inside the therapist’s office.

Hercules stuck his head out his door when he heard the commotion in front of his office. He saw everybody except Peggy and Lafayette there, with Thomas banging on the door, furious.

“Thomas, let it go. I’ll help you do that, don’t create problems” persuaded James, with a frown of worry.

“Don’t cool things down yet, or I’ll have come for nothing” complained Laurens.

“What’s going on?” asked Hercules, walking to the group.

“We’re going to have an office fight” explained Maria.

“Ah, true, it’s Friday and nobody has attacked someone yet” nodded the CIO.

“Thomas…” tried James one more time.

“Adams, open the goddamned door!” demanded Thomas.

“The door you’re banging on is turned off or out of range at this moment. Try it later” mocked Adams, from the other side.
“Are you going to laugh at me as well!?” asked Thomas, with arms in akimbo.

“Yep”

“Adams, what you’ve given me are your responsibility to fill!”

“After the fiasco you did yesterday, I doubt you could scold anyone in here about responsibility” shot back Adams.

“That wasn’t my…!” Thomas tried to defend himself.

“Make it up for me doing that. Doing something at all”

“But these are not my field! You’ve even given me Hamilton’s paperwork!”

“Bf, you’re not getting out of here today…” commented Hercules.

“God have mercy” Maria shook her head.

“Please…” said James, rolling his eyes at their comments.

“Call him if you don’t understand something” proposed Adams, the smirk clear in his voice.

Thomas clicked his tongue. “Why doesn’t he do it?”

“Is he here today?”

“No, but…”

“Someone would have to get it done”

“Why me?” inquired Thomas, crossing his arms.

“I’m doing you a favour here”

“A favour?” repeated the secretary, blinking dumbfounded.

“Yes. I don’t know if you’re aware, but people who do nothing at all are usually fired. I am saving your work”

“Firing me?” said Thomas, shocked. “You can’t fire me!”

“Until Washington comes, I decide. And I don’t think he’d miss you much”

“Well, he’s right there…” said James, putting a hand on his friend’s arm. “Let it go. I’ll help you with it”

Thomas groaned and looked nastily at the closed door before turning on his heels. James sighed, relieved.

“You’re welcome!” shouted Adams, quite indignant.

“Son of a…” muttered Thomas, turning back.
James stopped him rapidly. “No, no! Let him be! Let him be!”

“In the end, I came here for nothing…” complained Laurens.

Hercules looked at him with eyes half-closed. “John, do you want another blow in your head?” he threatened.

A shrill scream was heard from downstairs, turning their whole attention to it.

“Peggy!” said Maria, worried, as she sprinted downstairs.

The rest followed her. Once downstairs, they found Peggy kneeling on the floor, shivering and with her breath caught in her throat. Lafayette was behind her, rubbing circles in her back while looking inside the therapist’s office, biting his bottom lip.

Hercules, having a bad feeling about the whole thing, ran to where the two of them were kneeling and threw a glare inside the room. He half-closed his eyes in annoyance when he saw Godfred by the feet of Peggy’s mattress, completely destroyed with scratches and holes all over it.

The rest of the staff gathered at their backs, shocked at the image. They turned their heads to the therapist, who was at the verge of tears. Lafayette and Hercules exchanged a glare.

“And that’s why you don’t bring animals into work” said Hercules, throwing an accusatory glare to his roommate.

“Yeah, I see it now” nodded Laurens, scratching the back of his head.

Peggy’s glare sharpened at his attitude and jumped to her feet in a millisecond, startling Lafayette in the act, who crawled back in fear.

“Asshole! Your mutt has killed what I’ve loved the most in my whole life!” she screamed, red from fury and impotence.

“And your sisters?” asked James.

“The ones who haven’t called her, though she spent the whole night out?” asked Hercules, rhetorically.

“Good point…” nodded Maria.
“What I’m going to do with my life now?!” kept screaming Peggy.

“Girl, relax, it was only a mattress” said Laurens, waving one hand.

“It was the mattress!” she corrected.

“A 300 dollars mattress” added Maria.

“Huh, some little immigrant is going to have a heart attack when he knows” commented Hercules, rubbing his temples.

“That makes me feel a bit better” said Thomas, before walking in his office and closing the door behind him.

“Then, you’d complain about him not talking to you…” complained James, under his breath.

“Nooo, nooo” Peggy shook her head in the CIO’s direction. “Your friend is going to pay me!” She turned to Laurens and stretched her hand. “Pay me” she demanded.

“No!” refused Laurens, frowning. “I don’t have to pay you anything. In fact, I should be rewarded: I finally eliminated our therapist’s distraction so she can do some work” he explained.

“What an ease he has to change reality to his favour” commented James. “Why are you and Adams not friends?”

“Because he burnt him alive” answered Hercules.

“Ah, true”

“We’re sorry, Peggy” said Lafayette, finally getting up and walking to the enraged girl. “I promise you we’ll pay you”

“‘We’?” repeated Hercules. “What do you have? A mouse in your pocket or something?”

“Herc…”

“I don’t want to know anything about this” he declared, turning back to the staircase. “Let him handle it”

“But…!”

“NO!” hollered Peggy. “I want him to pay me!” She stepped closer to the freckled man. “Or there will be consequences” she promised.

“Oooh, I’m so afraaaid” mocked Laurens, turning his back on her. “Sleeping Useless is coming for me, what will I do?”

“Johnny, please, don’t make it worse” said Laf with trembling voice, seeing how Peggy’s face was turning redder.

Maria huffed and turned to James. “My nicknames leave quite a mark” she commented, proud of herself.

Peggy raised her fist in a solemn manner. “As God is my witness, I’ll get my revenge!” She bent down to the dog at their feet and pointed at him with anger. “And you’ll go down!”
Godfred looked at her finger and then licked her face once, before running back to Laurens. The other three persons in the hallway said ‘aaw’, moved.

“Don’t ‘aw’ him! He’s the devil in disguise!” complained Peggy.

The door of Jefferson’s office opened suddenly, revealing the frowning secretary holding the phone.

“Could you knock it off? I’m trying to make a call”

Peggy pointed angrily at him as well. “You’re going down as well!”

“I’m already down with no way back up, darling; you’re late to the party”

And he slammed his door shut.

____________________________________

Alexander had to make a stop at a gas station when they were a few miles from the law firm they were supposed to meet with Prevost. He was glad to see they still had plenty of time to arrive calmly and discuss the case a bit before the agreed hour arrived. His hands squeezed the wheel as he parked beside the gas pump, the air suddenly caught in his throat. Alexander tried to swallow the lump in his throat casually, while he threw a sideways glare to Aaron, finding the man staring back at him. It seemed he had said something to him.

“What?” he asked, clearing his throat afterwards.

“I said I was going to gas up the car, if that’s okay with you?”

“Yes, of course” nodded Alex, giving his friend the keys of the car.

Aaron gave him an odd look before getting out the car. Alexander ignored it as best as he could. The ringing of his phone distracted the two men, thankfully.

“You should turn off your phone while in the gas station” advised Aaron.
“I love living on the edge” said Alexander, looking for his phone inside his briefcase.

Aaron rolled his eyes and went to refuel the car. Alexander answered the phone without looking who was it. He didn’t want to lose more time by looking for the glasses as well.

“Hello?”

“Hamilton? It’s Jefferson”

Alexander half-closed his eyes. Maybe it was time to rethink that habit of answering the phone without looking the ID first.

“What do you want?” he asked, dryly.

“I’ve got your paperwork here and…”

“What are you doing with my paperwork?” inquired Alexander, annoyed.

“Adams’s given it to me and…”

“Can’t you two give me a break? I’ve got more important matters to attend today than your childish tries of getting me fired” he spat.

“… … Hamilton, I can do your job as well as you can” said Jefferson, indignantly.

“Sure you can. That’s why you’re the secretary and I am head of the finances”

“Look, I don’t want to fight. I just need you to tell me how to do this, so I can…”

“Ah, do you mean my way of doing the maths of the office? Aka: the ways of a man who doesn’t know a shit about what he’s talking about?”

“Hamilton, that was almost three years ago” said Thomas, his frown clear in his tone of voice.

“Please, you don’t know the day I just had yesterday…”

“Ah, but you know the word ‘please’?” mocked Alexander, with a little smile. “Well, who would’ve had thought!”

“Hamilton, this is not funny. Can we put whatever happened between us aside for a moment…”?

“No. Not gonna happen any time soon, I’m afraid” admitted Alexander.

“Hamilton, I swear I can’t…”

“And I swear that I don’t care. At all” said Alexander, surely. “Now, if you don’t mind, I’m in a gas station, and I wouldn’t want to prove the myth of the phones and the gas right by blowing myself up for a man like you”

“Hamilton, don’t hang…”
“Bye. Have a nice day”

Alexander clicked the red button and turned off his phone, putting it inside his briefcase right after. Aaron appeared at the passenger’s window just then, hanging his keys back.

“There”

“Thanks” Alex put the keys in the ignition again. “I turned off the phone, Dad, so don’t worry” he mocked.

“Good” nodded Aaron, half-closing his eyes. “Who was it?”

“Nobody important”

“Do you want something from the store?” asked Aaron suddenly, pointing at his backs.

“Eh, no, thank you”

“Have you eaten something before coming to pick me up?” he asked, with one hand on his hip.

“Well, no, but…”

“I’ll buy for two” commented Aaron, gaining an eye-roll from the shorter man.

“Wait” Alexander stopped him, taking his wallet out his briefcase.

“No, no, Alex, let me pay you the gas and the rest of…” Aaron objected as soon as he saw the man’s intentions.

Alexander rolled his eyes again and handed him the wallet. “No. My car, my gas, my money”

“My case, my problem” argued Aaron, taking a step back.

“My money” insisted Alexander, throwing the wallet out the window and making Aaron catch it by instinct. “No room for discussion”

“You already…”

“No”

“…” Aaron frowned down at him but sighed in defeat. “I’ll pay you back” he decided, turning around.

“No, you won’t” Alexander shook his head.

“You’re more stubborn than an old mule!” complained Aaron, walking to the store.

“Thank you!” responded Alexander, with a sided smile. He sighed as he leaned back on his seat. “Fuck, I’m such a good person. I deserve a monument”
Aaron chose to buy a bag of chips to share with Alexander and a Wonder Woman keychain for Theodosia. He greeted the attendant when he walked to the counter to pay, receiving a polite ‘good morning’ from the old man. The door dinged when another customer walked in. Aaron looked with a bit of pity at the dishevelled middle-aged man that entered the store.

“Morning, Bob, how are you doing?” asked the attendant, with a polite smile.

The man shrugged in his direction and scanned the shelves, ignoring their presence.

“Poor fella” commented the old man, shaking his head. “The old missus kicked him out four months ago and he hasn’t gotten back on his feet since”

“Ah…” was all Aaron could say. He hated the small chat, and today he didn’t want to cooperate at all.

“I’m not saying the man is a saint” kept gossiping the man. “But broke his ex-wife’s trust too many times”

“Aha…”

“He didn’t cheat, but it was failure after failure. Bob is a good guy, but he doesn’t have a will to fight and that can desperate anyone”

“… Yes…” said Aaron, handing the man the money.

“He kept promising her he could do things, and, in the end, he was always at the same spot. One thing is to have patience, and another thing is that” kept commenting the attendant, taking the money and giving Aaron his change.

“Yes…” replied Aaron, with tiny voice.

“The worst thing you can do to a woman” said the man, lowering his tone in case Bob could hear him. “is fail her”

“… …”

“Well” he said, talking loudly again, as if the previous conversation didn’t happen at all. “I think this is all. Have a good…”

The man stopped mid-sentence when he raised his glare and saw nobody standing in front of him anymore. He looked at both sides, seeing the door closing slowly. Bon looked in his direction and both shrugged.
Alexander was startled when he heard the attendant coming out the store, with a bag of chips and a keychain in his hand.

“Sir! You forgot your purchase! Sir!”

Alex arched one eyebrow and looked in the rear mirror. He clicked his tongue in annoyance when he saw Aaron running in the opposite direction. He started the car and turned around, leaving the gas station and the confused attendant behind.

“I can’t believe this man” muttered Alexander, shaking his head in disbelief. In a blink of an eye, he was by Aaron’s side. “Aaron” he called. “Aaron, what do you think you are doing?”

“I can’t do it, Alexander!” said Aaron, refusing to look in his direction. He fished his wallet out his pocket and threw it back at him. “Here, take it! I don’t deserve it! I don’t deserve anything!”

“Not the wallet, that’s for sure, it’s mine” agreed Alexander. “Aaron… Aaron, stop”

“No, no, I can’t do it”

“What’s gotten into you?”

“Theodosia is going to divorce me, and she will take Theo with her and I will never see her again” said Aaron, anxiously.

“… How did you go from buying chips to think your wife wants to divorce you and take the girl away from you?” asked Alexander, perplexed.

“I am a failure! I’ve spent my whole life doing nothing but waiting and losing chances! There’s no person who can stand that for too long”

“Man, they said the same about me and my bad temper and look who I married… And I also dated 28 more persons when I was younger. You can’t believe things like that”

“Twenty-eight?” repeated Aaron, turning his head to him without running. “More than me?”

“That doesn’t matter now” Alex shook his head. “Aaron, please, stop”

“No”

“Stop, please, you’re making a fool of yourself”

“I don’t care”

“We’re going to be late to the meeting if you don’t stop this nonsense”

“I don’t mind. I am not going”
“You are”

“No”

“Yes”

“I don’t deserve to take this case, I’ll ruin it again”

“No, you won’t” reassured Alexander, surprisingly gentle. “Aaron, please, get in the car and let’s talk this out”

“No! You’ll never catch me!” declared Aaron, frowning in his direction.

“I’ll never catch you? Aaron I’m in a car and you’re by foot. I only need to press the gas pedal a little bit and I’ll be out of your sight in a blink of an eye!”

“Do it” challenged Aaron, serious. He returned his glare forwards. “Tell my wife and daughter that I love them”

“Aaron…”

“No, don’t tell them anything, that could be confusing…”

“Aaron”

“Well, do whatever you want. You are better at choosing than me”

“Aaron, I am not going to say goodbye to Theodosia and Theo for you. Stop being an idiot and get in the goddamned car” demanded Alexander, starting to lose his patience.

“I’ll move to Canada” planned Aaron, out loud. “I’ll change my name and I’ll let my hair grow”

“Ah, but you can have hair?” asked Alex, raising a curious eyebrow.

“I think a wig will be a faster solution”

“The faster solution is stop running and getting in the car!” ordered Alexander.

“No!”

“Aaron!”

“Catch me if you can!”

Aaron sprinted suddenly, directed to the tree he had in front of him. He climbed it up.

“My God, I work with T’Challa…” he commented, quite impressed. He frowned and braked quite aggressively. “I don’t get paid enough for this!” he complained, unbuckling his seatbelt and jumping out the car. “I don’t even get paid at all, fuck!”

Alexander ran until he was at the feet of the tree. He squinted his eyes, looking for his workmate and kicking the sidewalk in frustration when he found him sat on one of the branches.
“Aaron, get down!” he ordered.

“No” refused the lawyer, frowning down at him.

“Aaron, this is stupid”

“Leave me, then”

“No! You sitting on a tree is stupid!” Alex sighed, frustrated. “Come down, please, let’s talk about this”

“No”

“Since when are you so stubborn and childish?”

“Since I realised I am doing more bad than good”

“Aaron, nothing wrong is gonna happen as long as you move your arse and get back in the car!”

Alexander’s screams startled a mother and her child, who stopped at the sidewalk across where he was standing. Screaming at a tree. Alex felt his cheeks burning from a blush of embarrassment, especially when he saw the woman taking her little child in her arms, throwing him scary glares as she kept walking, more cautiously.

“What are you looking at, ma’am?” spat Alexander, turning completely towards her. “Can’t a man scream at a tree at eight in the morning in a public area without snoopy people pestering?”

That made the woman trot as far as she could get from him.

“That was rude” commented Aaron.

Alexander turned back at him, both hands in his hips. “And this” he said, pointing directly at him. “It’s not professional. At all”

“I don’t care. I never wanted to be a lawyer. I wanted to go to Arts School” he admitted.

“Are you serious right now?” shouted Alexander.

“My uncle never let me and made me study Laws…” kept telling Aaron, now with a sad tone.

“Oh, my gosh…” complained Alexander, passing a hand through his face.

“Man, I’m opening up with you right now”

“The therapist in my marriage is Eliza. Everybody stop telling me your sob stories, I don’t care about them”
“And then the disagreeable it’s me…”

“You’re not very easy to like right now” Alex sighed. “Aaron, come on, get down”

“No”

“Please?” tried Alex.

“No. I’m going to ruin everything”

“You can’t know that”

“Yes, I can. I ruined it once, and I’ll do it again. I can’t do that to her”

“Isn’t it a bit late to be worrying over that?” inquired Alexander, tilting his head to the side.

“Yes. See? Another thing I’ve ruined. Just like what happened between you and Jefferson”

“What happened between Jefferson and me was his fault, for being an arrogant selfish” explained Alexander, frowning at the memory.

“I should’ve let you take the case completely” lamented Aaron.

“You know I can’t do that, Aaron” said Alexander, with a tiny voice.

“Yes, you can. Between the two you were always the one who came into any room and it was your oyster* in a second”

“Yes, I used to be that” snapped Alexander. “Now? I’ll be lucky if I can get in that meeting room without panicking. I’ve spent the whole trip anxious because I am not sure if I’ll be able to do it” he confessed.

“But I thought you took care of Adams’ cases when he was sick” said Aaron, frowning in confusion.

“I did his paperwork and delivered it to his clients sometimes” he explained. “I haven’t put a foot inside a courtroom since what happened with Maria. Jesus, I haven’t put a foot inside a meeting room to discuss anyone’s conditions or claims either. Aaron, I’m in fucking deep shit”

“Really?”

“Look at me: I’m begging an adult man to come down a tree for free. For free. I didn’t even know what ‘free’ meant until three years ago”

“…”

Alexander looked down in shame. “I’m not even the shadow of the man I used to be. I don’t know if that’s good or bad, but it’s not reassuring right now. Since that happened, I’m always feeling between a rock and a hard place, hesitating in every step I take or decision I have to make. Trapped in a fucking office, doing maths knowing I could do more, something to help people but unable to because…”

His confession was interrupted suddenly when Aaron got down the branch, landing on his feet and running to the car, without looking back. Alexander stopped mid-sentence, watching him in disconcertment as Aaron jumped in the passenger’s seat. Alex stood there, processing what just
happened. Aaron stuck his head out the window when he saw not movement on his part.

“Come on, Alexander, we’ll be late” he hurried.

That made Alex come back to reality. “But weren’t you having a crisis!?” he demanded.

“I’m over it”

The imaginary gears in Alexander’s brain moved frantically, leading him to a conclusion that made him angrier than his workmate’s previous stubbornness.

Aaron honked, with urgency. “Come on, Alex!”

“… … … Son of a bitch” concluded Alexander, walking slowly towards the car.

Aaron spent the whole trip ignoring his deadly sideways glare.

Thank goodness, James had spent enough time working with Hamilton to do part of the absent man’s work while he filled Adams’ part of work. He felt the need to sign the bottom of the documents when he was almost finished but tried not to as those were going to go to Washington and didn’t want to give explanations as to why the secretary was signing the CEO’s paperwork.

Thomas had almost finished when he found another bump in his road. He needed the reports Lee had written for that month. The only ones he didn’t have within his power as Hamilton had handed them to Washington himself at that hellish week he was in charge of everything. Well, at least they existed and he didn’t have to call the man. He wasn’t in the mood to talk to Lee right then.

He wasn’t in the mood to talk to Adams either, but it would be better than trying to persuade Hamilton to help him out with this. He got up, excusing himself to James, and walked out the room, with the papers he had left to check and fill.

“Jefferson” Maria called from her counter.

“Yes?”

“Are you going to the break room?”
“No, I’m going to talk to Adams”

“But you have the break room right in front of you right now, right?”

“… Well, technically yes, but I’m not…”

“Be cool and bring me one of my juices, please?” she interrupted, blinking innocently.

“No, I’m busy right now”

“Pretty please?”

“What are you? Four?”

“And what are you? An asshole?”

“Now, I will not bring you anything” he decided, walking upstairs.

“Oh…” she complained, lowering her glare. She smiled brightly again when she saw Peggy coming in the building. “Hi, there, Pegs!”

“If you want juice, go fetch it yourself” spat the girl.

“Well, aren’t we all in a great mood today?” complained the receptionist.

Thomas walked down the stairs again, with a cocked eyebrow. “Maria, have you seen Adams?”

“Just as much as your manners”

“Girl, what’s your problem?” asked Thomas, indignantly.

“None. It’s you the one who have a problem, always picking on me”

“I don’t pick on you. I’m just sick of so many laziness in here”

“Talked the working-class hero”

“Then, you’ll say I’ve have it in for you”

“Because it’s true!”

“I only talk to you when necessary and to ask you important things about work. You are the one…”

“You know, in all this time, you’d have been able to bring me by juice already”

Thomas clicked his tongue in annoyance as Maria crossed her arms upon her chest, with a cocky smile that easily read ‘I won’. Whatever retort Thomas had prepared for her, was drowned down his throat when Laurens made his way down the stairs, hoofing on the steps. He threw a hateful glare to both the secretary and the receptionist before turning his back on them and punching the break room door, startling the people who were eating in there.

“Who. Was. It?” he asked, frowning at the three men.
Lafayette and Hercules exchanged a glare of confusion.

“Who was what, John?” asked Hercules.

“You know pretty well what I’m talking about” said Laurens, squinting his eyes at his friend.

“No, that’s why I’m asking…”

“Where is Godfred?” asked Laurens, raising his voice considerably.

“Who is Godfred?”

Thomas frowned at the sound of that voice and made his way into the break room.

“Adams, what the hell are you doing in here?” he asked, arms in akimbo.

“Eating my lunch”

“Eating your lunch, hidden in the corner of the room?”

“I’ll eat my lunch wherever the hell I want to, duh”

Thomas decided to go straight to the point. “Adams, I need Lee’s reports to end this paperwork”

“Good for you”

“Good for me, no. Where are they?”

“Why would I know?”

“Why… Because Washington and Angelica gave everything to you so you could take care of it in their absence! And still I am the one doing it! At least, look for those documents for me!”

“My God, why must I always get you out of a tight spot?” complained Adams, sighing fed up.

Thomas was shocked at first. “You, getting me out of tight spots?” he repeated, scowling slowly. “You…!”

“Can we focus on the main problem here?” interrupted Laurens, exasperated.

“Yes, of course. Why would anyone want to talk about work in their workplace?” spat Thomas.

Laurens shot him a glare of pure disgust. “Shut up, I hate talking to you and you in general”

“The feeling is mutual, believe me”

“Good”

“What’s happening now?” asked Madison, walking to the noisy group with Maria, who was holding
a notebook and a pen.

“Here comes the Mary Angst*” complained Thomas.

“What’s happening is that *this man* accused Laurens, pointing at Hercules, who stopped his cookie midway to his mouth. “has taken Godfred away from me!”

“Excuse me?” said Hercules, arching one eyebrow.

Lafayette turned to his boyfriend rapidly. “You what?”

“I nothing!” Hercules defended himself.

“You everything!” shouted Laurens.

“Such a great level on the English language” commented Maria. “It’s clear we all went to college”

“Hercules, where is Godfred?” asked Lafayette, serious.

“I don’t know!” assured the man.

“Liar!” insulted Laurens. “You’ve hated the poor angel since he came into my life! You can’t bare seeing me happy!”

“Excuse me, but I love to see my friends happy!” argued Hercules, offended. “Especially when they are far away from me”

“Ugh. *C’est reparti*… [Here we go again]” complained Lafayette, under his breath.

“See! He’s full of resentment and hatred!” said Laurens, looking at his workmates for support while he pointed accusatory at his roommate again. “He’s gonna explode with so much hatred!”

“Well, let’s see if when the day comes, you’re close enough so you can blow up with me, you ungrateful brat!” hollered Hercules, getting up from his seat with a punch on the table.

“Don’t mistreat the office furniture…” said Lafayette, quite exhausted.

“True, why don’t you go to hate each other outside?” said Thomas, alternating his glare between the angry friends. “I’ve got important matters to discuss with Adams, over there…”

“Leave me alone” complained the man.

“Adams, I need…” tried to say Thomas, frowning enraged.

“I’ll go nowhere until Godfred is back!” declared Laurens.

“Of course you won’t, because you’re not coming back home with us!” decided Hercules.

“Hercules, *s’il te plait*…”

“No!” screamed Hercules, red from anger. “This ends here! I won’t tolerate this man to accuse me of things that are not true!”

“Hercules, please” said Lafayette, gently, getting up and putting a hand on his boyfriend’s arm. “Tell us where Godfred is and this will end here. There’s no need to…”

Hercules frowned at his words. “You don’t believe me?!”
“Hercules, it’s true that you made quite the fuss when Godfred first arrived”

“Why do you always have to take his side!?”

“Because he knows I’m right” answered Laurens.

“You shut up!” ordered Hercules.

“No! Tell me where my dog is!”

“I don’t have a clue where the fucking dog is, John. If I had been the one who took him away from you, I’d have taken him to a pound or an animal shelter. And I’d be telling you right in the face, enjoying your tantrum”

“Jesus Christ…” said James, in bewilderment.

“See how he’s evil?” asked Laurens.

“I’m fed up, that’s what I am” said Hercules, looking disgustingly at his friend.

“Where is my dog? Fourth time I ask”

“Ask all the times you want. I don’t know where that dog is!”

“I have the dog” said a voice from the hallway.

They looked behind their backs, finding Peggy sat on a swivel chair, with her back turned on them. She slowly turned around, hands clasped and deadly serious.

“… Isn’t that my chair?” asked Thomas, squinting his eyes.

“Yes, I borrowed it for my grand entrance” said Peggy.

“Nobody respects anything in here…”

“Peggy, where is Godfred?” asked Laurens, walking to be standing at the doorway.

“The poor animal, with that name I can’t take his disappearance seriously” commented Madison, on the quiet.

“Same…” agreed Maria.

“Godfred is in my house” answered Peggy, calmly.

“Your sister’s house, you’ll mean” corrected Thomas, upset at the girl.

“Go photocopy, important people are talking” spat the therapist.

“When did you take Godfred out of this building?” asked Maria, confused. “I’ve been sitting at the counter the whole day!”

“Being invisible has its perks” responded the girl, with her glare fixated on Laurens. She got up from the chair and walked to where Laurens was standing, dedicating her a glare of pure hatred. “Godfred
is and will stay in my house until you pay me what my mattress cost, or until you buy me a new one. Whatever you like the most” she explained. “You’ve got three days to pay me back, or you’ll never see the dog again. Besides, he kinds of likes me and I’m starting to like him too. He’s a very good boy. This afternoon, after work, I was going to buy him some toy and all”

“MONSTER!” screamed Laurens, hurt.

“Peggy, that’s a kidnapping. Are we all going crazy in here?!” screamed Lafayette, looking at his surroundings, in complete shock.

“No! He is the one who’s crazy!” shouted Peggy, pointing at Laurens, with anger. “Just like everybody else in here! This law firm is like the hotel from ‘The Shining’!” she said, turning on her heels and walking down the hall.

“I’m afraid, she’s going to fetch an axe!” said Maria, worried. “I’m afraid! I am afraid!”

“Well, now that we’ve been through the madness of the week, let’s focus on more important matters” said Thomas.

He turned on his heels and walked to Adams, still on the corner of the room. Laurens had begun to cry while Maria and Madison tried to cheer him up, sharing a few glares, while Lafayette let himself drop on the chair, his face buried in his hands. Hercules simply looked at his crying roommate with boredom.

“Adams, I just need you to look for Lee’s reports and give them to me” repeated Thomas.

“Why don’t you wait until Washington comes back and you ask him for them?” asked Adams, with tedium.

“No, I’m almost finished. I just need those reports to fill what’s left”

“Alright, get in my office and look for them. You’ve got my permission” shrugged Adams.

Thomas frowned. “I don’t want your permission, I want you to look for them and give them to me”

“Thomas, he already said…” said James, sensing the tension between the two ex-friends.

“No!” interrupted Jefferson, upset. “I’ve been working non-stop today and he’s done anything but…”

“My God, Thomas, I’ve told you that’s okay. Go to my office and get the goddamned reports, I don’t care!” said Adams, raising his voice.

Thomas clenched his free fist. “I don’t care, I don’t care…” he mocked, gaining a dead glare form the lawyer and a nervous one from his friend. “You need to care, Adams! You must start to care!” he scolded.

“Why? Because you say so?” retorted Adams, challenging.

“No! Because the world is going to demand you to, Adams! Because life will demand you to at some point!”
“You’re overwhelming meeeeee” whined Adams.

“Man, I’m trying to help you. *After all you’ve done to me*, I still don’t want you to sit while your life passes you by” said Thomas, totally serious and with a hint of worry.

“*You’re overwhelming me*” repeated Adams, dryly.

“Adams, seriously, maybe this attitude was ‘alright’ when you were little, back in school, high school… Even in college. I never minded doing something on your behalf. But for God’s sake, Adams, you’re forty-four years old. It’s not okay to be like this anymore, now it’s *ridiculous*”

“Go for the papers and let me be, Thomas” advised Adams.

“It’s not about the papers anymore, Adams. It’s about your attitude towards life”

“Fucking heeeell…”

“Adams, please…”

“You are overwhelming me”

“Well, I see that’s what people must do to you!” snapped Thomas. “Overwhelming you! Because when anyone lets you a bit loose you…”

Adams talked at the same time that him: “Be carefuuuuul, Thomas, be careful” he warned darkly, all of a sudden.

Thomas stopped mid-sentence. The rest of the people surrounding them alternating their glares between the two, quite scared for the dead silence the room was sunken into. Thomas looked at Adams in shock, at first, before saying:

“Excuse me, what did you say?”

“Be careful, be very careful, Thomas” repeated Adams, with a darker tone than before.

Thomas spent another few seconds of shocked silence, looking up and down at the man in front of him. Something snapped inside his brain, and the surprise in his face turned into pure anger in a millisecond.

“Sit down, John, you fat motherfucker!” screamed Thomas, at the top of his lungs, throwing the stack of papers to the floor afterwards.

“Oh, gosh, today is that day of the year when he loses it” complained James, shaking his head in fear.

“But who the hell do you think you are, man? What the hell is this? ‘Be careful, be very careful’!?!” said Thomas, raising his voice considerably at each sentence. “What is this now? Who do you think you are to threaten me, *or anyone in here*, like that?”
“I am not threatening you. I am warning you.”

“I was the one who was warning you, mister. And with good manners, though you’ve been a horrible friend to me, though you’ve treated me like if I were nothing the whole day of yesterday and half of today!”

“Yeah, sure” said Adams, rolling his eyes.

“‘Be careful, be very careful’… Careful with what? What do you think you are now, a Corleone or what? Tinpot mafioso…”

Maria smiled slowly as she began to record the whole thing.

“This’s been one of the best weeks” she commented, under her breath.

“He doesn’t lift a finger even when he needs to point at something he wants to be handed to, and he dares to go around threatening people. People who help him despite how bad he treats them” kept criticising Thomas, enraged. “Social scourge, good-for-nothing. You are the fucking embarrassment of human race; if the homo sapiens had known about your existence on time, they all would’ve killed themselves without hesitation to save the Earth from people like you.

“Your dead roll in their graves with shame each time you breathe. Sometimes I don’t know what’s worse: the fact that you have the same right to vote than I do, or that you were once the fastest spermatozoon and that means there can be someone worse than you someday. You are more useless than an ashtray in a motorbike, a social waste, a hypocrite crafty that will never be more than that in all your pathetic, sad and miserable life!”

Thomas was panting by the time he had finished his ramble. Maria was red from contained laughter as she recorded it all; Laf and Madison shared a shocked expression as they watched his furious friend looking daggers at Adams’ direction; Hercules had taken a couple of steps back, fearful of the secretary’s reaction. Laurens had stopped crying and was looking at Jefferson in awe, just as Peggy, who had come back when she heard the screams.

Adams’ puzzled expression mirrored Thomas’ frown after a moment and he opened his mouth to retort. But he never got the chance to shoot back, as the floor beneath them started to tremble, along with some objects that were on the table or the counter.

“Earthquake!” said Hercules, after the initial shock. “Get to the meeting room and hide under the tables!” he ordered, dragging Lafayette down with him and did as he said.

The rest lost no time in running to the meeting room as fast as they could, and hid themselves
under the large table, covering their heads for instinct and squeezing their eyes shut. They heard a
loud noise coming from upstairs, that made Laurens and Peggy to hug intuitively.

“Oh, John, if I don’t survive this, I want to say that I’m sorry” said the girl, regretful.

“Well, if I survive, I want you to know that I’ll do everything within my power to take revenge on
you” promised the boy, with the same tiny voice.

Peggy looked harshly at him by the time everything went back to normal. They waited a few
moments, gasping from nervousness, and none of them get out from under the table until Lafayette
and Hercules walked in the room.

“Are you all alright?” asked Lafayette, concerned.

“It’s alright, it wasn’t a big one” said Hercules.

They crawled out and got up. Lafayette helped Peggy, Hercules helped Maria and she, Adams. Thomas helped James to get on his feet, while the man tried to catch his breath for the sudden startle, nodding at his friend’s question about if he was feeling alright. Peggy looked at herself in the meantime and smiled evilly as she looked at Laurens back on his feet by Hercules’ help.

“Ha! I am still alive! Take that!” she laughed, with superiority, as she flipped him the bird.

“Who was going to die because of that?” asked Adams, with mockery.

“You didn’t look that sure when you stormed out the break room by elbows” commented Thomas.

“What was that noise?” asked Maria, interrupting the quarrel.

“You heard it too? I thought it was my imagination” said James, when he had calmed down considerably.

“No, no, we heard it too” nodded Hercules.

“It came from upstairs” said Lafayette.

They went upstairs in curiosity to see if their minds were tricking them or not. Hercules commented it had to be nothing to worry about, as the earthquake wasn’t the kind of create enough damage.

He was just as speechless as the rest of the staff when they reached the upstairs floor and saw
that part of the wall at the end of the hall had fallen down, the floor now covered in dust and debris.

“Huh. In the end, Alex was right: the building fell down without him” commented Laurens, his worried tone making his try to light the mood being in vain.

“Thank goodness nobody is ever in this floor” said Hercules, sincerely.

“How did this happen?” asked Laf, with tiny voice.

“There’s so much bad vibes in here that the building couldn’t take it…” commented Maria.

“Now it’s gonna be my fault that the wall fell” complained Thomas.

“Can we call Washington already?” deadpanned James.

Eliza had invited Theodosia and her daughter to her house that day, entertaining her with conversation about movies, books or whatever thing that could come up to her mind. Though her friend never stopped being nervous over how things might have been going with her ex and current husband, Eliza kept trying and she saw a gleam of gratitude in the woman’s eyes.

Eventually, the front door opened, and Alex and Aaron came into the living room, where they had been talking about the dog that appeared out of nowhere and that Eliza was planning on keeping. The kids had already seen it, so that could be a good way to try to convince Alexander, who refused to have animals at home.

Theodosia was the first one to get up. She ran to her husband and hugged him by the shoulders before speaking to him. Eliza followed her actions right after. She frowned a bit at the serious expressions on Alex and Aaron’s faces. She put a comforting hand on Theodosia once she had finished hugging her husband.

“How did it go?” she asked, clasping her hands, hopeful.

Aaron and Alex exchanged another serious glare. Eliza took a few steps backwards and took the tissue box she had hidden behind the cushions in case everything went wrong. She was walking back to her friend when the men’s expressions changed for two bright smiles.

“Augustine will be living with us as soon as he gets back from Switzerland” explained Aaron.
“Congratulations, Theodosia” said Alexander, sincerely.

Theodosia squeaked and then laughed in happiness when she made sure she had heard correctly. Eliza was taken aback at first for the change of mood and didn’t have enough time to hide the box once again when Theodosia turned around, jumping in happiness. She looked at the tissues box and threw a confused glare in her direction, still unable to stop laughing. Eliza hesitated a moment before she decided to throw tissues in the air, laughing as well.

“Hahaha! I didn’t find confetti!” she excused herself. “I knew you could do it!” she added, looking at the two men, while throwing tissues.

“Thank you so much, Alex!” said Theodosia, suddenly, hugging the shorter man with all her might.

“I barely did anything” said Alex, returning the hug.

“You supported us. Insistently. Not everybody can be that stubborn” said Aaron, tapping him on the shoulder as a sign of gratitude.

“I’ve seen worse” he said.

They shared a glare of understanding. Theodosia started rambling to Aaron about how happy she was feeling and he nodded in her direction, sharing her mood. Eliza walked to Alexander and gave him a hug. She asked if he was feeling alright, and he whispered back that he would tell her the story later. She nodded, comprehensive.

Alexander’s phone rang just then. He took it out his pocket and Eliza went to the Burr marriage to talk with them about the whole thing and propose family plans. Alexander smiled at the ID caller and answered instantly.

“Angelica, how are you…?”

He was interrupted abruptly, his sister-in-law screaming at the other side of the line.

“Ang… Angelica… Angelica, hold on! I can’t understand you!”

The other three persons in the room turned in his direction.

“What’s wrong?” asked Eliza, worried.
“I don’t know, she…” tried to explain Alexander. He returned his attention back to the phone. “Angelica, please, breathe and stop screaming!” he advised, starting to feel nervous himself. “Are you alright? Where is Washington? What…? Sir”

Aaron and Theodosia shared a glare of concern as Eliza got closer to her husband, bending down to hear the conversation through the receiver.

“What? No, I… I am not at work. I had to go with Aaron… Yes, yes… What?!?” he exclaimed.

Eliza walked away, a face of pain and a hand over her left ear. “Oh, goodbye eardrum” she hissed.

“Yes, yes… We’ll be there in no time. Yes. Goodbye, sir”

“Alexander, what’s going on?” asked Aaron, once his workmate ended the call.

“We have to go to the law firm” he said, heading to the front door by strides. “There was an earthquake and…”

“Is everyone okay?” asked Aaron immediately.

“It wasn’t such a big deal” said Eliza, sharing a confused look with Theodosia.

“Just a little scare” agreed the woman.

“Well, Washington seemed very concerned and Angelica almost deafened me”

“I feel you” said Eliza, rubbing her left ear.

“I’ll be back later, Betsey” said Alex, kissing her goodbye.

“Bye!” she said, still a bit lost.

“I’ll come drive you and Theo home” promised Aaron, kissing his wife.

“Alright, yes. Drive safely!”

Eliza shook her head when she saw her husband driving above the speed limit down the road.

“He is a lost cause” she commented.

“What do you think happen?” asked Theodosia, curious.

“Don’t know… Oh, the group chat, of course!” said Eliza, taking her phone out her pocket. “I’ve got a few audios from Maria, but nothing else”

“Do I make popcorn?” proposed Theodosia.

“Of course. You can’t hear a fight without popcorn” agreed Eliza, looping one arm with her friend’s
and leading her to the kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

I looked up how many hours it will take to go from New York to Boston by car. Sorry if I got it wrong.

Segismunda is the female form of the name Segismundo, who is the main character of the play "Life is a dream", by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Mais c'est quoi ce bordel?: What the hell? (?)

Dan Sherry is a character played by the actor Andrew Scott, from the movie 'Handsome Devil', just in case you wanted to put him a face.

Arts and Science (Letras o Ciencias): I don't know if Arts is the proper way or it's better to say Baccalaureate of philosophy and languages. But I hope you know what I meant.

Sally: In this AU, Sally is only a few years younger than Martha Jefferson (Thomas' wife), and is also her half-sister, because of an affair Martha's father had with Sally's mother. She won't appear because I respect her more than any other character, and that was why I also gave her a happy ending. Here, she is living in France. Instead of coming back with Jefferson, she decided to stay and married an entrepreneur and is living very well and happily. Sally comforted her brother-in-law after her half-sister's death, but when she saw he wasn't fulfilling any promises and was only a shoulder to cry on, she dumped him and started anew in France. She still has a good relationship with Patsy and Polly, though she stopped talking with her brother-in-law.

Uno-diez: From one to ten in Spanish. Consuelo was his mother's maid and she took care of him and his children, if you don't remember from past chapters.

"I don't know, I am not a scientist" is the translation of a Spanish meme that was famous a few years back. It was the answer someone gave at Yahoo Answers, mispelling the sentence: "Yo qué sé, no soy científico" by writing 'yo k se no soi 100tifikio". (100 in Spanish is said 'cien').

"The world is your oyster": I tried to translate what I intended to say as best as I could. There's a Spanish expression that goes "Se los comía (a la gente)", that can be translated literally as "He eats them all". It means that you owe some place. In fact, this saying in Spanish can go as "Te comes el mundo (You eat the world)". You can also say "Me lo como con papas/Me los voy a comer con papas (I'll eat them with french fries)", when you are angry at somebody and are sick of their bullshit.

Mary Angst: Angustias (angst) is a woman's Spanish name. It's common in elder ladies more than in young people nowadays, but it exists. I've heard some people using the composite name María Angustias to people who worry in excess, though I can't tell it's a common name to call. There are other names like Soledad (Solitude), Dolores (Pains; Lola comes from this name, it's its diminutive); Martirio (distress/agony).

Thank you so much for the 1000 hits!

Sursum corda!
Chapter Summary

AKA: The chapter where George King, Samuel Seabury and Maria Hadfield (Cosway) come. Probably to stay.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Maria walked in the meeting room, full of screams and profanities. More than usual. She let the tray on the table with shaky hands and threw a sideways glare to her boss. Washington had a lost glare directed to the white wall across them. By his right, Angelica was screaming at the top of her lungs, commanding silence and being completely ignored. Lee was by her left, a few steps back. He was called right after Alexander, who came along with Aaron in record time to the office.

Maria swallowed and straightened herself by Washington’s left, the voice inside her head, which she could miraculously heard above the shouting and blurred voices of her workmates, was wondering how they had come to this in the first place.

“The freaking building is not a decade old and it’s already falling to pieces!”

“And what do we do now?!”

“This is what happens when everybody mistreats the fucking building they work in!”

“Unprofessionalism doesn’t make buildings fall down, for the love of God!”

“Please, let’s calm down and…”

“It is a miracle no one was hurt!”

“What’s a miracle is that Lee is here at all!”

“My God, you can’t be left to your own devices! Ever!”

“And who’s going to pay this?!!”

“It’s all Adams’ fault! He must pay!”

“I refuse to be held responsible for this!”

“He was in charge when it happened, he should be the one fixing it!”

“A fucking hell is what I am going to pay!”

“I am not going to pay it from my pocket, that’s for sure!”
“I only find problems when I come here!”

“Could some…”

“Why can’t you be normal?!”

“Could someone explain what the fucking hell happened?!”

“Be normal for one freaking week! It’s not that difficult!”

“I am not going to pay that!”

“And I don’t want to have anything to do with it!”

“To the guillotine! Guillotine!”

“I don’t come here for three months and a wall is missing!”

“Calm the fuck down already, you beasts!”

Washington seemed to be back to reality with Angelica’s last and failed attempt to silence the staff. He looked at Maria, acknowledging her presence from the first time since she came in and then looked down, at the tray she had brought. George looked at it for way too long, making the receptionist uncomfortable.

Eventually, George began to empty the surface of the tray. Maria arched an eyebrow at his action but remained silent. She wouldn’t have been able to be heard with so much noise in that room. When the tray had nothing on it, George got up with it in his hands and walked to the whiteboard at his backs, with only Maria’s attention.

“Hm… Sir?” she tried to say aloud.

If Washington heard her, he ignored her completely. He straightened himself, his left side almost touching the whiteboard, crossed his right arm across his chest, holding the tray firmly, and squinted his eyes, fixated on the wall at the other side of the room.

“Sir, what are you…?” Maria tried one more time.

George interrupted her, and his deep loud voice silenced the whole room as well. “Incoming!!”

That was all the warning Maria and her workmates received before George threw the tray as if it were a frisbee. Angelica, Lee and Maria, the only ones standing, covered themselves, while the people sat at the table leaned back on their seats. All let a small scream of surprise and shock escape their lips and watched the tray flying from one side to the other of the room and hitting the wall.
across them. The impact created some cracks in the wall and made some debris fall to the ground.

Washington leveraged the few seconds of silence from his shocked team to walk back to his rocking chair. Angelica was the one who took her eyes away from the hit wall first.

“George, what did you do?” she asked, perplexed.

Washington looked at her directly to the eyes. “They wouldn’t have shut up otherwise” was his excuse. He turned to look at the rest of his employees, who were turning back to him slowly, a bit of fear in their eyes now. “So, what happened in here? Alexander?” he turned to the man, sat at his right-hand side.

“I wasn’t here when…”

“Wait, wait” interrupted Washington. “A minute, please, son”

“Don’t call me son” snapped Alexander, arching one eyebrow at his boss’ interruption.

George bent down and took a plastic bag from under the table. He grabbed one stress ball from inside and started to squeeze it.

“Now, proceed” said Washington.

Alexander cleared his throat and moved uncomfortably in his seat. “I wasn’t here yesterday, sir” he answered. “Aaron and I left yesterday for a family matter”

“Ah, it’s true” nodded Washington, comprehensively. “Adams, what happened?” he asked, more sharply this time, glaring the lawyer up and down.

“I don’t know. I left Jefferson in charge of the important matters” he confessed.

“Why did we do a raffle if you were going to put whoever you wanted in charge?” asked Angelica, arms crossed.

“What happened, Jefferson?” asked Lee, turning to the secretary.

“Well…”

“Wait, wait…” interrupted Washington once again. “If you are the one who’s gonna explain it…” he muttered to himself, as he bent down to take another stress ball that he squeezed on his left hand.

“Now, proceed, please”

Thomas contained a click of tongue of annoyance at his boss’ attitude. “We were downstairs when the earthquake happened, sir”

“How I’m not surprised…” commented Washington.

“It was registered as a 5.2 on the Richter Scale” informed Hercules, looking at his phone.
“A barely passing grade” commented Laurens.

“Like Adams. Let’s call it after him” joked Alexander, with a weak smile.

Adams threw a hateful glare in the CFO’s direction. “Creole, are you in a joker mood today?”

“I’m tired, actually” admitted Hamilton, before a sigh. “Still brighter than you”

“Huh. Call the damned earthquake whatever you want, that won’t make me responsible of this” declared Adams.

“It’s not you the one who should be held responsible for it, anyways” agreed Alexander, shrugging.

“I will not… Wait, what did you say?” Adams stopped his rant mid-way and looked dumbfounded at Hamilton.

“I said that you were right, this is not your obligation”

“…” Adams looked directly at Aaron. “Huh, take him with you at everything from now on, please”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Don’t get used to this. I may hate you but when I think someone is right, I have to say it. Call it occupational hazard” He turned to the secretary. “Mr. Jefferson, please, call the insurance so they can help us fix this”

“We don’t have one” said Thomas.

“Don’t you remember that fight you had a few weeks after the whole thing with your financial plan?” asked Lafayette.

“Gosh, it’s true” nodded Hercules, with tedium. “That fight had just finished and the next day you had another one just as big for what kind of insurance you wanted”

“And, in the end, we came out with nothing” added Madison, shrugging, with arms crossed.

“I still have it recorded in my phone” said Angelica, alternating her glare between the two men.

“Way to go, Lemongrab” said Maria, rolling her eyes and landing them on him.

Thomas frowned. “I’m not to blame. Washington is the head of this, it was his responsibility to come with a solution in the end”

“Nice. When things go right it’s everybody’s merit; but when things go wrong it’s all my fault” said Washington, looking nastily at the secretary. “Nice, very nice…”

“That’s what you get for being a CEO” chimed in Lee, with quite rancour.

“And who else is going to do it? You, deserter?” accused Laurens.

“You abandoned me! I needed time to overcome the trauma!” Lee defended himself.

“You abandoned us first” argued Laurens.

“Are we going to talk about that or about how incompetent Washington is?”

George frowned in his personnel manager’s direction. “But how is this my fault? How could have I known the building was going to fall down to pieces?”
“Well, you should’ve seen it coming after that first crack appeared” commented Aaron, quietly.

Everybody looked in his direction, and Aaron shrunk in his seat, pretending that way he’d become invisible. He remembered how to breathe properly again when all the eyes were on Washington next.

“What crack?” inquired Alexander, containing his bother.

“I don’t know” lied Washington, avoiding his glare.

“Sir” pressured Alex, noticing the evasive behaviour.

“The one that appeared one day on a wall upstairs…” admitted Aaron, in a lower tone, but Alexander, sat by his side, was able to hear it.

“Wait, what wall?” asked Alexander, turning to face Aaron completely. “The one that fell down!?"

“Wait, that’s why you asked him to draw that stupid tree?” asked Jefferson, addressing a very quiet Washington.

“That perfectly drawn tree. Yes.” answered Aaron, quite sore. “And that happy squirrel and cute bird, by the way. And everyone badmouthed me”

Alexander rolled his eyes and turned to his boss. “I’m shocked, sir, genuinely shocked”

Angelica crossed her arms and looked daggers at the silent man. “Make that two of us. George, what is happening?” she demanded to know.

Washington alternated his glare between the two siblings-in-law and then leaned on, clasping both hands on the table and resignation all over his face.

“Alright, I admit it” he talked and raised his glare to look at them all. “I made a deal with George King to get this building and be able to start my law firm in the most peaceful way possible”

“You are not admitting it. You got caught” condemned Thomas.

“Yeah, that as well…” he nodded.

Lee’s eyes widened. “You made a deal with Maleficent? In what were you thinking?”

“What did you give him in exchange? Your soul?” tried to joke Angelica, though she seemed very scared as well before the new information.

“I agree on not suing him as I intended to if he gave me someplace to start anew and let anyone who wanted to join me come without repercussions” explained George.

“That resentful madman. For sure he knew the building was going to fall down without the need of an earthquake” commented Laurens, enraged.
“Come on, Johnny…” tried to say Hercules, calmly. “No one is that evil”

“It’s so clear you never worked with him” said Thomas, after a huff.

“If that’s the case, let that Robespierre pay it all!” declared Lafayette, red from anger.

“Yeah, and then you wake up” said Lee, with a mocking tone. “No, we must do this on our own”

“I agree” nodded Angelica. “Gosh, I’m agreeing with this treacherous prick… I need to shower” she commented, fake-gagging.

“We’ll try calling the insurance, so we know what’s wrong first” concluded Alexander, taking out his phone.

“We don’t have one” Madison reminded him.

“Yeah, I hired one myself just the other day”

“Lucky bastard” said Lee, quite impressed.

“With whose permission?” asked Jefferson, frowning.

“With my intuition’s” spat Alexander, pressing the call button. “Remember this day when you try to say I don’t know what I’m talking about”

“He doesn’t miss a thing with me…” complained Thomas, rolling his eyes with tedium.

“Please, don’t start” said Lafayette, trying to calm both his friends and himself down.

“Good afternoon?” said Alexander, with the politest tone he could perform. “I’m Alexander Hamilton. I call for…”

“What?” asked Angelica, worried before the interruption of his brother-in-law.

“It’s a machine” answered Alexander, nodding at the robotic female voice from the other side of the line. “Workplace. [… …]. Yes, good afternoon, miss, I’m… … Disaster” he answered again, with boredom.

“As if anything else could happen in here…” muttered Lee, overwhelmed.

“Sssh!” ordered Angelica.

“Hello, good afternoon. I’m Alexander Hamilton. I’m calling on behalf of… … … Talk to an agent… What an annoyance…”

The whole staff groaned in exasperation. Alexander tapped his finger on the table. He separated the phone from his ear and squinting his eyes at the screen. He tapped his head a few times and then his neck.

“Where are my glasses?!” he asked, irritated. “Where… Where is the three?” he asked Aaron, showing him the bright screen.
Aaron blinked at the sudden light. “Gosh, it’s normal you’re almost blind at the age of 31! Low the screen brightness!” he complained.

Laurens hit the table with his two hands, startling the whole room. He got up from his seat in an enraged hurry and ran to where Hamilton was sat. He took the phone away from a shocked Alexander and screamed through the mic with fury and surfeit.

“Damn you to hell and back, motherfucker! Stop jerking us around and let us talk with a fucking human being, bullocks!”

And, when he was finished, he kicked the phone, making it fly across the room and out the open/broken window.

“John, what the hell!” said Alexander, getting up immediately. “It was only six years old!” he said, running out the room.

“Get out through the window, it’s faster!” advised Maria.

“Huh, you have quite a kick, Laurens” commented Lee, impressed.

“Yeah, I know. I used to play football back at college. I gave a lot of girls pointless hope” said Laurens.

All bad things come in threes. At least, that was for Alexander, anyways. Not only he had to take care of a building falling to pieces – really, what were the odds of something like that happening? – but he also had to endure some uninvited guest in his house more times than he would want to.

“I don’t know what I did wrong” sobbed a voice from the couch.

Alexander sighed in exasperation as he tapped a few more things on his laptop, ignoring Mr. Schuyler’s complaints. Eliza had gone to visit him every two weekends to see how he was coping. The answer was always the same: he wasn’t. Soon, Eliza was visiting her father every Sunday, that turned into the whole weekends, that turned into three times a week, that turned into every damned afternoon of the week…
He didn’t mind. Seriously, he didn’t. Philip was her father… Well, her ‘father’, in quotes, but he had raised her… Well, alright, Catherine and that nanny Eliza sometimes talked about did. But he was still important to Eliza, and that was totally respectable. And if she had the need to help the man out of this mess he was in, Alexander didn’t have a say in the matter. If Eliza wanted to waste her time helping that man, it was her business. But inviting him home without letting Alexander know first? That was one step too far…

Alexander contained a sigh when he heard another sniff from his father-in-law. He looked from above his glasses, seeing Philip hunched over himself on the couch and Eliza with a comforting hand on his back and frowning in concern. He rolled his eyes at the scene and tried to keep working. But there was too much noise for Alexander’s liking…

“Daughter of a whore” he sniffed, wiping non-existent tears with the back of his hand.

“Come on, Dad, don’t say that…” said Eliza.

“How could she do this to me?” wondered Philip. “I gave her children, a washing machine and a drier when the maid got fired and I even remodelled the kitchen the way she liked it the most, so she could cook comfortably. What else could she possibly want?”

“A job, dreams, ambitions, an own life?” proposed Alexander.

“Alexander, go work elsewhere” ordered Eliza.

“Don’t have to tell me twice”

Happy as a clam, Alex grabbed all his things and walked out the room, smiling to himself. *It always works*. He almost missed the hateful glare Philip Sr. threw in his direction.

“He can’t even show some support to his father-in-law” he commented, with venom, making sure his voice was loud enough for him to hear. Philip Sr. turned to his daughter. “You should’ve married Elijah, the architect!”

Alexander stopped in his tracks just in the doorway. “He always has to bring up Elijah the architect!” he complained, about to kick the floor in annoyance. “Wait, I think you gave me an idea for once” he commented, leaving the room.

“Pity…”

“Be nice…” reprimanded Eliza.

Alexander sent a quick message to his wife’s ex. Through clenched teeth, but did it, nonetheless. It was for the company, he tried to comfort himself. It wasn’t like he was grovelling for a personal favour.
He found his children eavesdropping in the staircase. The two siblings looked away and pretended to be talking about something else when they saw their father walking upstairs.

“Children, what are you doing?” asked Alexander, gesturing them to follow him. They obliged.

“Dad, is grandpa going to stay all day?” asked Angie. “Ow!” she complained when she received an elbow from her brother. “What? He already caught us!”

“Philip, don’t hit your sister” reprimanded Alexander, walking to his workroom and setting all his things on his desk. “And I don’t know, sweetheart” answered Alex, once he had sat up.

“But do we have to eat with him?” asked the girl, frowning in concern.

“I don’t want to” said Philip.

“Me neither and I hope we don’t have to” nodded Alexander, checking his phone. To his pleasant surprise, Elijah had answered him. He frowned his lips as he read and contained a sigh of frustration for the sake of his children, who had nothing to do with this.

“Dad, why don’t you tell Mum?” asked Philip, taking him out of his thoughts.

“Because I refuse to pay you a child therapist to treat your trauma from Mum and Dad’s divorce” deadpanned Alex.

“Dad, I don’t think you can say that to us”

“There are no books to learn parenting skills”

“Yes, there are”

“Philip, son, with all the love I’ve got within and the experience I carry on my backs, I’m gonna inform you that no one likes a know-it-all. You’re starting elementary school this September and that would be the beginning of a very ugly war if you keep going on like this” said Alex, as he got up and prepared himself and all he could need for the day.

“It’s not my fault I’ve got your genes…” retorted the child.

Alexander stopped putting on his jacket to look up and down at his son. “Gosh, if you talk to me like this when you’re six, I don’t want to see you when you’re fifteen”

“Hm…”

“You’re making me feel bad for Jefferson. Don’t do that again” He knelt down to kiss his children’s forehead. “Tell your mother I had to leave for something concerning my work”

“Like she wouldn’t know…” said Philip, rolling his eyes.

“Daddy, will you help me with my costume later?” asked Angie, grabbing the fabric of his father’s pants and letting herself being dragged by the adult.

“What costume?” asked Alexander, deciding to pick her up to go faster.

“We have to dress up for some thing the day care decided to do” explained Philip.
“Thanks for all that information” said Alex, sarcastically.

“Daddyyyy” whined Angie.

“Yes, yes… I’ll try to have the time for it, sweetheart. Does your mother know?”

“No yet”

“We were told today and she’s been busy with grandpa” said Philip, with both arms behind the head.

“And what do you wanna be?” asked Alex, walking inside their shared bedroom and putting her on bed.

“I wanna be Cinderella!” she said, in excitement.

Alexander laughed at her enthusiasm. “Alright, then, sweetheart. Your mother and I will look you for the best Cinderella costume” he promised, petting her head.

“Yay!”

“And you Philip?”

“I’ll pass” said the kid, shrugging.

“You sure?” asked his father, with a frown.

“Yeah”

“Well, you have time to think about it, I guess. When you make up your mind, tell us” said Alex, getting up and smoothing out his clothes.

“I’ve already made up my mind: I’ll pass” said Philip.

“Pip, everybody will be dressed up”

“So? Being like everyone else is boring”

“… … With all the good traits your mother has, why did you have to take after me so much?” asked Alexander, upset and saddened.

“Don’t know… Ask her, she was the one who decided to marry you” answered Philip, walking to the tiny library they had at one corner of the room.

“Kid, you’re making me mad” warned Alexander.

“What a novelty!” retorted the child, mockingly, as he picked a book.

Alex looked at his daughter, watching their conversation in amusement. “What is wrong with him? Is he in the middle of an idiotic phase?”

Angie shrugged in response.

“Goodness with the kid…” complained Alex. “Look, use all that bad mood with your grandpa. Let’s
see if when I’m back you are back to normal”

“Yes, whatever…” replied the kid, with his backs turned to him and reading.

“My God, my thoughts about sending the children away to a boarding school during their teenage years have changed drastically” he muttered, under his breath as he walked out the room.

Eliza saw Alexander walking down the stairs and gesturing to her that he had to leave the house. Work again. She contained a sigh and waved goodbye to him, hearing the door slammed shut as a response.

“What a meanie, what a witch” kept insulting Philip Sr. between sobs. “I gave her plenty of orgasms without asking anything from her in exchange”

“Dad, I didn’t need to know that” said Eliza, erasing that mental image.

“I don’t know what I did wrong”

“Well…” Eliza looked out of the living room and waited a bit, expecting Alex to get back in for something he had forgotten. When she saw no signs of it and heard the car driving away, she continued. “I think Alex was right, Dad. You could’ve treated her a lot better”

“But if I treated her as a Queen!” argued Philip Sr.

“Yes, but sometimes you have to treat us as human beings as well” said Eliza, calmly. “We have… We have our inquisitiveness, our plans for the future, our wish to do something with our lives…”

“You stayed as a housewife and you’re doing fine” pointed out her father.

“… … That has nothing to do with this. I chose this” she dismissed rapidly. “What I’m trying to say is that if you want Mum to be back maybe you’ll have to apologise”

“I did. But she doesn’t answer my texts. And she read them. The double check is blue” Philip Sr. started to sob again. “What the hell is she doing more important than answering her husband’s texts?”

“Dad, I’m not talking about verbally” explained Eliza, keeping herself calmed. “I was referring to show her you’re sorry and willing to change”

“Change what?”

“Well, for example… You could clean once on the weekends” she proposed.

“After a whole week working harder than a Chinaman, I’ve got to clean in my free days?”

“Don’t say those expressions, please. And, well… Mmh… Maybe on weekdays?” she tried again.
“Same problem again!”

“Alright, alright… Well, then… You can do the cooking?”

“Me, cooking? I could cut myself, girl! Do you want your father to lose a finger?!”

“I can teach you!”

“No! I don’t like to cook, it makes me sick”

“Makes you sick how?”

“The raw meat is disgusting. I like it only when cooked”

“Then you can do something with vegetables, healthier”

“Vegetables?? What am I know? A fucking rabbit?”

“Alright, no vegetables”

“No!”

“What about the laundry?”

“Honey, don’t you remember what happened in your first visit?”

“True, it cost hell to mop all that…” Eliza snapped her fingers. “I’ve got it! Go to the market”

“The market?”

“Yes. You’ve got the money and I’ll help you write a grocery list. You can’t mess this up, Dad”

Philip thought about it for a moment. Eventually, he nodded, and Eliza let out a breath of relief.

“Alright, I’ll do it” he decided, getting up. “Thank you, honey”

“Whenever you need me, Dad” said Eliza, hugging her father and accompanying him to the door.

“So many sacrifices for love” commented Philip, shaking his head. “Then you women would say we don’t make enough efforts for you”

Eliza nodded automatically and opened the door for him, almost pushing him out of the house.

“This must be the reason why some men decided to be gay”

“Yes, sure, sure. Bye, Dad” she bid farewell before closing the door and sighing. “Gosh, thank goodness Alexander wasn’t here”
“Mum?”

She looked up to see Angie and Pip looking at her seriously.

“Did grandpa leave?” she asked.

“Yes”

The two children sighed, relieved.

“Your father left, so having lunch with him was out of question” she explained. “I’ve got enough reprimands for how I eat for my whole lifetime…” She laughed along with her children and then looked at both sides. “Hey, have you seen the dog?”

“Aunt Peggy took him with her” answered Philip.

“Ah, but was she here?”

“Yeah, I saw her coming with Daddy” said Angie.

“They were having an argument before aunt Peggy stormed out the house with the dog” explained Philip.

“Pity, I wrote a decent list of pros for having a dog” commented Eliza, looking down. “Well, it doesn’t matter. We’ll give it a few weeks and then we’ll try again”

“Yay!” cheered the children.

When Alexander drove back to the law firm, he saw only Washington, Aaron, Jefferson, Madison and Maria were waiting inside. He wasn’t surprised enough to roll his eyes or get angry. His mental exhaustion could be to blame as well. He parked in the nearest parking lot to the entrance and made his way to where his workmates and boss were waiting for him.

“Good afternoon, son” greeted Washington as soon as he walked in.

“For calling it something” said Alexander, eyeing the five persons quickly. “Where are the rest?”

“They left one by one” answered Washington, impassive.

“Don’t worry, I’m recording” said Maria.
“When are you not?” asked Alexander, rubbing his temples. He sighed, tired. “Alright, I could contact the insurance and, guess what, they refuse to help us because I hired it a few weeks prior the whole thing happened”

“So? Nobody knew an earthquake could happen” said Madison.

“And nobody knew this building was made of papier maché” added Aaron.

“Try to tell that to them. If we want their help, we’d have to get in between a lot of paperwork, sues, evidences… To be honest, I wouldn’t mind going after them, but after this startle I wouldn’t prolong the solution to the matter any longer”

“Assholes, what can they make up just for not paying poor unlucky people like us” complained Maria.

Alexander nodded in her direction and took some papers out his briefcase. “I contacted an old acquaintance who works as an architect and he told me the most probable is that there is a differential settlement in the foundations of the building”

“Aah, okay, okay…” nodded Maria. “And what does all that mean?”

“It means the building is falling down, Betty Boop” spat Thomas, angry at the situation.

“Oh, gosh, no!” exclaimed Maria, horrified.

“The foundations are fracturing, digging deeply in the ground. According to him it can happen because of water filtrations or even sanitation” explained Alexander, calmly.

“That was because you called those men to fix the toilets” accused Thomas, looking at Washington.

“Twice” added Aaron.

“Twice”

“Alright, I’ll leave the building to flood next time” said the CEO, rolling his eyes. “If you took care of your workplace, I wouldn’t have to call anyone”

“It’s King’s fault, for being a sicko” Madison defended the president.

“It’s the builder’s fault, for allowing themselves to be bribed into making this shit…” said Maria.

“Is there a way to fix it?” asked Aaron.

“Well, yes… The support of the structure must be drifted; the degraded foundations, steadied with bridge frameworks. That’d transmit the loads to some steel beams that sit on top of the ground parallel to the foundations” explained Alexander.

“… But all that hot air sounds very expensive, Alex” concluded Madison.

“Because it is” nodded Alexander.

“How much are we talking about?” asked Washington, with a bad feeling in his guts.

Alexander cleared his throat. “According to my acquaintance? Around 250 thousand of dollars”

“Can’t we pay in instalments?” proposed Maria, paling.
“Yes, ten bucks per month” mocked Thomas.

“I’m trying to find a good solution for everyone!” complained the receptionist.

“I’ve got a solution, but you’re not going to like it” commented Alexander, on the quiet.

“What?” asked the CEO, suspicious.

Alex turned to Washington, almost avoiding his glare. Never a good sign. “Well, if you and Mr. King had a deal, I think you should meet with him and…”

“And a plan C?” interrupted Washington.

“End up in the streets and each of us should start anew somewhere else” responded Alexander, honestly.

“Nooo” complained Maria, saddened. “I like it in here, we’re like a family”

“We’re insulting and hating each other all day” said Madison.

“See? A family” she reassured. She turned to Washington with puppy eyes. “Please, meet with that man. It can’t be that bad”

“You say that because you didn’t work with him” said Jefferson.

“But Alex’s right. If the insurance is not an option, King must help us. He made a deal” said Aaron.

“Good plan, I’m sure morality would make him change his mind” said Jefferson, rolling his eyes at the lawyer. “That man knows nothing of loyalty”

“Aw, look, just like you” commented Alexander, snickering.

“Hamilton…” began to say Thomas in a warning tone.

“I ship it”

“We’re going to die buried because Maleficent is sick of the head” said James, interrupting the quarrel between the two men.

“You’re still the hopeful ray of sunshine I once knew, Madison” said Alexander, with sarcasm.

“In his defence, this situation is pretty dark in itself” said Maria.

“And the darker is gonna get if we don’t come to a decision by now” said Alex, looking at his boss. “Sir?” he pressured.

“Alright” he agreed, after a long sigh of conformity.

“Sir, you can’t be serious” argued Thomas, with a frown.

“Alexander is right. He is not the best option, but he’s the only one we can turn to right now”

“King will never pay. He barely spent money when he could gain something from you”

“I think it’s time to bury the hatch” commented Aaron. “This war is absurd. It’s always better to reach an agreement”
“Aaron’s right. It doesn’t matter if the law firms don’t work together and we all become best friends, but it’s not a good idea to piss a big company off. At least, twice in the same month” commented Alexander, throwing a glare to Thomas in the end.

“I’ll contact King” concluded Washington, unwillingly, interrupting the secretary’s retort to Alexander’s dig. “Even if he doesn’t help us, I have a few things I’d like to tell him in the face”

“All settled, then” nodded Alexander. “Let me know when you’re going to meet him, so I can go with you”

“Are you sure, son?” asked Washington.

“Yes, sir, I’m sure” answered Alexander, with eyes half-closed. “And don’t call me that” he added, out of habit.

“Well, Alexander, if you insist…” gave in Washington, still not agreeing much and ignoring the last part.

“Yes, I do. I am the CFO, so this is kind of my field”

“Alright, alright” interrupted the CEO, holding both hands up. “In that case, I’ll inform you”

“Thank you”

“Have a good rest of your day”

After concluding the conversation, Washington walked down the hall to his office. He threw a hateful glare to the staircase and closed the door at his backs with a thump.

If there was one time that group of five persons agreed on something was in that instant. None of them wanted to be on Washington’s shoes right then…

Philip Sr. was a man of his word. As soon as he had his grocery list written, he drove to the nearest supermarket. He greeted the cashier who said an automatic ‘Good afternoon, sir’, and made his way into the aisles.

“Okay, first thing on my list” Philip Sr. talked to himself, as he took out the piece of paper from his back pocket. “Milk”

He looked around and scratched the back of his head.
“Where is the milk…?”

He looked at his surroundings once again. He saw the shelves adorned by cleaning products and kept walking until he was out of that section. The supermarket was almost desert, expect from a few people looking at some items or waiting in the line. Eventually, he saw a girl refilling the fridges.

“Excuse me, miss, the milk?” he asked.

The girl looked over her shoulder and then pointed. “Behind you, sir” she answered, with a bored tone.

With a slight blush, Philip Sr. saw he had walked until the correct aisle without noticing, so focus on finding a person to indicate him the place first.

“Uh, thanks” he said, before walking closer.

He scratched the back of his head once again when he saw the whole aisle full of different cartons and bottles of milk. He scanned the shelves from left to right and right to left, feeling more lost at each attempt to find the milk he was looking for.

“Which one should I buy?” he wondered out loud. “Uh… Let’s see… Eh…” He squinted his eyes, trying to make out the numbers on the labels, “0.50… 1.39… 2.50… Hm… I suppose I’ll grab the 2.50$ one. If it’s more expensive, might be because it’s better”

He was about to grab the bottle when he stopped, his fingers a few inches away from the plastic.

“Wait, wait… Why is it more expensive? Milk is milk… Maybe it’s a trick to fool stupid people… I’ll grab the cheaper, then…”

Again, he stopped his hand mid-way.

“Wait, wait, wait… Why so much price difference? Maybe it’s because it’s about to expire and they want to sell it to us with evil intentions… Mmh… Well, if that’s the case I’d just have to read the date and end of the discussion… Wait, what day is today…? Oh, shoot…”
Philip Sr. scratched the back of his head again, lost. He heard some faint giggles at his backs. He turned to see a group of three ladies covering their smiling lips while they look at him.

“Hahaha, look at that man, he doesn’t know what day he is living in…” he heard one of them mutter.

Philip Sr. frowned. “Ma’ams, go live the two days you’ve got left in this world at any other place” he spat, turning back to the milks. “And now that I think about it… This label tells the price of the one of the top of it or at the bottom? Taking so much trouble so then don’t clarify that important part… Mmh… Eh… Bf…”

“Hahaha, look at him; he doesn’t know what milk he drinks” he heard again.

“Ma’ams, I told you to go die somewhere else” he spat again, this time not bothering to turn around. “Damn… Let’s see… Em… I think I’ve heard this brand before, but I don’t know if it’s from the TV or from my fridge… But why the hell are there so many milks? Raise a cow, milk it, put the milk in a carton and then sell it, Jesus Christ. It’s very simple. But, of course, now they add them a lot of crap because nowadays everybody has an opinion… Drink the fucking milk and stop being an idiot… And if you don’t like it, drink water… Talking about the water… Where is it? And… And what else did I have to buy?”

He took another glare to his list.

“Cheese. What kind of cheese? I know I like one that’s white, but only God knows how many white cheeses there’ll be… After this milk episode I’m afraid. Water… And… Wait, I think I saw a few bottles of water… Why are there so many? Water is water. Bbbfff… And… And what’s this? I don’t understand my own handwriting… Ah, bread… I don’t even want to know how many breads there will be… I don’t smell bread in here. They’re gonna sell me a cold shit, for sure. Oh, yes, my juice… Now, which brand. The cheap or the expensive, that is the question…”

“Hahahaha, look at that man! He can’t buy!” kept laughing the ladies at his back.

“Yeah, I can’t, but I’ve got the lifeline, you gossip…”

Eliza checked the list on her notepad.

- Kids fed and entertained. Checked.
- John has taken his bottle and is sleeping. Checked.
- Alexander is out, working. That always had a check.
- Phone on mute. Checked.
“My time has arrived” she declared, smiling to herself.

She threw the notepad on her bed and made her way to the bathroom, waiting for her with the bathtub full of water and bubbles. The lavender and vanilla scent filled her nostrils and she breathed in, exhaling in peace. She prepared a couple of towels for when she was finished, tied her long hair in a high bun, stripped and got into the bathtub. She exhaled once again, feeling the stress abandoning her slowly. She plugged one earbud in her right ear and let the music make her travel to a place on her own.

This was Eliza’s favourite time of the day. No one would bother her until it was dinnertime or if something was wrong with one of her children. Which was only when they were sick, a thing that didn’t happen usually. She thought about the book she borrowed from Angelica at some point. She was still on page ten since November… Bah, she could always read it tomorrow.

A strident sound, coming from the living room, woke her up from her daydreaming and broke the spell of calmness she had sunk in. She raised a bit the volume of the song she was listening to and decided to ignore it. She did the same the second time. And the third time. And the fourth. It was at the eleventh when Eliza got out the bathtub, cursing everyone she had known since she had a memory. She wrapped her body with one of the prepared towels and exited the bathroom.

The phone got silent, and she decided to wait at the door. She could hear the faint voices of Angie and Pip, joking with each other, and John’s calm breathing as well after sharpening her mother’s hearing. That baby sure took after Peggy. Better for her.

Eliza waited a couple more of minutes, feeling chills going down her whole body. Hearing nothing more at all, she made her way back in the bathroom, closed the door quietly and prepared herself to get into the bathtub again. She had only put one foot in when the annoying phone rang again.

“Could this be possible?” complained Eliza, wrapping the towel again above her breasts. “Thirty minutes a day. Just fifteen, at least…” she whispered, as she walked by strides to the living room, where the ringing was coming from. “Fifteen-minute break. Is that too much to ask?” She picked up the damned object and pressed it against her ear. “Yes?” It still sounded a bit harsh, but way politer than ‘Who the fuck is it?’.
“Eliza?”

“… Dad?” she said, blinking dumbfounded.

“Where were you? I’ve called you almost forty times”

“Yes, I was hearing it” she admitted, with a bitter tone. “What’s wrong?”

“Look, I’m following your advice”

“Nice…”

“And I need your help”

“My help?”

“Aha”

“With what?”

“See, I’m buying milk”

“Yes”

“Because I like to have my mug of milk in the mornings and afternoons and before going to bed”

“Yes, Dad. I lived with you until I married. I know your habits” Eliza hugged herself with her free arm. It was time to buy herself a bathrobe…

“Good, good… So, I opened the fridge and saw I’ve got none left” kept explaining Philip Sr.

“Mh…”

“And I added it to my grocery list”

“Good” she encouraged.

“And now I’m at the supermarket”

“Okay… Sorry, Dad, but I’m in a hurry… What’s wrong exactly?” she asked directly.

“What milk brand should I buy?” asked Philip Sr.

“… … Excuse me, what?”

“Yeah, I came here with the idea of buying milk and suddenly I see a whole aisle of milk”

“Uh… Dad…”

“See, there are blues, pinks… I think I saw one who had the bottle green”

“Yes, Dad, I know all that…” she said, rubbing her temples.

“Good. So, what should I buy?”

“The one you usually drink…”
“And what’s that?”

“And what’s that?”

“… I imagine the same one you had in your fridge”

“Yes, yes, but which one is that??”

“Don’t you remember how the carton looked like?”

“I threw it away. Why would I look at an empty carton??”

“To avoid this situation” Eliza pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. “Look, Dad… Is there one with the drawing of a flying cow? Red?”

“The cow is red?”

“No, no, the… The carton”

“Eeeeh… Yeah”

“Take that”

“That’s the one I like?”

“It’s the one we drink in here”

“Oh, okay, then… But because you like it or because your chibi like it?”

“My what?”

“Chibi”

“Chi… Dad, don’t call Alexander that. And why does that matter?”

“Because I’d rather not listen to a dwarf’s opinion about milk”

“That has nothing to do…”

“Pray for your children taking after you or you’ll be able to make a circus”

“Dad” She sighed, exasperated. “I buy it because I like it”

“Good, good…”

“Alright. Bye…”

“No, no, wait”

“What?”

“I need water”

“Buy it, then”

“Yes, but which one?”

“Dad, again?”
“There are too many!”

“Read the label and…”

“But I don’t know which one I drink”

“You don’t know the brand of the milk or of the water… How comes you don’t know what you drink?” asked Eliza, starting to lose her patience.

“Honey, I pour it in a glass and drink it… I want those things to drink ‘em, not to read ‘em”

“Alright, whatever… It’s water, anyways, take whatever”

“If it doesn’t matter, why so many?”

“I don’t know, honestly. For me, they all taste the same”

“In that case, can I buy the cheapest?”

“You can buy them all, Dad, you’re rich!”

“Yeah, but, I mean… I don’t like to waste my money”

“You once bought a boat to show off in front of your friends and never used it!”

“On useless things, I mean”

“Look… Drink from the faucet until I can go shopping with you”

“From the faucet?” repeated Philip Sr. indignant. “That’s a poor’s thing…”

“Dad…”

“I lost my wife, not my dignity”

“Alright! Are you seeing one that is… Poland Spring?”

It took a moment before Philip Sr. answered. “Yep, got it”

“Good, take that”

“But I’m not Poland”

“That doesn’t matter, Dad…”

“I want American water”

“My God…”

“Hey, I’m seeing one with a nice flower on the label”

“Good for you…”

“Shall I pick that one?”

“Yes, yes, if you like it…”
“Okay, got it”

“Good. Bye, then”

“No, no, wait”

“What now…?”

“I still have to buy cheese, juice, bread…”

“Dad, are you going to be with me on the phone until you get out of the supermarket?”

“What else do you have to do?”

“… Lots of things”

“Come on, honey, there are some mean ladies laughing at your father” said Philip Sr., with a pitiful tone of voice.

“And what do you want me to do about it?” asked Eliza, perplexed. “Ignore them…”

Philip Sr. sobbed on the phone. “All women are just cruel bitches”

“Dad, don’t break down in the middle of the supermarket!”

“Oh, Catherine!” he cried.

“Dad, don’t make a scene!” begged Eliza. “Look, I’ll get dressed and meet you there, okay?”

“Thank you, honey…” he sniffed. “That’s why you’re my favourite daughter”

“Yeah, whatever… Bye”

“See you”

Eliza hang up.

“And then, he’d wonder why Angelica and Peggy don’t answer his phone calls…”

She turned around just at the same time Alexander walked in the living room.

“Eliza?” he said, rubbing one eye. “What’s all this noise?”

“When did you come back??” she asked, after an initial startle.

“A few minutes ago…”

“Odd, I didn’t hear furious typing”
“I was sleeping”

“Why?”

“… Because I sleep as well”

“Only after I have to drag you to the bed. What’s wrong?”

“… I’m not feeling well” he admitted.

“Is it because what happened with the case?”

Her husband’s silence spoke volumes.

“Hun, don’t be silly. Everything turned out fine in the end” she said, walking to him to give him a hug.

“Not thanks to me… No, don’t touch me. You’re wet… Why are you walking with only a towel throughout the house?”

“I was taking a bath”

“Take showers, you waste less water”

“You too? We now have money to fill endless bathtubs!”

“That doesn’t mean I have to”

“Look, I don’t wanna fight. I’ve got to go; my father needs help”

“And you realise now?”

“Help with the groceries, you beast!”

“It was a joke…”

“Yeah, sure…” She tapped him on the shoulder. “We’ll talk about your trouble later, I promise”

“Don’t. I don’t want to talk about it”

“You have to”

“No”

“Alex”

“No”

“You couldn’t get in the courtroom, so what?” spat Eliza, frowning at her husband’s stubbornness. “It was not the moment yet”

“Hm…”
She peeked him on the cheek. “It was not your moment yet” she repeated, sweetly. “But the time will come. Have patience”

“If you say so…”

“I know so” she smiled. “Come on, go back to sleep, I’ll be back soon”

“Really, your father is abusing your kindness” commented Alexander, walking back to the bedroom.

“No, he’s not…” denied Eliza. She sneezed. “Damn it! Now, I got cold!” she complained.

“We are no more, duh” replied Laurens, petting Godfred’s head.

“Let them be, Herc” said Laf, sat at the table and reading something on his laptop.

“I’m sorry for kidnapping your dog, John” apologised Peggy.

“No worries. I’m sorry for calling you a useless spoiled brat”

“… You never called me that”

“Oh, I must’ve only thought it, then…”

“…”

“Such a beautiful friendship” commented Hercules, from the couch, as he read a book. “More beautiful than the one Hitler and Stalin shared…”

“I don’t know who those are” admitted Peggy. “But I know I want to make it up for you”

“It’s not necessary”

“Yes, it is. Look, I bumped into this guy I used to treat the other day and he was looking for a partner” she explained.

“Uf, no way, no way. I rejected relationships after what happened with Alf” said Laurens, listlessly.

“With more reason you should accept, I messed that up…” insisted Peggy, ashamed.

“That was Laf’s fault for telling you anything” said Hercules.
Laf stopped typing abruptly and looked up. “I didn’t tell her anything”

Peggy felt the three pair of eyes on her. She shrugged.

“What? A single lady has necessities as well”

“They grow up so fast…” commented Laf, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Anyways…” said Peggy, a bit upset as she rolled her eyes. “I could talk him about you, if you want”

“No, no” refused Laurens once again. “I don’t want to meet anyone. And less if he’s a madman…”

“Johnny…” reprimanded Lafayette.

“Man, don’t be so cliché. Nowadays everybody goes to a therapist at some time in their lives” argued Peggy. “Don’t let TV and uncultured people on the matter make you think otherwise”

“Peggy is right. Besides, it’s not like you are the sanest people on Earth” said Hercules.

“Hercules, weren’t you reading?” said Lafayette.

“No. Actually I was losing time until my show starts” he admitted.

“What a man…”

“Alright, then” gave in Laurens, shrugging in Peggy’s direction. “I trust you”

“Yay!” cheered Peggy. “I will arrange it all, don’t worry!”

“But why did you treat him, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I don’t remember, actually… I think he was one of the first ones I ever treated. I guess it had something to do with some kind of social anxiety? He seemed pretty shy when we talked” she explained, as she unblocked her phone.

“See?” said Lafayette.

“Oh, Dad sent me a text” said Peggy, as she read it. “Aaaw. ‘Thank you for today, sweetie’. I don’t know what he’s talking about, but it’s such a nice thing to say!” she said, moved.

“Send him something pretty in response” advised Lafayette.

“Yes, yes” nodded Peggy, typing rapidly.

A notification sounded, and she looked at the screen again, her smile fading away.

“‘Sorry, Peggy, that text was meant for Eliza’” she read.
“… … …”

“Or don’t send him anything…” said Lafayette, feeling bad for the girl.

Peggy kept his phone back in her pocket, upset. “Then, he’d complain about me and Angelica never contacting him”

Martha knew her husband better than the palm of her hand. Being married for 28 years helped, but what helped her a lot more was her sixth sense; that one she had well concealed and made her able to read people as an open book without no one noticing. A very useful weapon when you are married to someone like George Washington, who always tried to maintain a poker face and a neutral tone of voice. But everybody had little details, like any good story worth of her time.

When George spent the afternoons in his library to read a book with a mug of hot chocolate (during winter) or lemonade (during summer) it meant he needed to escape to a fictional world to clear his mind a bit; when he barely talked in the morning and then spent the whole afternoon working without breaks, was because he had procrastinated too much and felt ashamed of himself for such behaviour, and was reprimanding himself and vowing to never make the same mistake again. The next morning Martha would see him being the same man as yesterday, but never said anything, smiling to herself at the scene.

When he spent a day after work talking lively with her, it meant that he was about to explode a preferred to trust her with his complaints in a long monologue than making a scene back at the law firm. When he spent the day muttering just a couple of words, it meant that he was upset or angry at something, but the moment of venting hadn’t arrived yet and he could cope on his own. When he sat by her side on the couch and swallowed all the soap operas and reality shows she liked to watch and comment, it meant he not only needed a distraction, but the comfort of her company. Those were the days Martha loved the most, especially when they ended the TV session with smiling faces.

But when George spent two days not only answering her questions and contributing to their conversation with monosyllables, it meant something was wrong and troubling him. And he wouldn’t tell her until the very end, a habit that put Martha on her nerves but learned to respect. But she had to admit that waiting and pretending she didn’t know something was wrong for three days was a little too much for her curious nature. It didn’t help that George couldn’t go to work because the building was a dangerous place to be and so she had to endure his silent and avoiding presence all day. She had gone out with some friends in the afternoons to forget about the whole thing, but when she came back home she’d find George sitting in some room, looking at the nothingness.

It was worrisome, to say the least.
Thankfully, Tuesday morning came, and Martha was woken up by the sound of George’s deep voice talking to someone on the phone. Rubbing her eyes with annoyance – mornings and she didn’t get along, thank you – she got out of bed and walked to the kitchen, where her husband was with his back turned to the door. She decided to wait until the conversation was over.

“You don’t have to come, son” she heard George said, in an understating tone.

Alex. Martha would be stupid if she couldn’t guess who George was talking to after that nickname. She smiled to herself, almost hearing Alexander’s automatic response and George’s ignorance towards it.

“Are you sure?” asked George, with an impressed tone. He changed his weight from one foot to the other as he nodded at the young man’s words. “Alright, if you think so… I trust you. Especially for not killing each other during our stay there, as this is your idea. All right. I’ll pick you both, then. No, don’t worry, it’s not a bother. See you later, Alexander”

Martha frowned in worry as George hung up and threw the phone to the counter with an exhalation of tiredness.

“So, are you going to tell me what’s going on before you go or were you going to write me a farewell letter?” asked Martha.

George jumped at the unexpected voice behind him and turned around. He sighed again. “I just need some coffee before”

“Tell me while I do it” proposed Martha, walking to the cabinets, resolute.

It was a pity George was going to pick Alexander up, otherwise she would have a chat with him and the bad influence he had over George. Three mugs of coffee. She had to stopped him before he reached the fourth.

“Honey, you’re not that young anymore” she commented.

“That’s why I need all the energy I can get from this” responded George.

“With that pessimistic attitude, of course you do”

“And how do you want me to be?”

“Look at the bright side of things more often” She kept his hand around hers, as a way to stop him
for drinking more and to give him physical support. “Look, I know you can’t stand the man, but you knew what you were getting into when you decided to trust him with something as serious”

George let the mug down to be able to rub his temples with his free hand. “Not you too, Martha. I’ve spent eight years of my life fighting, filling up papers, coming in and out of courtrooms, hearing comments from every living thing I bumped into about how I was making a stupid decision… I’d have trusted him my pension”

“I hope you’re not serious right now” said Martha, twisting her lips.

“Not now, but back then? I’m not so sure…”

“You can’t change what you two agreed on, but you can make it better now. See this as an opportunity to finally turn the page. Or burn the book…”

“You’re right”

“Of course I am! Besides, now you have Alex by your side. He won’t leave that man alone until he has everything he wants” she said half-joking, a part of her knew that scene could be very much true if Alex was given the option.

George nodded with a wee smile, thinking the same. “Still, I’d want him not to ever know King. He has enough on his plate”

“What happened?” asked Martha, concerned.

“Nothing, just a stressful week” answered George quickly.

“Tell him on my part to take a break”

George huffed. “We’d have to get in line to tell him that”

Thomas closed the door with a puff. He thought he would be able to rest until they could go back to the law firm, but, of course, his daughters’ habit of being late always for everything didn’t help.

“They take after their mother” he complained, as he massaged his shoulders. He tripped over the step of the entrance and hissed. “Damned double heighted entrance…”

“Yeah, I almost broke my ankle when I came in…”

Thomas opened his eyes when he heard the unexpected female voice in front of him.
“But I was wearing heels, so…” kept telling Maria, as she walked downstairs.

“What are you doing in here?” asked Thomas, scanning the girl’s dishevelled hair and… “And what are you doing wearing my robe?”

“Jemmy’s was too little” she answered, shrugging.

“Don’t you have respect for anything?”

“I’ll wash it later…” she promised.

“Keep it”

“I’m very clean, huh? Calm down” spat Maria. “Fucking Lemongrab” she whispered as she walked in the dining room and threw an offended look to the man.

“She acts as Pedro does at his house* and she dares to get offended” complained Thomas, hanging his coat and following the girl into the kitchen.

“Where’s the milk?” asked Maria, as she scanned the fridge.

“I haven’t gone to the supermarket yet” explained Thomas, crossing his arms upon his chest.

“Very bad. One must always have milk in the fridge” reprimanded Maria, closing the fridge and with both hands on her hips.

“I’m going to have whatever you want in my house”

“And how am I supposed to prepare my morning chocolate milk?”

“If you want milk that much, get dressed and go buy it”

“You ruined my morning, Lemongrab” accused Maria.

“Great, because you ruined mine as well”

“Now, how the heck I’m going to face the rest of the day…”

“Driving back to your own fucking house, for example” Thomas sighed and turned around, walking directly to the living room. “My gosh, I can’t be in peace in my own house”

“Obnoxious!” shouted Maria, from the hallway.

“What’s going on?” asked James, walking downstairs with a frown in his face. He looked right – to Maria – and left – to Thomas – and then sighed. “You just saw each other and are already screaming?”

“It’s her!” said Thomas, picking a book from the shelve.

“Me? You’re the one disrespecting me because I wanted milk!” Maria defended herself.

“I’ll go to the supermarket later” promised James.

“Let her go!” said Thomas.

“I didn’t divorce to obey more men, I divorced to live!” declared Maria, proudful.
“Keep living in the supermarket buying whatever we might need” argued Thomas.

“I’m not your maid!”

“If you are going to come in and out of here as if this were your house, collaborate”

“Relax…” muttered James, exhausted.

“I’m sick of everybody teasing me”

“I’m not…”

“If I see her toothbrush in the bathroom one day, you two will leave for never returning” warned Thomas.

“I can’t clean my teeth now?” said Maria, blinking perplexed.

“You start with the toothbrush, then some clothes to clean and, before any of us realise, you’d spend more time in here than in your own house” complained Thomas, under his breath.

“Am I bother?” asked Maria, offended.

“No” hurried to say James.

“Yes” replied Thomas at the same time.

“Thomas!”

“Good, now I’ll stay here all day just to piss you off” decided Maria.

She walked in the living room and sat across from Thomas, who frowned at her. The doorbell rang and James looked at the door and the two enraged persons in the living room.

“Don’t be childish” he said, as he walked to open the door.

“As soon as we get back to work, I’ll make that law firm your living hell, Betty Boop” swore Thomas.

“I am going to be your downfall, Lemongrab” swore back Maria.

“What did I just say!??” complained James, opening the door with more force than necessary. He rolled his eyes at the man at the other side. “The person we needed the most right now” he said, sarcastically.

“Dobby, every time you talk, a kitty is sunk in the most absolute depression” spat Alexander.

“I’m more of a dogs’ guy, anyways…”

“Tell your friend he needs to get ready. Washington will come to pick us up soon”

“Why?”

“Who is it, James?” asked Thomas, at the doorway. He half-closed his eyes at the immigrant’s
presence. “Is this a pact you all made at my backs to kill me slowly or what?”

“If I wanted you dead, you’d already be” said Alexander.

“Hi, Alex” greeted Maria, cheerful, sticking her head out the corner of the doorframe.

“Hi, Mari” greeted Alex, softening his tone and throwing a smile to the girl.

“Thomas, Washington will come to pick you up, get ready” informed James.

“Why?” asked Thomas, taken aback.

“Because you have to come with us to meet Mr. King” informed Alexander, with a dry tone.

“Meeting with King?” repeated Thomas. “No, I can’t go”

“Not looking like that, that’s for sure. Dress properly, it’s a formal meeting. Have shame*”

“Alexander, calm down” said James.

“There are roasted hams and then, there are roasting Hams” joked Maria, laughing.

Thomas clicked his tongue at the immigrant’s remark. “Have you ever taken a look to your pits of fashion, gremlin?”

“Thomas…” tried to say James.

Maria interrupted him. “Lemongrab, don’t you ever run out of that bitter juice? Jeez!”

“He has something internal that prevents him to be happy” said James.

“There he goes again” complained Thomas.

“Damn your life while you get ready, Jefferson” hurried Alexander, exasperated.

“I’m not going to meet with Maleficent just because you’re resolved to destroy the rest of my life. Thus far and no further” snapped Thomas.

“Did I start my request with a ‘If it pleases his Royal Highness’? No? Get ready, then”

“Hamilton…”

“That hair in itself must take one hour to tame”

“For Christ’s sake, Hamilton, I’m not going to meet that devil in disguise!” refused Thomas once again. “Look, if I wronged you in a past life, forgive me, but let me live peacefully in this one”

Alexander gritted his teeth in contained anger. “Another life? You’ve wronged me in this one, asshole! And more than once!”

“Ugh, I should’ve brought the phone with me downstairs…” lamented Maria.

“Gosh, the neighbours” said James, alerted, as he closed the door behind Hamilton’s back to muffle a bit the screams. “Hamilton, calm down!”

“No! This man sowed a lot of shit throughout his whole life and he hasn’t reaped one bit of it!” Alex turned in Thomas’ direction, who was moving the tongue inside his mouth in annoyance. “Now,
come here and reap your shit!”

“Alright, I’m going upstairs to get ready, happy?” spat Thomas, turning around and walking upstairs while muttering curses. “Fuck, who was the dimwit who fed him after midnight…”

Hamilton did just as much. “Penco de mierda…”

Maria walked to calm Alexander down, who was now red in the face and cursing under his breath in three different and mixed-up languages while James followed his friend. He found Thomas changing to his usual magenta formal clothes as he also cursed under his breath.

“Thomas” called James, closing the door behind him. “Thomas, take it easy”

“How? When it isn’t about Juana, it’s about the sister*. My gosh, I just wanted to read a book!”

“Well, it’s alright. Don’t listen to him, he’s not serious” assured James.

“The fuck he isn’t”

“No, he is not. Alexander is like that. You put a match beside him, and he lights it*”

“Since when is he Alexander?” asked Thomas, buttoning up his shirt.

“Since his parents decided so, I guess…”

“No, since when do you address him by the first name” clarified Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“Aaah. I don’t know. It slipped once and as he didn’t say anything, I keep going on with it. According to Burr, he doesn’t mind about that that much”

“That’d depend on who does it”

“No, he really doesn’t care. Sometimes, Adams and Lee address him by the first name and he ignores it”

“If you say so”

“Try it out. Maybe that way you’d stop acting like three-years-old”

“I’ll only try it to have a peaceful trip” informed Thomas, ordering his briefcase.

“I think Alexander have all the papers from his acquaintance” said James.

“Yes, but I’m losing time. With a bit of luck, he’ll get tired and I won’t have to go through that with any of them three” explained Thomas.

“This idiotic thing reminded me of another thing Burr advised me to do” said James, opening one of the drawers to take one blank sheet of paper out and one pen and passed them to his friend. “As you two like to write lists that much, write down one about all the things you’ve got in common. You can put that habit as the first thing” he explained.

Thomas took the two things hesitantly. “And you’re going to write another one as well? I’ve got the
first one as well for you: resentful as hell” he said but kept the pen and the sheet inside his briefcase, anyway.

James half-closed his eyes. “Write hurtful sarcasm there, as well”

“I won’t write anything down, James” spat Thomas, sighing as he found no more distractions to kill the time.

“I’ve worked with Alexander and know how he works. He’s just as hot-headed as you” he said, with tedium.

“Shall I write it on the list as well?” asked Thomas, with mockery.

“Don’t make fun of me. Trust me a bit more, will you? When have I ever failed you?” asked James, in annoyance.

“A couple of months ago, without going any further, while we were coming back from work late at night” answered Thomas, after a very brief moment of thinking.

“Send Patsy a text to tell her we’re almost there” said Thomas, as he pulled over when the light turned red.

James nodded and took out his phone out. He typed as he rubbed his slumberous eyes. Today his friend had decided to finish all the work he had left. Which meant almost all the work he had due to a couple of days. It was a bad habit, and Thomas had almost gone home when James assured him for the fifth time that he could, because it was not his fault that James liked to procrastinate that much. But he stayed. He wasn’t going to leave the man alone in that desolate building at night.

James just had to have the call of work the same night Hamilton also left the law firm just three hours later than he had to.

“Polly says she’s fine, and with the doors locked” answered James, reclining in his seat as he yawned.

“Polly?” asked Thomas, raising one eyebrow. “I thought I told you to text Patsy”

“Yes, but she was the one who answered”

“Yeah, that means the other is wandering around only God knows where” He rolled down his window to let some fresh air hit him in the face. “Tell Patsy that I’m going to lock the doors at ten”

“You can’t lock her out the house, Thomas, I’ve told you” argued James, sleepily.
“She wouldn’t mind. She spends her whole day out, anyways”

As James was about to say he was too tired for one of those fights, two armed guys came running to the window Thomas had previously opened, one of them pointing the gun at his head.

“Get out of the car!” one ordered, in a husky voice.

“Scream and you’re dead!” the other threatened, as he pressed the gun against Thomas’ temple.

That was enough to wake James up completely and take action. “Thank you for the ride, sir” he said to Thomas, as much formally as he could, and then opened the car door and sprinted all the way down street, without looking back.

“That event again?” asked James, upset. “I told you countless of times I ran to look for help!”

“Yes, that was why I found you right at home, watching TV” said Thomas, sarcastically, as he exited the room with resignation.

“Because I found no one as I ran”

“No one? In New York?” said Thomas, sceptically.

“Besides, they let you go” said James, following him to the staircase.

“Yes, after pitying the poor unfortunate whose friend abandoned him”

“For looking for help” insisted James.

“Yes, James, whatever you say…”

They made the way downstairs, where they found Hamilton talking with Maria, calmer than before.

“The only good thing of having her here today” commented Thomas, in a whisper.

“Take the meds, just in case” said James.

“You know I’m not going to take them” said Thomas.

“Thomas…”

“Well, about time. Washington’s already waiting” snapped Alexander, as soon as he saw the two
men appearing in the staircase.

“Why didn’t you leave with him then?” asked Thomas.

“Because you’re coming with us”

“Stubborn gremlin”

“Wonder who he reminds me of…” commented James, rolling his eyes.

“I’ll make sure to add it to the list, darling” said Thomas, mockingly, as he wrapped his throat with a scarf.

“Try not to kill each other, Alex” said James.

“I can’t make promises on that matter, Madison”

James looked at Thomas as he pointed at Hamilton with the chin. Thomas sighed heavily, knowing what his friend wanted him to do.

“Let’s go, Alexander” he said opening the door for his workmate.

“Drive safely!” said Maria, giving Alex a farewell hug.

“Thanks, Maria, have a nice day” said Alex, returning the gesture quickly. “Come on, Washington is not that patient” he commented, casually.

“Alright” said Thomas, throwing a surprised glare to James, who nodded as if saying ‘told you so’.

“Ah, Jefferson” said Alexander, stopping his tracks just at the door.

“Yes?”

“Don’t you ever call me by my first name. We are not friends” he deadpanned, before walking directly to the silver Ford Edge waiting for them.

Maria’s let a couple of laughs escape her lips. “Ho ho, he must really despise you. He doesn’t say that to Adams when the man calls him Alexander”

“Thanks for the commentary, Maria. What would we do without you?” said Thomas, sarcastically.

“Not much” nodded the girl. “Remember to buy milk” she said, walking in the living room.

“I’m not going to the supermarket!”

“Buy bread as well” said James, as he took his phone out and typed something to someone.

“I don’t know when I’ll be back” complained Thomas, slamming the front door shut.

“Whole-wheat!” said James, through the door.
Thomas trotted to the car, cherishing the fact that Hamilton was still out, in front of the co-pilot door, reading something on his phone. He took a seat at the right side at the back seat, saying a polite good morning to Washington, who only hummed in response, eyeing Hamilton. Alexander threw a rapid glare to the back of the car. Sighing, he closed the door and went quickly to the back seat, taking a seat beside Thomas, who frowned at the action but remained silent. *What a ride this will be…*

“What the hell were you doing?” snapped George, as soon as Alexander closed his door and looking at the immigrant through the rear mirror. “I’ve been waiting out here for ten minutes”

“Well, we’ve still got some time” said Alex, taken aback by his boss’ sudden outburst.

“That doesn’t matter. I shouldn’t be standing this disrespect from my employees, especially when I’m doing something I don’t agree completely with in the first place”

“… Well, I won’t make you lose any more time” decided Alexander, red in the face. He opened the door and jumped out of the car with anger. “Fuck this!” he shouted, closing the door with a thump and hoofing back to his house.

“And why does he get angry??” asked Washington, dumbfounded.

“For once, I’ve got a slight idea…” said Thomas.

Washington rolled down his window and stuck out his head. “Alex, come back!”

Jefferson turned to see Hamilton walked directly to his house. The immigrant suddenly turned on his heels without stopping and hoofed back to the car. He entered the vehicle again.

“Maybe you were right, the less time we can lose the better” admitted Alexander, buckling his seat belt.

“Bah, forget it. There’s a part of me that would do the same” said Washington, starting the car and driving them out of there.

Thomas looked at the two men, shrugging and not understanding a thing. He buckled his own belt and threw a rapid glare to the window, where he saw Maria with the phone against the window. Thomas turned his head to the other sidewalk and made himself comfortable. It was going to be a long ride and day.

Laurens waited at lobby of the restaurant. Peggy’s friend, Nestor, had decided the place and she told him the time Laurens preferred to meet. John had to admit the place was nice and made a
mental note to recommend it to Hercules and Lafayette if one day they wanted to dine out. It was medieval styled, there were a few armours with swords as decoration down the halls. Though John wasn’t a fan of the decorations, he found this one place a bit comforting and nice to look at while waiting for his date to arrive.

He looked at his watch. He had come a bit late and was worried he’d made his date to wait for him, but in the end, it was him the one waiting. He asked for a bit of water to the head waiter and he came back with a glass full of it. John drank half of it, swallowing his nerves in the process. He went to drink the other half and, at last hour, decided to gargle to clear his voice and throat.

“John Laurens?” a man called from the entrance. “Laurens? Is there a guy here called John Laurens?”

John made sure to swallow as fast as he could, choking and coughing as a result.

“There we go again…” he heard the man, complaining. “There we go again, playing pranks on me!” the man raised his voice, clearly offended.

Laurens trotted quickly to where he was standing. Nestor was slim but still with some presence. Or, at least, that was what Laurens felt because of his baritone voice and the deep frown on his face. His raven hair was cut in the mid-fade haircut type, and he had a subtle beard. He was wearing a casual white shirt and black jeans that matched his jacket. Well, Peggy wasn’t lying when she told him he was good-looking.

“I’m here, I’m here, sorry” Laurens excused himself, scratching the back of the neck in a nervous manner.

Nestor’s face relaxed considerably and a blush spread on his cheeks. “Oh, sorry! It’s just that blind dates make me so nervous. Please, don’t think badly of me” he apologised.

“Don’t worry, it’s normal. I was shaking a few minutes ago” admitted Laurens, as they made their way to their table. “Besides, I never understood why they are called that. Because, if this is a blind date, what would you call a date between two blind persons?”

John did what he did best: he rambled to forget about his nerves. It was a habit Alexander and he shared. Needless to say, their first date was one to remember. Not in a literal way, because the two talked about so many irrelevant and stupid things that none of them remembered a single one of them.
Laurens turned his head when he felt nobody at his side. He saw Nestor had stopped walking and was looking at the floor, too serious for Laurens’ liking. He shut his mouth with an audible click of the jaw, and Nestor lifted up his head to look him in the eyes.

“Listen, I’m going to warn you before we keep knowing each other: I can’t stand jokes about blind people. Say just one more, and I’ll leave” he declared.

Laurens was taken aback at first, but then nodded slowly. “Alright, sorry. I’ll never forget”

It was true, it would be difficult to forget a scene like that. Especially when Nestor changed his mood drastically again, smiling and thanking him for being understanding. Way to start the date, Laurens condemned himself inside his head.

They took a seat at the table reserved for them and read the menu in silence. Laurens didn’t know if it would be wise to start another conversation, but the tension was killing him.

“Well…” he said, making Nestor raise his glare from the menu. “It’s… This place is lovely” he complimented.

Nestor smiled – point for me, thought Laurens, smiling back. “It is, isn’t in?” nodded Nestor, with a dreamy gleam in his eyes. “I came here with my ex once and fell in love with it. Since then, I don’t want to go anywhere else”

“Ah, your ex?” asked Laurens.

Nestor waved one hand dismissively. “Water under the bridge. Not even think about him”

“All right” he nodded.

Nestor’s smile fell. “Oh, God… How will you when I brought him up?” he said, feeling bad.

“No, no, it’s alright, I also…” Laurens tried to make him feel better.

Nestor hit his head against the menu card. “Idiot! Idiot! Idiot!”

“Stop, stop!” said Laurens, taking the menu away from him.

“I messed the whole date up!” regretted Nestor, sobbing uncontrollably.

“No, no! It’s alright, I don’t mind, we all have exes! … Well, not me. I… I was waiting for the right partner” he made up quickly. Better not to bring Alex into this yet.

“Really?” said Nestor, with both hands upon his chest.

“Yes, yes. This place is still lovely, you’re nice, everything perfect” nodded Laurens, nervous.

Nestor smiled, relieved. “Peggy wasn’t lying when she told me you were worth a shot”
A shot is what I want right now. To drink or to go through my skull, I don’t know… thought Laurens, laughing forcefully.

“And what do you do for a living?” asked Nestor, casually.

“Well, I work at a law firm…”

“Are you a lawyer?” asked Nestor, interested.

“I’m the Human Resources manager, actually” he clarified.

Nestor nodded. Laurens sighed, thankful that some calmness and normality was back to the conversation. Nestor opened his mouth to ask him something else but stopped when the table beside them burst out laughing. John barely paid them any attention, but Nestor’s expression darkened as he looked at the gentlemen sat at their left.

“Matter to tell where the joke is?” spat Nestor, making the men become serious in a blink of an eye.

“Nestor, they must be laughing at some in-joke…” said Laurens, calmly.

“What? Are you making fun of me? Do I look funny to you?!” he shouted, accusatory and ignoring John’s words.

Okay… Enough. I’m not that desperate… thought John.

“Em… Nestor, you know what?” he said, as he got up from the chair, casually. “I… I just remember I double-parked and I should check on the car…” he made up, clumsily.

“You’re feeling it too, right?” interrupted Nestor.

“… Feeling what?” asked Laurens, quite scared.

“This sexual connection between us” answered Nestor, lustfully. “I don’t want to sound superficial, but… I’ve been wanting to bang you since I saw you”

“… … … Let’s go to the washroom” declared Laurens, grabbing him by the forearm and making him get up.

“Shouldn’t we check your car first?” he asked, letting the freckled man lead the way.

“Screw the car. It’s a friend’s”

“Hahahaha! You’re so funny!”
Eliza had finished up mopping the whole basement of her father’s house with an exhausted sigh. She had only come by to visit him and see how he was doing, and thank God for that sixth sense she had, because when she went downstairs into the basement with her father, very proud of himself for having made the laundry that day all by himself without calling her, they found the whole room flooded.

She wouldn’t have minded cleaning all that water if it weren’t for the fact that just three minutes later, Philip Sr. had insisted on showing her how he could make them both fried eggs for lunch. And the next thing she knew was that she had to run out of the house, grab the extinguisher and extinguish the fire on the pan.

And one minute after the startle, she had to comfort her sobbing father.

“Look, as it’s clear you can’t be left alone with the house duties, I think the best would be to hire a professional cleaner” said Eliza, resigned.

“Told you…” said Philip Sr., his voice muffled by his hands.

Eliza avoid clicking her tongue at that reply. “But” she added, sharply. “I still think you’ve got some other things to improve”

She got up from the couch and walked to her father’s workroom. Philip Sr.’s eyed grew wide when he saw what his daughter had brought.

“No, honey, please, not that…” he begged.

“Yes, yes this” she said.

“Not the whiteboard, I hate when any of you use the whiteboard” groaned Philip Sr

Eliza put the whiteboard in front of her father and passed him the marker. “Come on, Dad, collaborate” she said, pulling him to his feet. “It’ll be productive, I promise”

“Ugh…”

“Look, you’ve got me, alright? I want to help you”

“I know, I know”

“Good. Then, do as I say. We’ll do it slowly and calmly”
“Alright… What do I do?” he asked, looking at the marker as if it were his worst enemy.

“Nice!” celebrated Eliza, taking a seat on the couch. “This is an exercise of self-judgement. I want you to write down three flaws of you, and we’ll discuss them and work on them” she explained.

“Three flaws?” repeated her father.

“Just think of three and write them down” she nodded.

“My flaws… My flaws…” said Philip Sr., tapping his chin with the marker, thoughtful. He snapped his fingers. “Got ‘em” he declared, as he started writing down three words. He took a step aside to let his daughter read. “There, my three flaws”

“… … These?” asked Eliza, after reading them.

“Yep”

“… … ‘I love to give without minding about receiving’” she read.

“I don’t mind. Not at all” said Philip Sr., shaking his head in resignation.

“‘I can’t stand injustices’”

“I can’t stand them. They make me sick”

Eliza took her time before reading the last one. “… … ‘Sometimes, being so loved by society hurts me and I blame myself for the world not having more Philip Schuylers around’”

“It’s a secret burden that sometimes it’s too hard to carry” admitted Philip Sr.

“… … Give me that” said Eliza, getting up.

“What?”

“The marker” she said, taking it herself. “Sit down. Let me”

Philip Sr. took a seat again, crossing his arms upon his chest when he saw Eliza erasing what he had written. What idiotic crap will she write… he thought.

“Dad, I love you” said Eliza, as she wrote. “But you must admit…” she took a step aside to let her father see the whiteboard, now with three new words written on it. Eliza tapped them as she said them. “that you’ve always been a bit of a selfish, liar and immature”

“Your face is immature!” snapped Philip Sr.

Eliza half-closed her eyes. “Dad, please…”

“And a liar? When?”

“Well, Dad, I’ve spent the last thirty years thinking I was your and Mum’s daughter”

“There you go. It only took you two months and three weeks to rub that in my face” complained Philip Sr.
“Dad…”

“And what’s that about ‘selfish’?”

“Dad, please” said Eliza, frowning in exasperation and with both arms in akimbo. “All those times we asked for food and you asked for chicken and Mom wanted a bite and you slapped her hand away and told her off”

“That was not being selfish, that was me proving a point: if you want chicken, ask for chicken” explained Philip Sr.

“You once did it in front of guests” Eliza reminded.

“Embarrassment helps to learn faster”

“The poor bird wanted to fly away from the scene, and it was dead” commented Eliza, rubbing her temples.

“And what do I do, according to you? Do I send your mother a photo of me eating chicken and sharing it with you?” asked her father, lost.

“No, no! That could be misinterpreted!” she said rapidly. She thought for a moment, and then snapped her fingers. “Got it. Wasn’t Mom sick of all the junk you kept in the attic?”

“Yeah, she was such a nag about it…” complained Philip Sr.

“Then kill two birds with one rock. Clean all that trash and the things that could still be useful you’ll give to charity”

“The annoying woman that lives across from here? No way in hell!” decided Philip Sr.

“No, charity as charitable organizations, Dad” explained Eliza, with boredom.

“I don’t know what’s worse…”

“It will be fun, you’ll see!” encouraged Eliza, helping her father to get up. “I’m sure there has to be something useful in there”

“But what will I be given in exchange?” asked Philip Sr., as his daughter walked him down the hallway.

Eliza stopped in her tracks and looked over her shoulder. “Nothing… That’s why it’s charity”

“So, why do people do it?”

“Because it’s nice to be altruist” explained Eliza, opening the attic door.

“Daughter, one thing is to be altruist, and another thing is to be altruist in exchange of nothing” said Philip Sr., after a huff.

Eliza stopped mid-way again, now in the stairs. “Dad, that’s the exact definition of altruism” she said.

“Really? Now I understand it less”
Hercules had set the table by the time the doorbell rang. Lafayette had gone to wake Laurens up – if the man used to come back home past midnight when they still had to go to the law firm the next morning, now with the sudden ‘vacation’ they all had until further notice, he came when the sun rose. Hercules went to open the door, almost bumping his boyfriend in the way.

“He’s coming” informed Lafayette.

Hercules nodded and looked through the peephole, groaning at the two persons at the other side.

“Is this going to become a tradition?” he asked, when he opened the door.

“We came to cheer your lunches up and this is the way you have to thank us?” asked Peggy, walking in the house with no invitation.

“I brought you this” said Alf, passing the man a bottle of wine.

“Well, at least one of the two has manners” said Hercules, smiling slightly. The smile dropped when he saw… “The bottle is half empty”

“I see it half full” commented Alf, closing the door at his backs.

“Whatever. This is already opened” condemned Hercules.

“Well, I wasn’t going to bring something that could hurt any of you. I tasted it just in case” explained Alf, entering the kitchen, where Laf and Peggy were already chatting lively.

“You surely had a good time tasting it” muttered Hercules, under his breath.

“Pegs, you didn’t drink, did you?” asked Laf.

“Noono, Mum, calm down” she said, rolling her eyes.

“Good”

Laurens made his way into the room when they were all about to eat. Hercules got up to put some food on his plate as well.

“Well, it’s good to see your Highness decided to join us” he said, mockingly.

Laurens let himself fall on one of the chairs. “Yes, with a royal hangover…” he muttered. “Give me some water, please…”
“I take that as you got a busy night?” asked Peggy, waggling her eyebrows.

“Yes” he said, after drinking the whole glass of water Hercules gave him. “I got that and laid”

“We’re eating” scolded Laf.

Hercules huffed. “And then, on the first night with this man, he only cuddled” he complained, pointing at Alfred. “He does it all the other way around”

“If I go straight for it, wrong. If I wait, wrong. I never do anything right according to you” said Laurens.

“And how is he?” asked Alf, interested.

Laurens shrugged one shoulder. “Well, at first it was a bit weird. But then we clicked”

Peggy smiled triumphally. “Well, well, well, it seems that Peggy is a better matchmaker than people claimed her to be” she declared, taking a bite of chicken.

“Yeah, but, Pegs, the guy is a bit… Cuckoo, cuckoo” said Laurens, throwing a sideways glare to the girl. “I don’t want to sound cruel, but there was a moment in which I thought the guy escaped from an asylum”

“Jeez, John…” said Alf.

“Well, nowadays, we call them mental health facilities” said Peggy, as she kept eating nonchalantly.

“What?” asked Laurens, freezing in spot as the rest of the table.

Mental health facilities” repeated the girl, taking a sip of water.

“Yes, I heard you” said Laurens, enraged. “Peggy, did you get me involved with an insane guy?” he asked, raising his voice.

“Don’t be so close-minded” scolded Lafayette. “He could be there for many reasons that don’t need to be dangerous”

“Besides, he’s out” added Alf. “That means he’s better”

“Exactly” chimed in Peggy. “Last time I saw him there he was a lot better” She turned to Laurens, who was passing a hand through his hair, nervous. “What did he do? Did he talk with strangers?”

“Yes, yes, he made a fuss because the ones sitting next to us laughed out loud” nodded Laurens.

“Mood swings?”

“That’s an understatement”

“Did he take his time to offer himself sexually?”

“Well, that’s subjective” said Laurens, pretending to think. “Three minutes after sitting down is a lot of time?”

“That’s what you should’ve done” said Hercules, looking at Alf.

“Shut up!” shouted Laurens. “Peggy, how do you see him?”
Peggy moved her head slightly. “I see him just as he was before he got admitted”

“You’re making the poor guy’s defence very difficult, Peggy…” complained Lafayette.

Alf laughed a bit. “Gosh, Johnny, you get yourself in such messes…” he commented, as he scrutinized the table. “Where’s the bread?”

“Ugh, I knew I forgot something when I went shopping” said the Frenchman.

“What bread, assholes??” exploded Laurens, hitting the table. He looked for his phone in his pockets. “Where’s my phone!? Where’s my phone?!”

“That’s your pyjamas, John” said Hercules, keeping eating as if nothing was happening around him.

Laurens got up. “I’m gonna call him and break up with him. I won’t forgive you for this, ever!” he declared, pointing at Peggy.

The therapist got up and grabbed his arm. “No, don’t do that!” she advised.

“I’ve got another date tonight” explained Laurens, trying to get his arm free. “I’ll send him a text to say goodbye, and that is”

“There, breaking up with a text” commented Hercules.

“Johnny, that drives mad average people, imagine what that could do to him” said Alf.

“He can’t do a single thing right” said Hercules.

Lafayette threw daggers in his direction. “Herc, don’t talk with your mouth full… Or empty, if you only have bad things to say…”

Laurens looked panickily at each of them. “Then, what should I do?”

“Break up with him with tact” said Alf, immediately. “It’s always the best option”

“No!” said Peggy, immediately. “No, no, this guy doesn’t do well with break-ups”

“Pity, he already had his hour with John Laurens” said Laurens, stubbornly.

“No, John, listen to me! When I say he doesn’t do well I mean… that the last guy who broke up with him didn’t have a good ending” she explained.

“What do you mean by that?” asked Laurens, more scared than before.

“Nothing serious, calm down, it’s just that… his last boyfriend and he had a heated break-up”

“Gosh, but that happens sometimes. I remembered that time I threw the TV remote at Alex”

“Yes, but you never made Alex be in a wheelchair” she commented, quietly.

“What?!” he screamed. “Why?? Was he in an accident or something?”

“Well, yeah… We liked to call it ‘accident’ in therapy” she said, wringing her hands.

“What a matchmaker…” commented Hercules, as Laurens let out a sob.

“Peggy, with all due respect, but I think you’re a bit of a bitch” said Alf, gaining a hateful glare from
the girl. “With all due respect, I said”

“This was your revenge for that stupid mattress!” accused Laurens, hyperventilating.

“No! I swear it wasn’t!” said Peggy, shaking her head. “Look, the only thing you’ve gotta do is to follow Alf’s advice: break up with him with tact. Slowly… And maybe that way… and if he’s taking the meds… Maybe you’ll get rid of him in three, four…”

“Days?” said Laurens, hopeful.

“Em…”

“Months?” tried Laurens again.

“Years…” she said, with tiny voice.

“Bon sang…” muttered Laf, shaking his head with empathy.

Laurens looked at Peggy, and the girl simply shrugged, frowning in concern. He let out a few sobs before storming out the kitchen, bursting into tears.

“Well done, Peggy” said Lafayette, sarcastically.

Hercules laughed a bit. “He used to say he was lucky Alexander ended up breaking up with him because he had too much temper for his likings” he commented. “Now, I bet he must be rethinking it”

“He’s got such good friends…” commented Alf, shaking his head.

George locked the doors of the backseat as he parked outside a huge building. A good decision, because, as soon as the car stopped, the two men sat there tried to pull them open with no avail. Washington tried not to smile with superiority. He looked at them by the rear-view mirror.

“Alright, sub-animals, listen up. King had a business reunion today but still accepted to meet with us. That means that I want you to pretend you’re humans. Grown-up humans, if possible” he explained.

“Why not any other day?” asked Alexander, cocking an eyebrow.

Washington had a few theories, the most probable one being that King and Lee were still in contact and the latter was a chatterbox when drunk. If King thought he would embarrass him today because of the children that worked for him, he was going to prove him wrong. Or tried to, at least.
“I don’t know. But the sooner the better” Washington ended up saying. “Now, I’m going to open the doors. I don’t know what’s gotten into you two during the trip, but I want you to be just as silent. Understood?”

“Yes, sir” both men said in unison.

“Good”

“… Sir, could you open the door?” asked Alexander, after both he and Jefferson failed two attempts to jump out of the car.

“Oh, yes, sorry, boys” he said, unlocking the doors. “I was thinking”

Alexander and Thomas got out of the car without questioning the edge in their boss’ voice.

They followed Washington in complete silence. Alexander took a look at his surroundings, his curious nature taking over. Their law firm didn’t hold a candle against this. Not only for the lack of missing walls, but for how spotless it was and how it was full of moving or working people. Washington almost let out a sniff when he heard the only noise they were surrounded by was the ringing of various phones and several chats. Polite chats.

_Eleven years to retire_, thought George, feeling his eyes watery from contained tears.

Thomas walked with his glare down. He knew every corner of that building. He had spent countless hours (some that were out his work hours) walking and trotting, always with something to do and hand out. He could even remember which office was whose and who worked where. But Thomas preferred not to. There weren’t many people he wanted to remember right now from there.

“Excuse me, we had a meeting with Mr. King for today?” Washington’s voice (thankfully) took him out of his thoughts.

“He’s still meeting with Mr. Porter right now, but I’m sure he’d be finished in a few minutes” said the receptionist, giving them an automatic smile. “It’s the fourth floor, turn left and at the end of the hall” she explained.

“Thank you, miss” said Washington, as he and his two employees nodded politely. “He changes his receptionists as much as his wardrobe” he commented, on the quiet, when they arrived at the elevator.

“At least, we weren’t here to see all those firings” commented Thomas.

“She would thank the firing, judging by her face” said Alexander, as he looked over his shoulder to the girl.
“All do at some point” said Thomas and Washington, with resignation.

The elevator dinged and the doors opened. Thomas swallowed. He wasn’t claustrophobic, but he always tried to avoid elevators as pest itself. He always preferred the stairs, at least those couldn’t stop at any second, trapping him with whomever he might’ve been with.

“Wait! Hold on!” a woman cried in the distance, out of air.

Thomas looked up at the sound of the familiar voice while Alexander stopped the elevator doors. The voice owner came into view: a girl, with a hair as bright as gold, wavy and tied up in a messy ponytail, and skin as pale as day, who came running in their direction. She was wearing a pair of white pants and a mint green jacket that covered her black shirt, the same colour as her heels. One of those heels broke when she was about to reach the elevator, and the girl fell on her noses, making the sheets she brought with her fly around her. The three men waiting for her winced in sympathetic pain.

Thomas was the first one to get out to go to her aid, being soon followed by the other two.

“Ow, my nose” complained the woman, rubbing her sore face.

“Are you okay, miss?” asked Alexander, collecting the sheets for her along with Washington.

“Yes, it was a stupid fall, that’s all…” she said, not sounding convincing at all.

“You haven’t changed at all, Marisa*” said Thomas, kneeling beside her and helping her to get up.

“Ugh, it’s not my fault!” complained the girl, looking at the broken heel. “It’s these damned shoes’!” She sighed and then turned to him, finally looking up at him. “Thanks, s… Thomas?” she stopped mid-sentence, blinking in surprise. Her blue eyes shone with delight when she finally recognised the man in front of her and hugged him without hesitation. “I’m so glad to see you again!”

Thomas patted her on the back. “Sure you weren’t expecting to see me around here ever again” he commented, awkwardly.

“Not at all” she agreed, turning around to look at the other two men. “Mr. Washington, good to see you as well” she said, taking the papers the oldest man handed to her.

“It’s good the first familiar face we see here is yours, Mrs. Cosway” said Washington, smiling at the girl.

“Miss Hadfield” she corrected. “I got divorced a couple of months ago”

“Finally, some good news” half-joked Washington.

“Hope you’re doing better, then” said Thomas.
Marisa turned to him with a bright smile. “Lot better” she assured. “I’m throwing myself into my art, now that I don’t have to put up with that man anymore”

“Good to know” said Thomas, smiling at her.

“Yes, my therapist told me it would be a good thing to do to get over my divorce and what used to be my marriage” explained Marisa, as she took her shoes off. “It’s really helpful”

“That’s good” commented Washington, nodding in happiness for the girl.

“I almost finished the painting I started the other day. It’s titled ‘My ex, the fucking cheater’” she said, her tone becoming darker all of a sudden. The three men exchanged glares of nervousness. “It’s part of my collection, called ‘Go burn in hell, fucking asshole’” she added, breaking the other heel.

Thomas swallowed. “It’s… very healthy, I see…”

“It is, right?” said Marisa, changing her mood again and now showing them a bright smile. She put her shoes on again. “So, what are you doing in here?”

“We needed to sort some things out with King” answered George.

“Oh, in that case you are lucky. He’s gonna be in a good mood today” she said.

“Really?”

“Yeah, he and Samuel have been meeting with Mr. Porter and his assistant for two hours now, and both pairs seemed to be enjoying themselves”

“Seabury?” asked Thomas, with a cocked eyebrow.

“He’s now the vice president” explained Marisa.

“Birds of a feather” commented Thomas.

“If Mr. Porter can get along with him, maybe it was a good thing we never reached an agreement” said Washington.

Marisa laughed. “Yeah. Thanks, mister” she said, taking the sheets Alexander was handing her. She frowned slightly. “Do I know you?”

“I don’t think so, miss” replied Alexander.

“Alexander used to come here to help me before I and a few others left” explained Washington, before Marisa’s intense glare.

“Alexander?” echoed the girl, tilting her head. Something clicked in her mind and her eyes shone with realization. “Oh, are you Alexander Hamilton?”

Alex nodded and stretched out his hand. “Nice to meet you, miss” he said, while shaking hands.

“I’ve heard lots about you in several meetings I’ve gone to with Mr. King!” she explained. “You’re Mrs. Knox’s son, right?”

Alex flinched considerably. “Foster son” he clarified.

Marisa saw her error and blushed slightly. “Sorry!”
“It’s alright”

“Let’s go to the fourth floor” said Washington suddenly, breaking the awkwardness. “You were heading there as well, right?”

Marisa nodded while Washington called the elevator once again. They waited in comfortable silence until the doors dinged after what they felt like an eternity. Just when Marisa was about to put a foot in the car, she stopped abruptly.

“Shit…” she muttered.

“What’s wrong?” asked Thomas.

“Now I’ve got the sheets disorganised” she explained, her cheeks redder than a tomato, giggling.

“You don’t know how to print the papers with the page number yet?” asked Washington, with boredom.

“Nope” she admitted, lowering her glare and kicking the air absently.

“You’re hopeless, Marisa” said Thomas, half-closing his eyes.

“Let me help you with that” offered Alexander, getting out the elevator. “Washington and Jefferson know how to handle Mr. King better and know Mr. Porter” he explained, throwing a sideways glare to his boss.

Washington nodded. “Alright, then, we’ll wait for you there, son”

“Don’t call…”

Washington pressed the button to the fourth floor, interrupting Alexander’s sentence by the sliding doors closing.

“…son” Alex finished, stubbornly.

Marisa contained a laugh, not understanding the scene, but finding it funny nonetheless.

Chapter End Notes

I took Alex’s explanation from the Spanish sitcom where this situation happened. I just translated the terms as well as I could. Don’t think I’m smart on the matter or anything XD
Hitler and Stalin signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, that was basically a nonaggression pact. I recall Hitler broke it by invading Poland all for himself, starting the WWII.

As Pedro does at his house (Como Pedro por su casa): The Spanish version of the saying 'Acting as if you own someplace'.

As long as I know, Jefferson didn't care too much about his appearance as the musical showed. Ironically, that was Hamilton. I wanted to do it the other way around, though these are the musical's characters, 'cause it was more original and interesting.

Penco de mierda: Shitty f**ker. "Penco/penca" is a Canary word (I'm from the Canary Islands), so it's probable that people in the Peninsula haven't heard of it. It means 'a very despicable person'. If you use it in the female form "Penca", it has another connotation, very similar to 'puta (bitch, slut)'.

"When it's not about Juana, it's about her sister (Cuando no es Juana, es la hermana)": Like when you're trying to do something but all are problems and objections, you say this. Like, something's always the matter.

"If you put a match beside me, you'd light it (Me pones un fósforo/cerilla al lado y lo/la enciendo)”: Don't know how to explain this or even if it's an idiom in itself, but it's something I grew up hearing from several people close to me. You say this when you're so nervous/angry or at the limit (or a mix of the three) that you could light a match (I guess because of that metaphorical inner fire we associate anger with). In the Canary (and I think in Latin America as well (?)) we call a match 'fósforo', but the Peninsula call it 'cerilla'. Just in case you were interested.

The quarrel between Alexander and Washington was based on anecdote the real ones had once. It turns Washington wanted to meet Alexander to talk in private with him and Alexander bumped into a couple of persons who kept him busy and made Washington wait for ten minutes. When Alex could make it to where Washington was waiting, he asked where had he been and that if he was disrespecting him. Alexander being Alexander said, in what would be modern slang, "Fuck you and fuck this revolution, I'm out of here". They made amends the same day, but I had to include that XD

Maria Cosway's full name is: Maria Luisa Caterina Cecilia. As we already have a Maria (Lewis), and it would be very confusing, I decided to use Marisa (diminutive for María Luisa, at least in Spain) and Cattie (for Caterina)
You'll be back (P 2)

Chapter Notes

As someone who's been called crazy throughout her whole life, I think it's needless to say I don't intend to offend anyone with Nestor's character. Laurens' plot was based on an episode from an old Spanish sitcom in which one of the protagonists had to date a woman that acted even crazier.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With Alexander’s help, it was easier to organise the papers. Marisa watched in awe as the man worked at light speed. If only more people like him would help others more often, maybe the workplace would be a better place to be. She didn’t know what Mr. Washington had to talk with Mr. King, but it must be a life or death situation to come back to that man.

And to think that now we’re cooperating with Mr. Porter, she thought bitterly. Her ex-husband worked there, and the last thing she needed was to have anything to do with him, professionally or not.

“You’ve got these done already” said Alexander, passing her another stack of papers.

“Thank you!” she said, blinking impressed and adding them to the correspondent pile. “Has anyone told you you’re non-stop?”

Alex smiled a bit. “Sometimes…”

She frowned. “Sorry for my previous slip-up” she apologised.

“Told you it was nothing” he reassured, reading the next pages closer to him. “It was just an assumption due to a blur memory”

“Technically talking, yes” she giggled. “Thanks for your help, it really took me long enough to print them in the first place” she admitted.

“Nothing” said Alexander again, dismissive.

“Since Thomas left, King put me in his post. I should be grateful for not being one of his disposable receptionists, but I’ve never envied Thomas’ post, to be honest” she talked, taking other three pages Alexander handed to her.

“Why so?” asked the CFO, arching one eyebrow.

“Those scenes are legendary around here” said Marisa. “King is not very good towards anyone, but he had it for Thomas for some reason, especially after… Well, that’s not my place to tell” she interrupted herself, shaking her head. “But King never liked him”
“He’s difficult to like” commented Alexander.

“He’s better than his appearance lets us to see” said Marisa, resting her chin on the palm of her hand. “For example, I’ve always been told that I look like a porcelain girl, but you’d never want to see me angry” she said, with a devilish smile spreading across her face.

“I could say the same thing, though anyone could easily see that through me” he laughed a bit.

Marisa laughed another bit. “I think my temper saved me from being treated the same way King used to treat Thomas. He’s not dumb, but shyness can be a truly inconvenience”

Alexander nodded in agreement. “What’s the deal with King? What did he use to do?” he asked, out of curiosity.

“I could tell you, but you wouldn’t believe me”

“Well, it’s clear you’ve never been to our law firm” said Alexander, rolling his eyes.

“If you say so…” said Marisa, with a thoughtful expression. “Well, there was that one time with the lemonade…”

Marisa had just started working there and could name a few persons just by their faces. That lunchbreak, she was eating at the table in the break room with Madison, Monroe and another man she just knew that day and was introduced to her as John Adams. The break was about to finish when a fourth man entered the room, in a hurry.

“Thomas, you’re still working?” asked Monroe.

“The reunion just finished and King asked me for something for the throat ache” explained the secretary, boiling some water.

“You just got out from there now?” asked Madison, with a hint of worry in his voice.

“You must be starving” commented Marisa, sharing the accountant’s concern.

“I’m alright. I just need to prepare some hot lemonade” dismissed Thomas.

“Gross” commented Adams.

“It’s good for throat aches” said Madison. “You should add some honey to it”

“Yes, and a paper umbrella as well” said Thomas, sarcastically.

“I was only suggesting…” muttered Madison.

Thomas poured the water in a glass and squeezed half a lemon, groaning when he took a
look at his watch and saw he wouldn’t be able to have lunch today. The same day he couldn’t have a proper breakfast because King decided to rearrange the meeting without telling him first.

He waved his head to bid farewell to his workmates and friend and headed upstairs. He knocked on the door and came in when he heard the hoarse voice of his boss allowing him to do so. He greeted Washington, who was there discussing a few topics of today’s meeting.

“About time” snapped King, interrupted his vice president, who sealed his lips immediately.

“Sorry, sir” said Thomas, putting the glass on King’s desk. “If you’ll excuse me…” he said, nodding and turning around, just wanting to have a time to breathe.

“What is this?” King’s sharp voice stopped him.

“What, sir?” asked Thomas, turning around reluctantly.

King frowned and pointed at his glass. “This”

“It’s… Uh… Hot lemonade, sir, for your sore throat” he explained, hesitantly.

King clicked his tongue. “I know what a lemonade is. I was asking you what’s the meaning of this” Washington rubbed his temples as Thomas looked at the glass, still not understanding what the problem was.

“Excuse me, sir, maybe it’s not hot enough?” he tried, keeping the polite tone.

King’s right eyebrow ticked. “There’s a seed in here”

Thomas’ shoulders tensed. “Ah…”

“What did you want?” asked King, throwing daggers in the secretary’s direction. “Did you think I wasn’t going to look and I’d drink it and choke on it, right?”

“No, no, of course not” Thomas shook his head quickly. “I can take it out, if you want” he suggested.

“Yes, because that’s the way life works, right? ‘I almost choke my boss to death, but I would just throw the deathly seed away and pretend nothing happened’”

“King, please, it’s only a seed” tried to help Washington.

“No!” screamed King.

Thomas squinted his eyes. Sore throat, my ass… he thought bitterly.
“You are going to do it all over again and you’re going to do it fine!” ordered King, throwing the glass against the wall.

“King!” screamed Washington, perplexed.

“And clean before leaving!” ordered King again.

“But, sir, I haven’t had lunch yet” informed Thomas.

“That’s not my problem, pretty face” sentenced King. “Move!”

Unwillingly, Thomas went to fetch some paper, the broom and the dustpan, and spent a not very good time cleaning a mess he hadn’t done. Also biting his tongue at his boss’ remarks, who was talking as if he wasn’t there at all.

“That’s what happens when a nob wants to play the servant. He can’t do a single one right”

“King, please…” muttered Washington, feeling bad for his workmate.

Now, Thomas wanted that man to have choked on that stupid seed. It was very tempting not letting a few fall on the next glass of lemonade he made.

“Here, sir” he said, putting a second glass on the desk. “If you’ll excuse me”

“Wait, I’ll leave with you” said Washington, getting up as well with a folder under his arm. “See you later, King”

“Bye, George” said King, ignoring the secretary’s presence.

Both men left in relative silence, Thomas containing a sigh of relief for being able to be far away from his boss. Finally. He opened the door for Washington, who thanked him and threw him a sympathetic glare. Thomas heard King drinking the lemonade.

“Aaah, good…” he breathed out.

Thomas sighed when he closed the door at his backs. At least, this time King was happy...

CRASH.
“… It can’t be…” muttered Thomas, before opening the door and finding the glass shattered on the same spot he had just cleaned. “What was wrong now, sir?” asked Thomas, containing the volume of his voice as he shook from rage.

“I don’t like lemonade” replied King, nonchalantly, as he read some papers. “Clean that” he ordered, after a moment of silence.

Thomas let his head drop with tiredness as he turned around, prepared clean the same place.

“Initiative” he heard King complaining.

It cost a lot not to slam the door just then.

“At least, that’s how Washington and Thomas tell it” said Marisa.

“It turns out Maria got the nickname right, after all” commented Alexander, laughing a bit.

“What?”

“Nothing”

“Ah, yes, there was also that other time…” began to retell Marisa again.

“Thomas, you’re still cleaning?” asked Madison, as he locked his office, prepared to go home.

“I’m finished already” promised the secretary, rubbing his back.

“Do you need help?” offered the accountant.

“No, no, really, I’m almost finished”

“Alright, then, I'll wait for you” said Madison, not very convinced.

Thomas nodded as he finished mopping the last landing of the staircase. He’d have done it in
the morning as he was used to, but he had overslept and had to take care of driving his daughters to school as the next bus wouldn’t have come until thirty minutes after the one the girls usually took, and they were already pretty late.

Thankfully, King didn’t say anything about it.

Talking about the Devil, thought Thomas bitterly as he saw his boss walking down the hall with his new assistant, Seabury.

“Good evening, sirs” he greeted, respectfully.

“Good evening, Mr. Jefferson” said Seabury, with a shy smile.

“You’re still here?” asked King, with a cocked eyebrow.

“I just had to finish the cleaning” explained Thomas.

King ‘hum’ as a response. “Make sure to lock the doors before leaving”

“Yes, sir”

“Oh, Thomas, you missed a spot”

“Where?”

The next thing Thomas saw was the mop bucket falling downstairs, undoing everything he had just cleaned.

“There” said King, still with the leg he had kicked the bucket with raised. “Have a good night, Thomas” he said, with a smirk spreading across his face as he walked downstairs.

Thomas looked daggers at the back of his boss’ neck. Seabury passed him, muttering an almost inaudible ‘sorry’ and followed King to the exit. Thomas looked at the wet stairs and the empty bucket and sighed. He should’ve not cleaned at all and pretended he did it in the morning. Though, after what happened, Thomas didn’t want to know what King would’ve done if he had done that instead.

Alexander frowned. He started to understand certain behaviours the secretary had when he
first arrived at the law firm. A flashback tried to make his way out of the depths of his mind, but he managed to push it back there. He swore to not care and was resolute to keep it.

Marisa, oblivious to his internal fights and realizations, kept talking.

“And there was that other time as well when…”

It was a peaceful afternoon. Marisa enjoyed the quietness of the building while she watched the minutes passing by, wishing to be able to go home already. The heads of the law firm were meeting with some important persons whose names Marisa didn’t bother on remembering, and on the first floor there were just a few people finishing up late work.

Thomas’ figure stepped out the elevator, quite in a hurry. Marisa waited for him to reach the printer, in the room across her counter.

“Last hour work, Tommy?” she asked, wanting to lift the mood and break the tedious silence.

“Just this and we would finally be able to leave” he explained.

“Hurry then” she joked.

They chatted while the machine did its job. Thomas stapled the sheets and bid farewell to Marisa, who returned to be silent and bored.

Thomas knocked on the door and came in the room where King was making the monthly meeting. Everyone shared the same expression of tiredness and wish to leave already. Madison and Washington sighed when they saw him coming with the reports they needed to finish the meeting.

“Here, sir” said Thomas, passing the stapled papers to his boss.

“All right” said King, shaking his hand to dismiss him.

“If you’ll excuse me” he said, turning around to leave and wait with Marisa for what was left of work day.

“… … What is this?” asked King.
Thomas stopped when he had opened the door just a bit. He breathed in and out when he felt the deadly silence at his backs and a few glares in the back of his head. King let out a breath of exasperation.

“You call this ‘done’? Can’t you organise a few papers?” complained King. “This is your only job, Thomas, I think I’ve left this pretty clear to you countless times.”

Madison swallowed as he looked at his friend, seeing how the grip Thomas held around the knob was tightening considerably at each thing King said; Adams watched the secretary as well, in expectation; Monroe did as well, with a frown of worry at the motionless secretary; Aaron shrunk in his chair, thinking today would be the day when Thomas would lose his patience; Washington had buried his face between his hands, completely tired. At the other side of the door, Marisa, who had walked upstairs to see if she could hear what the whole thing was about, waited for anything to happen.

“I’m sorry, sir” Thomas said eventually, managing to keep his cool. “Could you tell me what I did wrong so I won’t do it again, please?” he asked politely, turning around.

“That’s your problem, pretty face” spat King, arching an eyebrow at the man’s attitude. “And don’t talk to me with that tiny voice of ‘I haven’t broken a single plate in my whole life’ because I’m not buying it. You’re all the same, pretending you don’t have a voice, but you shy people are a bunch of dark horses.

“Are you trying to sell me you don’t even know…? This is from first-year of common sense, you slow-witted good-for-nothing…” King held the papers Thomas had just given to him up, so he could see it, and then pointed at the right corner. “When you staple documents, you have to staple them at a 45-degree angle!” exploded King.

The whole table shared looks of shock while Thomas simply stood there, not showing any emotion, but Madison saw how pressed his lips and tensed his shoulders were. King startled everyone when he threw the stapled papers to Thomas face.

“Do all that again, nobody will leave until you do it right” declared King, turning around again with a calmer attitude.

“…Alright…” said Thomas, kneeling to pick up the papers.

“You’d think it’s wonderful a whole competent staff must wait because you can’t do your job right” condemned King, without looking at him.

“… … I’m sorry” said Thomas, through clenched teeth.

“If you did your job right you wouldn’t have to apologise this much” spat King.
It cost Thomas hell not to staple those sheets to King’s forehead. With a horizontal staple, to throw salt into the open wound.

Alexander shared the girl’s wee and forced smile, as she shook her head at the memory. It was kind of comical how someone could act like this for such a trivial thing, even Alexander, with his short-tempered nature agreed on that. In the back of his head, the flashback of the text he received from Madison before coming popped up. He still was reluctant of keeping an eye of Jefferson, but he understood a bit better now. Also, why the man arrived to the office with such severe anxiety.

Marisa got up from her seat when Alexander passed him the last sheets. He asked for permission to take a bit of water and, then, they made their way to the elevator.

“Working in here is a free ticket to the psychologist” muttered the girl.

“For what you’re telling me, it seems so” agreed Alexander. “Why don’t you leave?” he asked, straightforward.

“And where will I go?” she asked, with resignation. “I went to Art School, and though I enjoy that kind of life it’s difficult to live off that only”

Alexander smiled sympathetically, a brief memory of his mother coming to mind. Rachel was an artist at heart, but she barely worked as the photographer she aspired to be, especially when she was abandoned by her husband with two little children. Alexander swallowed the bitter taste in his mouth, answering with a simply yet sharp ‘I understand’.

“I also went to a language school, which is useful with this job, but still” kept explaining Marisa, eyes locked on the slow changing numbers at their rights, telling them which floor they were passing by. “And I’m good at computers and, that’s it. That’s my CV” she laughed, with a slight blush of embarrassment.

“Public relationships” said Alexander suddenly.

“What?”

“You could be a very good public relations officer: you are extroverted, kind and your knowledge in several languages can be a plus for clients who can’t speak English fluently but need legal help” explained Alexander, changing his weight for one foot to the other. “Another foreigner co-worker and I take care of that right now, but now that you talk about all that, I think having someone like you could be very useful to attract new clients and grow as a law firm”
Marisa blinked a couple of times, taken out of her shock by the doors dinging open. “You’re quite scheming, sir!” she commented, impressed.

Alexander shrugged. “You won’t advance by expecting things coming to you” he replied.

Maria hummed in response. “What are you here for? Not to sound rude, but I wouldn’t come back if I could leave” she said, while heading to the end of the hallway, where they saw Thomas and Washington still waiting.

“Let’s say that King can mess things up even when he’s not present” answered Alexander, without giving too much detail.

Marisa cocked an eyebrow. “Well, I hope whatever it was, you can fix it”

“Thanks” said Alexander automatically. “Isn’t he finished yet?” he asked, receiving a shake of the head from Washington.

“Tommy, are you okay? You look a bit pale” commented Marisa, with a worried tone.

“I’m alright” he dismissed rapidly, his eyes falling on the papers she was holding. “Marisa, do you think the meeting isn’t over yet because you have to give those papers to King?” he asked.

Marisa looked down and blushed again. “Ah, you’re right!” she said, running towards the door.

“Knock first” Thomas reminded.

“I know, I know” she said, though retrieving her hand from the knob.

She knocked and walked in the room, mustering an apology and making up an excuse as she closed the door behind her backs. The voices were muffled once again, and the three men were left there, waiting.

Alexander walked to Thomas once the door was closed, passing him the plastic cup full of water.

“Here, thought you’d need some” he explained when he saw the confusion on the other man’s face. Which, now that Alexander paid attention to, was as pale as Marisa’s concern let out to be.

“Thank you” said Thomas, taking the cup hesitantly and taking a few sips.

“If you need something at some point let me know” said Alexander, in a strange quiet voice, before walking to Washington’s side to wait.

“What was all that about?” asked the CEO, with an arched eyebrow.

“Thought you wanted us to get along” answered Alexander, a bit evasive.

“Yes, but I wasn’t expecting it to be real” said Washington. “I’m sure hell froze”

“Sir…” said Alexander, half-closing his eyes.
Laurens splashed water against his face in the public restroom of the restaurant he had to met with Nestor again. He looked at his left, seeing a small window. He turned off the tap and walked to it, focusing his whole attention on it.

“I can cut and run through here if the thing goes too out of hand” he planned out loud.

He breathed in and out a few times before opening the door, he walked upstairs, to the table they’d booked. Nestor hadn’t arrived yet. Good. He didn’t want to start the date with Nestor angry for him being late. He took a seat and read the menu countless times before Nestor appeared, sitting across him, apologising for the delay.

Both said their orders to the waiter. Nestor wanted undercooked meat while Laurens asked for a salad, not feeling too hungry. He ordered wine and asked the waiter if he could keep the bottle there. Thanks heavens, the waiter just hesitated a bit before letting the bottle there. He could always call a cab while he ran away, down the street.

They exchanged a few words. It wasn’t until Laurens had finished half of his fourth glass of wine when he found enough courage to talk.

“Mh… Nestor…” he said, falteringly.

“Yes?” said the man, cutting another piece of meat.

Laurens swallowed. If he didn’t like meat before, now he liked it even less. “Look… I’ve been… I’ve been giving this… What we have… I’ve given it a lot of thought, and I… Well, I…”

Nestor dropped both the fork and the knife down. “Yes, yes, you don’t need to keep talking” he said, looking him in the eye. “I’ve been thinking about it as well and… I know what you’re about to say”

“Really?”

“Yes, and I couldn’t agree more”

“Really?” asked Laurens again, now with a huge smile on his face. “Are you serious?”

Nestor smiled at him. “Yes, absolutely. We don’t need to pretend anymore” he nodded.

“Oh, thank God!” said Laurens, feeling a whole weight being lifted from his shoulders. “Oh… Gosh…” he drank the whole glass of water that had been untouched during the whole dinner. “You
don’t know how much relive you’ve given me… Oh… I didn’t know how to word it!” he admitted.

“Don’t worry, I understand” said Nestor, taking the fork and the knife again to keep eating. “So, which day will you be moving with me?” he asked.

Laurens choked on the lettuce. “What?” he coughed. “I think you didn’t understand me…” he said, laughing a bit to lighten the mood.

Nestor looked up, frowning. “What? Do you want me to move to your place instead?”

“No, I…”

Nestor inspired dangerously through his nostrils. “Look, John, I’m warning you: if you want our relationship to work, you must consult me before deciding anything. Alright?” he said, raising his voice slightly and pointing at him with the knife.

Laurens nodded, while shaking in his seat. “Yes, yes, I’m sorry”

“Good, very good. So, when are you going to move to my place?” he asked, smiling again.

“I don’t know… Everything is happening so fast, that I…” said Laurens, swallowing his sobs.

“I know, but that’s what makes it more exciting, right?” said Nestor. He dropped the cutlery. “Oh, I almost forgot, I’ve got something for you!” he said, rummaging inside the bag he had brought with him.

“Don’t say…” said Laurens, looking at the bag slightly in fear.

Nestor passed him a square-shaped box. “Here, open it, open it” he hurried, with the same excitement of a little child.

Laurens giggled a bit, nervous, as he inspected the box. He opened it slowly, under the pressing glare of Nestor, who didn’t miss one of his moves. Laurens blinked a bit taken aback when he saw a silver watch in it.

“Do you like it?” asked Nestor immediately.

“It’s… It’s very pretty” said Laurens, feeling his throat closing with nerves.

“It was my father’s” explained Nestor, satisfied with the answer. “Last night, I suffocated him with a pillow and took it”

“What?!” exclaimed Laurens, pushing the box away from him.

“No, silly, it was a joke!” laughed Nestor, tossing the box back at him. “He’s been dead for three years”

“Ah, good… I mean, not good that he’s dead, but… … Nestor, you know what? I think I need to go to the bathroom” he said, getting up as casually as he could. Which wasn’t much because he was trembling from foot to head.

“Oh, okay… Be careful with the stairs. That’s where my ex had his little accident” said Nestor, with
Laurens stopped in his tracks after the A word. “What accident…?” he asked, trying to swallow the lump in his throat.

“Nothing, he was very clumsy” said Nestor, with an unsettling smile. “Let me go with you, just in case…”

“NO!” shouted Laurens, freezing Nestor in spot and making a few people look in their direction. “No, no, no, no. It’s fine, false alarm” he explained, now unable to control the sobs.

“Oh… John, you’re crying” commented Nestor.

“Noo, noo, something’s in my eye” he said, unconvincingly.

“You’re so cute, you’re moved!”

“I’m very emotional”

“I like men who cry”

And that made Laurens burst into tears.

Eliza drove to the organization Theodosia talked to her about often and where she usually took all things the people in need they helped there might need. Which happened to be children. Widowed or divorced mothers, women that escaped from abusive relationships or children from abusive households. Sometimes, when they didn’t come willingly, they had to take the issue in their own hands and help those children before something horrible could happen. More horrible than what they had endured already.

Eliza didn’t know why she hadn’t gone there yet. She had made several mental notes about it, but it was always postponed. Maybe Alexander needed her help with something or one of their children needed help with school or had fallen ill. Maybe one of her sisters were having problems and she had to go there and be the shoulder to cry on.

But today she would be both a shoulder to cry on and a helping hand. Her father and she had ordered the whole attic and packaged a few old things from where she and her sisters were little. And the idea appeared clearly in her head.

The building was old, but she only knew because she had looked for information on the Internet the first time Theodosia talked about it and she was just as curious as her husband. For a
building that had been helping families and children in need since the late 19th century, it seemed as if it’d been opened a couple of years ago. She smiled. That meant they took care of the environment those children and people lived in. She was having a good feeling about it already.

“Are you sure you don’t want anything from it?” asked Philip Sr., getting out the car.

“Yeah, Dad. They need it more than I would, anyways” she commented, opening the truck and getting two boxes out of the three they had.

Her father shrugged and forced her to give him the boxes, claiming he could do it himself. Eliza frowned slightly, seeing the trembling legs of his father as he took three boxes to the entrance of the building. She turned around when she saw him able to walk the first three steps to close the truck. A bang made her flinch and sigh in defeat.

“This man is incorrigible” she lamented.

Eliza ran to the entrance of the building, where her father was facing down the floor, complaining. He was already being helped by a young girl that seemed to share Eliza’s age.

“Thank you, miss” she said immediately, as she knelt beside her father. “Dad, are you okay?”

“It was that stupid last step. The heights are not the same” complained Philip Sr., rubbing his red face.

Eliza rolled her eyes. “Of course, it’s all that murderous steps’ fault” she commented sarcastically, as she helped him to get up.

“Do you need some ice, sir?” asked the girl, with a wee smile for the previous exchange of words between daughter and father.

“No…”

“Let me help you pick this up, then” she offered, already knelt on the floor.

“Let us, please!” said Eliza, imitating the gesture. “You already must have a lot of work!”

“No, it’s been a peaceful day”

Eliza wanted to differ. The girl’s eyelids felt so heavy Eliza was feeling sleepy just by looking at her. But she bit her tongue.

“Thank you” she said instead.
Philip Sr. joined them when he had overcome the tantrum for the public event of shame. Once the three boxes were closed again, Eliza put them on the counter, with the girl’s help. Her father complaining from behind, still thinking he could do it without problems.

“Sorry for that” said Eliza, with a slight blush.

“Don’t worry. So, what can I help you with?” responded the girl, politely.

“We came to donate these” said Eliza, pointing at the boxes. “They’re things from where my sisters and I were little, and they were in good state, so…”

The girl showed a sincere smile in her direction. “All of it?”

“All of it”

“You’re very generous, miss, mister” she said alternating her glare between father and daughter.

“Could you repeat that?” asked Philip Sr., with the recording on his phone.

“Dad, please” said Eliza, blushing harder now.

“What? We were doing this for your mother”

“We’re doing it for the children” said Eliza, laughing nervously at the girl. “Dad, go call Mum” she hissed.

“I told you she doesn’t answer me”

Eliza sighed and took out her own phone. She pressed one of her contacts, the phone ran twice and then she was talking with somebody on the other side.

“Hi, Mum” she said, happily.

Philip Sr. frowned. “She answers you??” he inquired, taking the phone away from her daughter. “Catherine, you bitch, why do you answer Eliza and not me??”

“Maybe because of that…” muttered Eliza. Her face became even redder when she saw some children looking at them in the distance and laughing among them. “Dad, please, lower your voice!” she scolded.

Philip Sr. didn’t hear her at all, his whole attention on the phone. “Catherine? Hello? Hello!??” he looked at the phone with hatred. “She hung up!”

With a scream of frustration, Philip Sr. threw the phone against the wall, breaking it into pieces.
“Dad!” shouted Eliza.

“Damn her to hell!” said Philip Sr., stepping on the broken pieces, with fury.

“Why do you not get along with Alexander again?” asked Eliza, with a hand on her forehead. She heard faint giggles at her backs, and saw the girl trying not to burst out laughing. “Sorry for the scene” she apologised.

“It’s nothing, I work with children. I’ve seen worse” she commented.

“Same”

“You work with children?”

“Live with a lot of them”

The girl laughed this time. “Well, maybe you could do some good around here, miss” she stretched out her hand for a shake “Name’s Ruth”

“Glad to meet you” nodded Eliza.

“I wasn’t joking, you know?” she interrupted before Eliza could give her her name. “We never turn our backs to help. You’d have to pass some tests with the children, to see how you act around them and how they act around you as well” explained Ruth.

“Well…” said Eliza, hesitantly.

“Of course, if you pass you’d be paid”

“No, it’s not because of that” admitted Eliza. “It’s just that… I should talk it out with my husband, we’ve got children and…”

“Of course! It’s your decision at the end of the day” nodded Ruth, understanding. With a funny expression, she pointed at the front doors. “Besides, I think you’ve got more pressing issues to attend to”

Eliza looked at the staircase, seeing her father benched over, sobbing and cursing at the same time. She sighed.

“I think you’re right” she admitted. “Well, it was a pleasure to meet you, Ruth”

“Same. I hope to see you around soon” she said, hopefully.

Eliza smiled. “Me too” she nodded. “Oh, my name’s Eliza. Eliza Schuyler Hamilton” she introduced herself, before going to attend her father.

Ruth blinked a bit perplexed as she saw the woman leaving with her father, chatting peacefully. A workmate came to her, arching an eyebrow at her expression.
“Something’s wrong?” he asked.

Ruth jumped from the startle. “Oh, nothing, it’s just…” She pointed at Eliza, who was now in the car and about to drive away. “That woman’s name rang me some bells, that’s all”

The double doors startled two out of the three men that were waiting when they opened, half an hour after what they felt like an eternal wait. Washington was the only one who wasn’t affected by the sound of them and the now clear voices of the two men. Thomas frowned at the sight of Mr. Porter and, especially, his assistant, and walked to be beside Alexander, who just arched an eyebrow at his action.

He preferred to be by the immigrant’s side than being seen by any of those two again. Besides, with that grim look Alexander’s was wearing right now, none of them would dare to even cough in that direction. The little man didn’t do well with waiting.

“Heart to be able to work with you in a near future” said Porter, with a slight smile on his face. “Have a good day, Mr. King”

Thomas looked down when the two men passed them by. He felt Washington and Hamilton nodding as a greet, and then the sharp glares on him. He nodded as well, without looking at them directly. Why aren’t they leaving and why isn’t King allowing them to come in the meeting room yet?

“Well, look who’s back” commented King, with mockery in his tone of voice.

“I’m sure you were waiting for our ghosts” spat Washington, with his deep voice full of anger. “Sorry to disappoint you”

“You made me used to it. Some more than others”

Thomas squinted his eyes in the man’s direction when he saw that King looked at him after saying that. Washington made his way into the room, and King followed, with a bored expression on his face. Hamilton and Jefferson followed suit.

They greeted Marisa, who was in a corner, watching as a witness. Thomas turned his head to
greet Seabury, who was sitting across from Hamilton, and the man returned the gesture with a tired expression. The poor guy wanted to go home. And Thomas as well. He still didn’t know what he was doing there. Thomas walked directly to where Marisa was standing, old habits kicking in. Washington didn’t seem to mind, also being victim of following King’s habits.

Hamilton, however, hadn’t worked with the man. And, though he had, Washington doubted he’d have followed his instructions of not letting the secretaries or the assistants to be at the table, being part of the conversation. Alexander didn’t know any of that, but he had some sense to realise certain things, especially when he wasn’t with his noses stuck in some paperwork. Just a few shared glares with Marisa, and all the things the girl had shared with him came back to him.

“Jefferson” Hamilton called, without looking in his direction. “Your seat” he simply said, taking a seat beside the chair he had pulled back.

Thomas blinked in slight surprise. Marisa smiled and pushed him to take him out of his shock. Washington alternated his glare between the two men. Whatever had happened between them he hoped it would last until the end of the meeting. Especially because, for once, he didn’t know if he could control himself today.

“Thank you, Hamilton” said Thomas, sitting beside the immigrant.

“Who’s seen you and who’s seeing you now, Thomas. Are you finally in some head position?” asked King, after an up and down look Jefferson tried to ignore.

“He’s doing a marvellous job as the secretary of the office” replied Washington.

“Ah, and what is he doing in here?” asked King, with a cocked eyebrow.

This time, Alexander was faster than the CEO. “Mr. Jefferson came here at my petition, sir. No one knows their bosses and co-workers better than a secretary, in my opinion”

Oh, so it was that… Well, Hamilton’d be damned if he thought Thomas would say anything about all he knew about King and his dirty secrets. Especially because… Well, that wasn’t important, and it wasn’t like Thomas would tell Hamilton, of all people.

“And who are you?” asked King, pointing at Alexander with his pen.

“He’s Alexander Hamilton, the chief financial officer” Washington introduced the man.

“Nice to finally meet you, sir” added Alex, with a polite nod.

“Ah, yes, I know you” said King, with a condescending tone. “The charitable work of the Knox”
Alexander flinched considerably in his seat, and Thomas moved his chair a bit further when he saw the immigrant tightening the grip he had on his pen.

“George…” Seabury whispered, the second-hand embarrassment clear in his voice.

“I’m surprised you know what charity is” snapped Washington, defensive.

“Having you here isn’t proof enough that I do know?” asked King.

“We’re here precisely because your last charity work could’ve ended with someone’s life, King” spat Washington.

“Excuse me?”

“There is a differential settlement in the foundations of the building” explained Alexander, calmer than his boss for once. “That means they’re fracturing. A wall fell the other day”

King’s eyes opened widely, but the three men saw a spark in them. Seabury moved uncomfortably in his chair, and that was all the evidence Washington and Thomas needed to corroborate their theory.

“Oh, and what am I supposed to do with that?” asked King, with a condescending tone.

“To pay” said Washington, with a bitter tone.

“I’ve brought you the reports our architect wrote” made up Alexander, as he passed some papers to Seabury.

King lowered his hand. “Excuse me, but I’m in charge of a law firm, not of an insurance company”

“Yes, but you were the one who told me the building was in perfect state” said Washington, his fists so clenched his knuckles turned white.

“And how is it my fault that your employees can’t take care of a building, Georgie?” retorted King, with a wee smile.

“What are you saying? How is my employee’s ineptitude the responsible of different settlements?!” exploded Washington.

“Differential settlement, sir” corrected Alexander.

“Of that, yes…”

“What’s wrong, Georgie? Is it hard to be in the head of a company full of incompetents?”

“No, for your information the law firm is on a roll. Or was until that joke of a building started to fall down” replied Washington, with a fake smile. Alexander and Thomas looked in his direction with an eyebrow raised.

“If it’s going so well, call the insurance and fix it” King made a pause, in which his smile widened considerably. “Or perhaps you don’t have one?”
“You knew the state that building was in” accused Washington.

“Mr. King, please, if we could reach an agreement, we…” tried to say Alexander.

“Why must I pay the fact that your boss is useless?” interrupted King.

“And why must we pay the fact that you’re a resentful sociopath?!” exploded Thomas. “And why must we all pay it with our mental and physical health? A wall fell down, King! Someone could’ve been hurt!”

“About time you started caring about your workmates” said King, with a knowing smile that extinguished the internal fire Jefferson felt for a brief moment before his attitude.

“At least he cares about something. Not like you” said Washington, rubbing his temples. “You’ve got the whole staff terrified with those mood swings you still haven’t overcome”

“I don’t have mood swings!” shouted King, red in the face within seconds.

“Were you saying?” said Washington, half-closing his eyes.

“George, your pressure” said Seabury, in a quiet voice.

“Mr. King, the issue is on the table” declared Hamilton. “You and Mr. Washington made a verbal contract”

“Show me in which part of that contract I agreed on paying his messes” inquired King, arching an eyebrow at the immigrant.

“A verbal contract, Mr. King” repeated Alexander, slowly, as if talking with a little child which was starting to feel more real than a simple comparison. “They are as lawful as a written one”

“Hm, yes, but less convincing. Who says your boss is not making his part of the deal up?”

“The same that would say you’re doing the same, sir” snapped Alexander, starting to lose his patience. “They can be tricky…”

“I’m sure that’s why he did it that way…” Alex heard Jefferson muttering under his breath.

“…but oral contracts can be equally valid and binding” he kept explaining, focusing King’s whole attention on him.

A smirk spread across King’s face. “I’m sure you’re an expert in oral contracts”

And even Thomas flinched at that statement. Yes, hypocritically, there was a time when he thought the same about Hamilton and implied so a few times; but after hearing how he had ended up living with the Knox and working for Washington, he couldn’t manage to think that was the real reason why he was in such a high position being so young. And it made him sick to his stomach to think about what Hamilton had concealed from the story he told James and him that time.

“King, I can’t control how you treat your employees, but I will not tolerate another disrespect to any of mine” said Washington, his deep voice filled with a venom none of the men had ever heard him speak with. “What Alexander is saying is true, you and I reached an agreement, and though we
never signed or printed anything concerning it, it’s still real. As well as all the evidence we could get against you”

“You’d need a warrant to do so, Georgie, and you and I know it could take forever” said King, with a bored tone. “Do you really think you can allow yourself to lose that much time?”

“I will if you don’t cooperate” promised Washington. “I’ve stood your tantrums and child-like behaviour for too many years and I refuse to give in in any of your games anymore. If I have to spend the rest of my career trying to bring you down, I will”

“Sir, please, calm yourself” advised Alexander.

King clicked his tongue. “Do whatever you want, you won’t get anything from me” he swore.

“George, please, be reasonable” pleaded Seabury.

“You’ll live under a bridge by the time I’m done with you” Washington swore back.

“Sir, don’t threaten!” said Alexander, now with a frown.

“This is getting out of hand” commented Thomas, under his breath.

“Try me, I’ll be here waiting” assured King.

“George, no, please, we just recovered” said Seabury, with a hint of worry in his voice.

“You what?” asked Washington, finally addressing the younger man.

“Nothing!” said King rapidly. Turning his head to Seabury, he hissed. “Shut up”

“We were about to go bankrupt” admitted Seabury, frowning in his boss’ direction. “I lied once today to Mr. Porter, I refuse to keep going on with the façade, especially if that means going to court to pay a money we can’t give!”

“Huh, guess karma exists after all” muttered Thomas.

“Wait a minute” said Washington, shaking his head in disbelief. “I thought your law firm was going perfectly fine!”

“If that were the case, we’d never agree to cooperate with any other law firm. You know how he is!” said Seabury.

“I should’ve never risen you” said King, with a glare of pure hatred.

“That surely was an oral contract” whispered Thomas, and Alexander had to bite his bottom lip for not laughing.

“George, I’m doing it for the greater good” insisted Seabury. He looked apologetically at Washington. “I’m sorry, but we couldn’t help you even if we wanted to!”

“And there goes our only resource…” complained Alexander, rubbing his temples.

The whole table was startled and surprised when Washington started to laugh uncontrollably, tears streaming down his face.
“Oh, yes! All those comments saying I wouldn’t be able to do it and now the tables have turned!” said George, enjoying King’s red face. “We only have a fallen wall but you’ll have to stand other’s demands in order to be where you used to”

“Sir, please…” tried to say Jefferson.

“I hope the next wall falls over your head!” shouted King.

“George!” exclaimed Seabury.

“Look, you know what? Now, I’m going to go to court just to see your face when you’ll have to pay me more than you have” said Washington, with a satisfactory smile.

“You do that, and I’ll spend the rest of my life making yours miserable” swore King.

“And what difference would that make from what you’re doing now?”

“You freaking traitor, after all the bother you caused me, you still think you’ve got the right to come here and demand me things” hissed King, with hatred.

“Of course I do. And more I should’ve asked, after all the inconvenience I had to endure since college with you!”

“If it weren’t for me, you’d have stayed as a third-rate lawyer, still living with your mother and blaming her of all your failures!”

“Yes, and you accompanying me while blaming yours about the same!” argued Washington, punching the table and now deadly serious. “And, for your information, it was thanks to me that this law firm could stay afloat”

“Excuse me?” said King, indignant.

“I was all my doing, and Lee’s, Lu’s and Debbie’s. Thanks to us the law firm is still existent!”

“Not true! I did my part as well!”

“When? You were an absent founder. You came back when the waters calmed” complained Washington, rolling his eyes. “And another thing, Mr. Ancien Régime, don’t lecture me about how to take the reigns of a company; while we four were breaking our backs so this could be something in the future, you were getting high with the English”

Alexander shared a knowing glare with Thomas. With a heavy sigh, they got up and walked to the door. Marisa, who’d been watching the quarrel as if it were a tennis match, arched an eyebrow at their action.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“This building still has security?” asked Jefferson, in lieu of an answer.

Marisa blinked surprised at first. “Uh… Yeah, they might be at the other end of the hallway…” she
answered.

“Good”

“But where are you going?” she repeated.

“We’ll be back as soon as we can” promised Alexander, before closing the door at his backs.

Marisa just shrugged and returned her attention to the now heated discussion Washington and King were having, oblivious to the two missing men. She felt a bit bad for Seabury, who had his face in his hands, red from embarrassment.

“That was one time!” whined King. “You can’t be trusted with anything!”

Washington gave another eye-roll. “Huh, if the shoes fits, wear it”

“Why don’t you turn around and bend over, so I can show you where my shoe fits?”

“George!” said Seabury, flushing again.

“I don’t have as much experience as you” replied Washington.

Marisa’s cheeks filled with air as she contained a laugh. Seabury just moaned and King had a tic in his right eye. He launched at Washington, who didn’t think twice before defending himself. Seabury got up from his chair and went to separate the two stubborn men. She stood to the side, too in shock to know how to solve the situation.

At that moment, the doors swung open. Thomas and Alexander returned with two security guards who shared her shock but overcame it easily and went to help Seabury to end the fight. Marisa looked in the secretary and CFO’s direction, in bewilderment.

“How did you know it was going to go so down?” she asked, impressed.

The two men avoided her glare and she saw a slight blush spread on their faces as Alexander answered.

“We kind of lived this already”

Marisa titled her head to the side, but decided to let it slide.
It was being a good day. Lafayette had accompanied Peggy to her visit to the doctor, he had finished the book he’d been trying to read for months and was now cleaning some dishes from the dinner while Hercules prepared himself to take Godfred for a walk. There hadn’t been a single fight and the house was sunk into the most complete peace Hercules had felt since… He would dare to say forever.

He walked the same route that he called his and Godfred’s and enjoyed the soft breeze of the night. The dog made his necessities, he cleaned it and when he thought it was enough, turned around to walk back to his building.

He bumped into one of his neighbours in the gate, who kept the door opened for him to get in.

“Thank you, Mr. Garret” he said, with a polite smile.

The old man just nodded as a ‘you’re welcome’ and both got in the elevator together. Hercules pressed the floor Garret lived in (downstairs from his) and then his own. They waited there in relatively silence until the doors opened. The old man walked out, the keys already prepared in his hands.

“Well, Mr. Garret, have a good night” said Hercules, again with the automatic polite tone.

The doors were about to close when Garret stopped them, looking Hercules in the eye.

“If you and your friends bother me again with your annoying shit, I’ll come up there and give y’all two blows” he swore, in a calm tone.

“… Alright?” said Hercules, blinking in surprise.

“Good. Have a nice night” said Garret, nodding and letting the doors close.

Hercules shared a glare with the dog. “Why crazy people always have to be near me?” he complained.
He came back home right when Lafayette finished the dishes and made his way into the house. He cleaned Godfred’s paws and snout and gave him a treat the animal devoured in his bed. The couple kissed and Hercules made himself comfortable in the couch, beside Lafayette, where they zapped, in search of something to watch together.

The front door opened at some point and was closed so quietly than none of them realised Laurens had come back until they saw him walking slowly down the hall.

“Hi, John, how did the date go?” asked Laf.

Laurens turned his head to the couple and shrugged. “Good” he replied.

“Did you break up with him in the end?” asked Hercules.

There was another pause before Laurens answered, totally serious. “No”

“Are you going to give him time?” asked Lafayette, after sharing a confused look with his boyfriend.

“I’m going to move to his place” explained Laurens, his voice lacking any emotion.

“Quoi?!” exclaimed Lafayette, getting up from the couch immediately and walking to his friend.

Hercules smirked a bit. “Huh… Be careful with what you wish for, Laf”

“This isn’t funny, Hercules” spat Laf, throwing him an angry look. “Johnny, what happened?”

Laurens raised his left wrist. “He gave me his dead father’s watch” he said. A few sobs escaped his lips and then he was hunched over himself, crying. “He made a joke about suffocating him with a pillow but I’m not sure”

“Why did you agree to move to his place, then?” asked Hercules.

“Because he asked me to!” almost shouted Laurens, as Laf took him to take a seat in the couch. “Fucking Peggy” he cursed, in tears.

“She didn’t make you say ‘yes’” commented Hercules.

“What else should I’ve done?” wondered Laurens, sniffing. “I said he was right in everything. That’s when you do to crazy people, right?” he asked, looking at Laf for comfort.

“Yes, that’s what I always heard” nodded Lafayette, thoughtful. “What do we do now?”

“Laf, I think you’re not understanding how obliged the pronoun ‘we’ is…” said Hercules.

“Gosh… I’ll have to live with that man until one day I’ll make the wrong decision on the colour of our cat’s kennel within our first year” sobbed Laurens.

“Cats don’t have kennels, John” said Laf, rubbing circles in the man’s back.

“See? I’ve already got it wrong!”
“Call Peggy and let her handle all this” concluded Hercules, getting up to pick up the phone.

“There he goes, passing the buck, as usual” condemned Lafayette.

“Fuck, she must be responsible for this mess!”

“Don’t raise your voice, it’s too late!”

Hercules extended his arms. “This is how much I care about the neighbours’ bullshit” he declared.

“And why don’t you come with me next time we have to meet?” asked Laurens. “Or go on your own”

“Why me?” asked Hercules.

“Because you’re solidly built, you’re threatening to people who don’t know you”

“That much is true” nodded Lafayette.

“I’m not going to fight anyone just because this man can’t live a normal and peaceful life” complained Hercules.

“Eh, I didn’t say you’ll have to fight him” clarified Laurens. “I’m just saying that you can tell him on my behalf that this is over… and… Just in case, huh? If he goes and starts acting all bold or something like that… You can throw a couple of punches here and there…”

“I said ‘no’, John! I’m not going to punch anyone!”

Laurens began to cry again. “I’m very afraid, Hercules, please”

“No”

“Do you want me to beg? I’ll beg” said Laurens, jumping from the couch and kneeling on the floor.

“Get up, moron” said Hercules, with tedium. “I’m going to call Peggy and she’s going to fix this, you’ll see”

“And can you make me something to eat as well?” asked Laurens, with puppy eyes.

“You just came back from a restaurant!”

“But I was so afraid I barely ate…”

“More wasted money?”

“I’ll make John dinner” said Lafayette, getting up from his seat. “You call Peggy… And you, John, get up from the floor!”

Lafayette made his way to the kitchen, seeing how his order had been ignored as Laurens kept looking at Hercules from the floor. His boyfriend threw a few curses to the air when nobody answered him the phone.

“Fucking girl, she must be sleeping as usual…” he heard him whisper.
“Quel bordel” complained Laf, dropping the pan with more force than necessary on the counter.

Thomas didn’t know what made him do it. He tried to convince himself that it was the selfish need of a job. It wasn’t like a lot of people would hire a forty-year-old man with experience rather than a naïve twenty-something-years-old guy, easier to fool and exploit. He knew, he had been there. He had seen his mother being there. And he’d be lying if he said he didn’t miss being there, on the upper hand. But he found some kind of comfort in the reason why he’d renounced to that life.

Was it still a good reason to do what he was about to do? It was risky and it put him in a position where he’d have to face his social anxiety, a thing he always tried to avoid at all costs. But it was true that it wasn’t only for his job. James worked there too, he shared his discomfort of knowing new people, so starting anew in some other company was not in James’ list of ‘Things I’d love to do before I die’.

Then, he had Maria as well, who couldn’t finish her studies for some bad past relationship but had a daughter to raise all alone. He had Burr who was married and responsible of a little girl (and soon a teenager, as well). He had Angelica who had worked herself to the top at a young age. He had Washington who was only a few years left to retire and live a good and well-earned peaceful old age with his wife. He had Gilbert who had also renounced to everything he had to start anew in a whole new country just to be with someone he loved.

Thomas tried to convince himself he was doing it for himself. And maybe for James and Gilbert as well. He refused to accept that he cared about how his workmates’ lives, he ignored how they would make their way back to the front of his mind. All of them could start anew and the ones who couldn’t, it was their business. He wasn’t born to solve everybody’s problems. It wasn’t like they’d do it for him, anyways, were the roles reversed.

He tried to convince himself it was his way to take revenge on King, as well. A small voice in his head knew he kind of deserved some things he’d lived with the man under his orders. But others were very inexcusable. Though there would always be people who’d think otherwise. Sally would say he’d deserved it to finally know how it felt like to be treated as an inferior, with the obligation of putting on a brave face while trying to control the need to slap more than one in their cocky faces. His siblings wouldn’t think the same, but they’d have paid to see him working and be treated like that. He knew for sure. He would do the same if they found themselves in that situation. Hamilton would both agree with his sister-in-law and siblings. He could only thank the heavens he didn’t know any of that, who knows what he could do to him with such information.

Though, being completely honest, wasn’t Thomas about to give Hamilton something that
would put him in a risky position? There was still a small voice warning him and trying to dissuade him. This was a bad idea, a bad decision to make. But both options would end with him fired. At least, with this choice he’d give King some piece of his mind and enjoy of having the upper hand in a discussion again.

So, if someone asked Thomas why he drove to King’s law firm at last hour to meet with his ex-boss in private after the disastrous meeting he had with Washington and Hamilton a few hours prior… he would answer that it was a matter of pride, a matter of revenge, a matter of having a sweet taste in his mouth before the waves of bitterness swept him away once again.

“Thomas, what are you doing in here?”

He looked up, seeing a tired Marisa behind the counter. The building was deserted. Thomas knew the only ones there would be lawyers overworking themselves, the secretary and the heads of the company. And those last ones were the most important ones for Thomas right now.

“I came to meet with King” he said simply, walking directly to the elevator.

“But, Thomas…” she tried to say.

“You should go home” he advised, stepping inside the lift. “He’s not gonna be in a good mood when we’re finished”

“He’s never in a good mood” muttered Marisa, her worry expression the last thing Thomas saw before the metal doors closed.

Thomas only bothered to knock, he never waited for an answer. Seabury froze midway to the door and King frowned at him from the other side of his desk.

“What are you doing in here?” spat the CEO. His face blushed with anger when the other man didn’t answer. “You can’t come in here uninvited”

“I forgot to give you this” said Thomas simply, tossing the papers he had brought with him on the desk. “Blame the quarrel” he added.

“And what made you think that seeing it written would make me change my…?”

Thomas tried not to smirk when he saw King stopping mid-sentence. Really, he did. But it felt good. Like when he refused to obey his mother on the first day of school; when he left the house he grew up in and never returned or asked for help to his family to keep going; when he could kick
Lucy out of her own house because she was no longer his landlady. Or like when he had the chance to put his ex-boss in his rightful place. Those moments were the ones Thomas cherished the most and he would be damned if he’d let it escape from his reach.

“What is this?” asked King, showing Thomas the sheet, as if he hadn’t read or written it himself. “I thought you said it was 200 thousand dollars for damage”

“250, actually” corrected Thomas, calmly.

“Whatever! This is not…”

“Not the same issue my boss was discussing with you previously” explained Thomas. “This is just a calculation I made on my own taking into account all the damage you’ve caused your former workers, and some current ones. Maybe I didn’t finish my studies in the Law field, but I don’t need a diploma hung on the wall to know what I’m talking about”

King’s eyebrow suffered a tic then. “You can’t…”

“Of course, if you don’t agree with the number, you can always talk it out with Mr. Hamilton; he’s the chief financial officer for a reason. Though, I should warn you that he’s less flexible than me, especially with people that have disrespected him because of where he came from. I know first-hand” Thomas broke eye contact for the first time at that last statement.

“And how are you being flexible, Jefferson?” asked King.

“I’m willing to reach a compromise. A quid pro quo, if you prefer” explained Thomas, taking a few steps closer to King’s desk. “You won’t agree to what Mr. Washington was asking for you because, according to your new vice president, such kind of money would only sink this company in the deepest misery once it was starting to resurface again from its ashes. But, for what I know, you still own that vacant building where you were about to send the new employees in your cooperation with Mr. Porter”

“And what do any of you have to offer me that it’s better than the money Porter will make me gain with our cooperation?” asked King, with a mockery tone.

Thomas maintained eye contact with his former boss. He pressed the carpet he was holding in his left hand, hesitant. Now, there and with the scene being real and not only in his head, he was starting to have more doubts. He would have to look for another job either if he did this or not, so why let himself being targeted for a past action that he tried so hard to conceal and forget?

He didn’t know. He just found himself saying:

“We could avoid another court war with you” And Thomas passed the carpet to him, half of him hesitant, half of him resolute. “And this time, I’m sure you’ll agree with me that you will not end well”
Thomas waited. He heard Seabury’s footsteps trotting to his boss’ side, reading the document along King once they were shoulder to shoulder. Thomas couldn’t even enjoy the sombre expression that took over King’s face as he recognised the papers in front of his eyes; he was very busy fighting that tiny yet powerful voice that told him he was making the worst decision ever.

“What are you doing with this?” asked King, venom in his voice. “You don’t work here anymore, you…”

“Those documents are from where I did” interrupted Thomas, pretending to be completely calm. “I’ve always been very organised. Though if you really want to talk about present issues, I’m sure that those documents could be a perfect key to open all the drawers where you hide others similar to these…”

Thomas was interrupted by King breaking the papers into pieces, like a little child. Seabury watched him and contained a sigh of resignation, while Thomas simply looked at the scene with tedium.

“Those were just photocopies I made to let you know I still have the original ones, King” he explained, enjoying how red the man’s face was turning. Addressing Seabury, he added. “Really, what do you see in him?”

Seabury turned red from embarrassment, almost matching his boss’ tone, and avoided his glare. Thomas returned his attention to King.

“It’s your choice: the money to fix the building or give us the safe building and let us do our job without any of us interfering in the other’s path, as you promised Mr. Washington long ago” said Thomas, holding his hands at his backs. “Or you can refuse, of course, and we’ll meet you in court. Whatever you prefer”

“Are you aware that my name is not the only one that’s on these papers?” asked King.

Thomas contained the flinch the second-meaning sentence caused him. “I’ve always been aware that birds of a feather fly together” answered Thomas. “So, it’s never been a surprise to know the heads of this company have taken more money than they needed for personal whims, though that might’ve cost reduction of the salaries of their co-workers of lesser positions”

“Jefferson, your talent for acting like an idiot for a broken pride sometimes surpasses my own” talked King, with a husky voice of impatience.

“And that’s saying something” commented Seabury, on the quiet.

“Before coming here with this cheekiness, did you remember that your name is on this account as well? If I fall, you’re going to fall with me”
Thomas tried to swallow the lump in his throat. “I brought that upon myself, sir. So, it’d rather be me than my workmates”

And not only King was surprised to hear him say such a thing. Thomas swallowed again, this time to erase the bitter taste in his mouth.

“Okay, so we’re doing this…” muttered King, squinting his eyes at his former secretary.

“I’ll let you think about it” said Thomas, finally stepping aside from the desk. “Have a good night, sir”

“It’d be for you” spat King, as he rubbed his temples.

Thomas stopped his hand a few inches away from the knob. A few inches to step out, mess it up even further, go home, drink a few glasses of wine to blur the worst decision he could’ve made to solve this problem he hadn’t caused in the first place. Instead, he withdrew his hand and turned around.

“Can I tell you something, sir?” he asked, and since the first time he entered the room, his tone was totally sincere and lacking all resentment he might’ve felt for the man. “You’ve got a good bunch of people working for you and believe me when I tell you that all of them know or, at least, suspect why sometimes the salaries are cut but some other people keep doing their lives as if they worked in a different law firm. I know you enjoy the sensation of power their resignation gives you as well as I know that when you go back home it’s still not enough to fill how empty you feel because you’ll never know who respects you and spends time with you for who you are instead of because you’re old money or because you’re the one who pays them.

“I know you like to see them bowing their heads so you can feel superior because you actually feel inferior to everybody. I know you act with condescendence because the times you acted with humility you received the treatment you now give the rest. I know you think old money can’t evaporate, but, I assure you it can. And there aren’t enough Mr. Porters who can save you if you don’t change the way you treat people. Because they get tired”

“What are you trying to do, Jefferson?” asked King with tedium. “To soft my heart so I give in?”

“No, I’m warning you, because before I had to stand your comments and behaviour towards me, I was you” snapped Thomas, frowning slightly. “One day you’re insulting an immigrant because you think they’re inferior and don’t deserve to be where they are, and the next thing you know is that you’re depending on them and have to swallow all they throw in your way because there is not a soul that would help you for the sake of it, because you didn’t do it when you could either. And that taking into account the fact that you were lucky to have found a couple of people with the patience
of a saint to put up with you. So, really, think about what you want to do. Now, good night to the both of you.”

And then, he did walk out the room. He thought about how he’d handle the situation with Hamilton now. Thomas decided it was best to not think about it at all while he drove back home. His head was starting to hurt enough already.

Alexander entertained his head as much as he could: he went to buy Angie’s dress – but couldn’t because he forgot the name of the princess –, he watched TV with his children and thanked heavens for the girl not asking for the costume in all night; he prepared dinner for Angie and Philip and a bottle for John and then put them into bed, reading them a book to sleep.

It wasn’t until he was almost finished with the dishes that the front door closed, and an exhausted Eliza made her way to the living room, where she let herself fall on the couch, moaning. Alexander walked into the room with a glass of water.

“Too much junk in the attic?” he asked.

Eliza grabbed the glass with a grateful smile. “Nah, that was the easiest part. But my father is very picky with whom he let inside his house or not”

“As anyone else, I guess?” said Alexander, lifting his wife’s legs to take a seat at the other side of the couch.

“I mean we’ve been till now trying to hire someone to clean the house” explained Eliza.

“But weren’t you going to help him with the housework so he’d be able to do it himself?” inquired Alex, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Alexander, I’ve spent fifteen minutes on the phone with him as he bought milk and water. Let’s go step by step” replied Eliza, feeling her eyes heavier by the passing seconds.

“I still don’t understand why you bother…”

“Hey, I made him donate things to orphans and families in need. That’s a success”

“Honey, you can’t change someone’s nature. People are who they are”

“I’m not trying to change anyone” said Eliza, frowning weakly at him. “I’m just taking his best side out”

“His best side?”
“Everyone has good and evil in them” opined Eliza. “And I think that if someone is willing to make use of their good side, you should help them”

“Even if they decide to do it at the age of 54?” asked Alexander, with a mocking smile.

“Hey, it’s never too late to decide to do good!”

Alex sighed. “Betsey, you’ve got a heart as big as the world… And maybe too much faith sometimes…”

A snore made him jump in his seat. He looked at his side, finding Eliza fast asleep. A tender smile made its way on Alexander’s lips.

“Why can’t the children be this easy to fall asleep?” he wondered, as he took her into his arms and walked her to their shared bedroom.

Alexander took her shoes and jacket off, undid her ponytail and then tucked her in, giving her a kiss goodnight on the forehead. The doorbell rang just when he walked into the kitchen to wash the last dish that was left.

With a quick glare to the clock – who would be at their door at ten pm? – Alexander trotted to the door and looked through the peephole to answer his thought question. He rolled his eyes when he saw the man standing at the other side, and opened the door unwillingly.

“Isn’t it a bit too late to start an argument with me about whatever the hell got in your way now, Jefferson?” he asked, opening the door just enough so they could see each other.

“I went to talk to King” explained Jefferson, going directly to the point.

Alexander took his time to comprehend what he was told. “And?”

“He may be willing to either pay what we asked for or let us start anew in a vacant building he’d hand to us. This one safer than our current one” he promised at last second.

Alexander scrutinized him. “And what will he be gaining?” he asked, suspicious.

It was Thomas’ time to take a moment to reply. “We won’t use this against him” he said, eventually, passing the CFO the documents he had kept the past years. “He and some others who worked for him as head of departments are very used to take the money they should be giving to the ones in inferior positions if they find something better to spend that money on, like whatever they lay their eyes on in some shopping centre”

“And he made the great mistake of trusting you with such important information, huh?” asked Alexander, as he leafed through the papers.

“I thought you should be the one having them” kept explaining Thomas, ignoring the dig. He was
too tired and wanted to end this conversation before Alexander reached his name. “Knowing King, he’d want to do this the hard way again. And you move through numbers as fish in the water…”

“Maybe not as well as you” interrupted Alexander, sharply. “Or was there another Thomas Jefferson working for King, Mr. Secretary?” he asked, raising his glare a bit.

*Of course, I wouldn’t be this lucky,* thought Thomas, pressing his lips. Why did the Caribbean have to read so fast?

<<<*You decided to do this, in the first place*>.*

*I know, go to sleep.* Thomas took a deep breath and opened his mouth, no words coming out. And what do you say when…

“Tell me, Jefferson, did you suspect of me taking money from the company because you are an expert on the matter?”

Yes, when *that.*

“Tell me what I did that reminded you of yourself so I don’t do it again”

“Hamilton…”

“I wouldn’t want to risk my job again for some misinterpretation” kept talking Alexander, with that fake smile as he inspired through his nostrils.

“Hamilton, it’s not…”

“I hope the *whim* you spent it on was worth it” declared Alexander, with a dangerous edge in his voice. Thomas felt a ping in his chest. “Hamilton…”

“I’ll make sure to keep this for whatever that might happen in a near future” interrupted Alexander one last time, his smile long gone. “Thank you for your help, Mr. Secretary, I hope you have a good night”

And with that, Alexander closed the doors in his noses. He felt the blood boiling inside as he made his way back to his bedroom, where Eliza slept, snoring softly. He stopped for a moment, alternating his glare between his wife and the documents recently given to him. Alexander dropped them on the nightstand with a sigh of frustration.
The next morning, the Hamilton family was awoken by the insistent sound of the doorbell ringing non-stop. Alexander groaned from the bed and Eliza tossed and turned beside him, clearly disturbed.

“What’s happening?” she moaned.

“That someone’s gonna lose their hand…” swore Alexander, throwing his sheets aside.

“THE DOORBELL, GOD DAMNIIIIIIIIIT!” Peggy shouted from her room.

“I’M GOING ALREADY!” Alexander shouted back.

“DAAAAD, I WAS SLEEPING!” complained Philip.

“I SAID I WAS GOING!”

“AAAW, WHAT’S THAT NOISE?!” whined Angie.

“IT’S THE DOORBELL!” answered Philip.

“I HATE THIS NOISY HOUSE!” screamed Peggy.

“THEN GO LIVE SOMEWHERE ELSE!” replied Alexander, as he put his robe on.

“ELIIIIIZAAA, YOUR HUSBAND IS DISRESPECTING ME!”

“BETSEY, TELL YOUR SISTER TO GET HER SHIT TOGETHER!”

Eliza covered her ears. “Gooooooosh, why are you all screaming at…?” she turned around to look at the clock on the nightstand. “8.30 IN THE MORNING?! WHY DID THE ALARM NOT SOUND?!”

“WHY WOULD I KNOW!” screamed Alexander, knelt on the floor as he looked for something. “WHERE ARE MY SLIPPERS?!”

John’s crying joined the annoying doorbell, then.

“You just woke your son up!” condemned Eliza, running to the crib.

“OF COURSE, IT WAS ME! NOT THAT STUPID DOORBELL!”

“THEN, WHY DON’T YOU OPEN THE DOOR?!”

“I’m… you know what? Okay, I’ll go barefoot. I hope to catch a cold
AND DIE FROM IT AND THAT YOU SPEND THE REST OF YOUR DAYS FEELING GUILTY!” screamed Alexander, hoofing out of the room.

“Gosh, this house is crazy…” muttered Philip from his room.

“STOP BEING A DRAMA KING!” Eliza screamed, following him around.

“I HOPE IT’S A DOOR-TO-DOOR SALESPERSON SO I CAN SHOVE WHATSOEVER SHIT THEY’RE SELLING UP THEIR ASS!”

“LANGUAGE!”

Alexander swung the door open after Eliza’s reprimand. A frowning John Laurens made his way into the house, pushing him to the side.

“About time!” he complained. “Didn’t you hear the doorbell or what? I was about to use my spare key, for God’s sake!”

Alexander blinked a few times, then returned his friend’s enraged expression. “Of course I was hearing the doorbell, John! Everybody in this fucking house heard it!” he shouted, slamming the front door shut.

“What’s going on?” asked Eliza, who walked into the room. “Oh, good morning, Johnny”

“Now it’s ‘good morning, Johnny’” said Alexander, passing a hand through his face.

“Where is she?” asked John, arms in akimbo and facing Eliza.

“She who?” asked Eliza, perplexed.

“The useless of your sister”

“Second door upstairs” replied Alexander.

“Thank you!” said Laurens, sprinting to the staircase.

“What’s gotten into him?” asked Eliza, rocking a sleeping John in her arms.

“I don’t know… And why does he have a spare key?” asked Alexander.

“In case of an emergency” she replied, as a matter-of-a-fact.

“Eliza, John is usually the emergency…”

A bang made them jump in their spots and the couple ran upstairs. They found Peggy’s door open wide and they stuck their heads to see John shaking the sleeping girl by the shoulders.

“Wake up, wake up, wake up so I can fucking kill you!” screamed John, with no avail.
“Peggy, I’m going to eat the last donut” said Eliza, loud enough so she could be heard above John’s demands.

The girl’s eyes opened in a second. She kicked John in the stomach, making him fly and hit the wall across her bed. A few things from the shelves above tremble and fell to the floor, breaking in the process.

“That’s why I refuse to buy expensive and pretty things to her…” said Alexander, sadly.

“Don’t help me, asshole” complained John, out of breath, on the floor.

Peggy sat up in her bed, adjusting her eyes to the darkness of the room. “What’s happening? What time is it?” she asked, lost.

Eliza walked in the room and opened the blinds. Peggy covered her eyes, moaning.

“Aagh, sunlight…”

“Van Helsing came asking for your head” joked Alexander.

“Who…?” asked the girl, rubbing her eyes.

“Alexander, it’s not funny” scolded Eliza. John got up, a hand on his stomach. “John, what’s wrong?” she asked, gentler.

“What’s wrong is that your sister wants me dead” he accused, pointing at the girl.

“Don’t put yourself on the top of people while they’re sleeping, and nobody will have to kick the air out of you” Peggy defended herself.

“Oh, yes? And pairing me up with Nestor was because of what? A sick revenge for the mattress?” Alexander frowned. “True, someone must pay for that”

“Alexander…” said Eliza.

“Your sister-in-law is making me pay it with my life” said John.


“A patient of hers!” explained John.

Eliza’s eyes widened in realization. “Wait, wait, are you referring to Nestor Ray?”

“I don’t know”

“You don’t know the name of the guy you’re dating?” asked Alex.

“I didn’t ask for his ID card on the first date, Alexander” replied John, rolling his eyes. “I usually
wait a few more dates to search them on the social media”

“You’re unbelievable”

Eliza put a hand over her mouth, paling. “My God, Johnny, what are you doing dating that guy? People called him ‘The Black Widow’ back at the mental asylum! Partner he had, partner that ended up in the hospital, and that if they were lucky!”

“For fuck’s sake, John, can’t you live out of trouble or what?” said Alexander, with a faint worry in his bored tone.

“It was her!” John accused the younger Schuyler sister again.

“Peggy, in what were you thinking?!” asked Eliza, raising her voice considerably.

“The last time I treated him, he seemed to be fine…” she said.

“Last time you treated him?” echoed Eliza. “But if he was my patient!”

“But wasn’t one of the people she treated in her internship?” asked John.

“What internship? She was kicked out of that for oversleeping all mornings, and Dad had to pull strings so she accompanied me while I worked!” explained Eliza, with a frown and her free arm in akimbo.

“Well, but that’s internship as well!” Peggy defended herself.

“Wait, you treated a man like that and you never told me about him?” asked Alexander, eyes wide in surprise.

“Why would I?”

“Really, Eliza? The other day you sent me over thirty messages talking about the teaser of ‘Infinity War’ and now you are coming to me with that?” said Alexander, eyes half-closed.

“Can we focus on my problem over here?” asked John, upset.

“Break up with him” said Alexander.

“Noooo!” John, Eliza and Peggy said at the same time.

“Do you want me dead?!” exclaimed John.

“Well, you’re very difficult to love right now…”

“Alexander!” scolded Eliza one more time.

“If you can’t break up with him, make him break up with you” concluded Alex.

“And how do I do that?” asked John, frowning.

“Well, opposites attract” began to explain Alexander. “Madman with madman has no future”

“… Are you calling me crazy?” inquired Laurens, offended.

“John, look at your life, you are not fine…”
“Gosh, you really need to go to work. You’re hurting everyone around you this morning!” said Laurens.

“He’s been unbearable since he woke up” agreed Eliza.

Alexander frowned, enraged. “Because this brat started to scream about the doorbell!”

“Huh, said Mr. Whispers” said Peggy, lying on her bed again.

“If I spend the day working, because I do; if I spend the day in here, because I do… I never do anything right with you” complained Alexander.

“You don’t bother me by being in here, but by being angry all day” explained Eliza.

“I am not angry all day. You make me angry all day, which is different…”

“It’s never his fault…” muttered Peggy. “Come on, go fight out of here, I want to sleep”

“Okay…” said Eliza, grabbing John with her free arm and walking out.

“Shameless girl…” complained Alexander, under his breath.

“Try not to wake up too late, Peggy, or you’ll be late for your nap” said Eliza, closing the door quietly.

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing… This is surrealist…”

“Alex, make me some breakfast” pleaded John.

“Go to hell” snapped Alexander. “You come here, wake everybody up and now you want us to make you breakfast… Make it yourself!” he complained walking down the hall.

Laurens curved his lips in disgust. “Gee, Eliza, get laid with that man. Let’s see if that way he stops being bitter”

“Agh, I don’t want right now” complained Eliza.

Alexander huffed, looking at them with hatred before walking in the living room. “I am going to call Washington, so don’t worry about my bitterness because I’ll be gone all day with it” he promised, taking the phone from the table. It rang once he picked it up. “Huh, it’s him. What a coincidence…” he commented.

“That’s the father-son bond” joked Eliza, making Laurens laughed loudly.

“You too?” asked Alexander, frowning in his wife’s direction.

Eliza showed him a shy smile. “You make it too easy sometimes, Alex…”

“What with that empty bottle of wine that’s in the trash? Were you celebrating something last night?”
“Yes, my firing”

James stopped mid-way of taking the garbage bag out of the can to look at his friend over his shoulder. He knew Thomas went out last night after spending the rest of the afternoon locked up in his workroom and then the whole night downstairs.

“What?” he finally asked, when his friend refused to explain any further.

“I did a stupid thing yesterday” admitted Thomas, still not raising from the couch he presumably slept on last night.

“How level of stupid?” asked James, carefully.

“I said I was going to be fired. Take a guess”

James let the bag on the can again and walked to the dining room. He rounded the couch and knelt in front of his friend, who was staring straight at the ceiling.

“Thomas, what did you do?” he asked, straightforward.

“I gave Hamilton the accounts in which King and company kept the money they wasted on themselves, instead of on the company and its workers” he admitted, after a small pause.

“Why?”

“Because I lied to King telling him Hamilton and Washington knew and had those documents in their power”

“Is that where you went yesterday?” asked James, gaining a nod from his friend. “And you could make it back home after threatening that man?”

“And after Hamilton read I was part of that company that imitated his habit, yes” Thomas nodded again.

“And he told you you were going to be fired?” asked James, tilting his head to the side.

“He threw a few digs for what happened, but you don’t need to be a genius to know he would tell Washington first thing in the morning”

“Well, but if you tell them why you…”

“No” Thomas interrupted sharply, changing in a sitting position. “I don’t want him to know”

“Then, tell only Washington”

“No, Hamilton already knows, and he can convince him that if I did it once, I can do it again”

“But you did it because…”
The doorbell rang, interrupting James’ complaint.

“I’ll take it” he said, walking to the front door.

Thomas sighed, raising a hand to his forehead, which hadn’t stopped bothering him since he decided to pay King, what he hoped was, a last visit. He made a mental note of concealing this for James, or he’d spend the day trying to convince him to take meds along with telling Washington the truth.

And he didn’t want to do either.

“Thomas” James’ voice took him out of his internal promise and the worry in his friend’s tone made him sit straighter on the couch. “It’s Washington” he said.

Fuck, it’s not been twelve hours yet, complained Thomas in his head, frowning upset. Didn’t Hamilton have three children to entertain his mind with?

<<Said the man who sent his daughters away>>

“God damnit, what a complot…” he complained under his breath.

“Do you want me to tell him you’re not feeling fine?” asked James, taking a couple of cautious steps in his direction.

“No, no, I’ll meet him. Tell him to wait a moment, please” he decided, getting up from the couch. He groaned when a wave of pain went through his forehead.

“Are you sure?” said James, cocking an eyebrow.

“Yes, yes, I’ll need to wet my face, that’s all”

And James had the decency to drop the matter there and walked to have a little chat to Washington while he waited.

<<You don’t deserve him>>.
“As if I didn’t know already” commented Thomas, casually, making his way to the entrance after drying his face and making sure he looked presentable.

“Good morning, Mr. Jefferson” greeted Washington with a smile when he saw the man coming in his direction.

“Mr. Washington” he greeted back, taken aback by the man’s attitude. He threw a glare to James, who shrugged.

“He seems to be in a good mood” muttered his friend, while he walked back to the living room.

“Do you want to come in?” invited Thomas, unsure.

“Actually, I don’t have a lot of time” admitted Washington, with an apologetic tone. “I just came by because I wanted to tell you how thankful I am for the help you provided us”

Thomas stood still for a moment, assimilating the words. How much wine did he drink last night?

“Excuse me?” he said.

“King called this morning telling me he is willing to reach a compromise” explained Washington. “I called Alexander because King wanted to meet in a few, and he told me you went to talk to him and managed to make him change his mind. It never crossed my mind you still kept those! It made everything easier”

“I… I always like to keep the documents I work on, just in case” said Thomas, nodding and avoiding saying anything about the issue that was filling his mind.

“It’s good to know, with all the disorganization I’ve got to face in a daily basis” half-joked Washington.

“Sir, did you read the documents?” asked Thomas because if he didn’t, he thought he was going to have a nervous breakdown just there.

“Yes, I almost didn’t remember all the names. Of how many they were! With good reason King changed his mind” Washington stretched out his hand and Thomas took it and shook it, still a bit hesitant. “Thank you” repeated the older man.

“It was nothing, sir” lied Thomas.

Washington nodded his head towards James, who had been watching the exchange of words from the living room. The shorter man imitated the gesture, though his eyes were glued to Thomas, who still waited for his boss to say it was all a joke and that he could go later to take his settlement. Instead, Washington walked back to his car, parked on the driveway.

“I’ll give you a couple of minutes to admit that I was right” said James, walking to be by his side. “As usual”
Thomas shook his head, as if waking up for a dream. “About?” he asked.

“Hamilton” clarified James. “You know? The one you said you couldn’t trust a couple of months ago?”

Thomas frowned at the mention of the name and turned his head to look at the next-door house. The front door was still closed, but Washington didn’t drive away and had told him Hamilton and he were to meet King now.

“No, I think you’re not” said Thomas, putting his shoes on.

“Where are you going?” asked James, with clear tedium.

“Hamilton wouldn’t miss this opportunity just like this”

“There we go again. Let him be” advised James.

“No, he’s planning something” he said, sure of himself, before walking out the house.

James sighed in defeat. “What a man…”

Thomas strode to the Hamilton’s house, knocking on the door with more force than necessary. He was fuming mad. He was prepared for Hamilton to tell Washington everything the next morning. And he was right in a sense, not twelve hours after he had given those documents to him, Washington was at his door… to thank him.

He knew the consequences of the decision he made yesterday, and he was ready to face them. But he wouldn’t allow Hamilton to have something to blackmail Thomas with until he got bored and made him get fired. That was another different thing and he wasn’t going to allow it.

His features softened a bit when the door was opened by Eliza. What such a sweet woman saw in Hamilton was beyond his understandings.

“Oh, good morning, Mr. Jefferson” she said, a bit surprised. “Did you need anything? Alex is about to leave with Washington”

“I know, Mrs. Hamilton, but I’d like to talk to your husband before he leaves” Thomas said with the politest tone he could talk with while being so angry.

“Uh… Well, I guess… Get in, you can wait in the living room” she hesitated, with a smile.

“Thank you”
The woman disappeared from sight as soon as Thomas put a foot inside the house. He didn’t reach the middle of the room when he heard a soft arguing from upstairs. The voices became clearer when the couple walked downstairs.

“Why did you let him in? Didn’t you learn anything from your sister?” asked Hamilton, annoyance clear in his voice.

“First: stop making vampire references with my sister; she’s just a night soul. And second: you invited her!” Eliza defended her family and actions. She took her husband arm and hissed in his ear: “Be nice” before taking the opposite direction to leave the two men to talk in private.

“What are you doing in here?” asked Hamilton, throwing the formalities and Eliza’s order out of the window. “I thought I let you clear that I didn’t want to talk to you. Or didn’t I close the front door hard enough?”

“Why am I not fired?” asked Thomas, straight to the point.

“That’s what I think about Adams every day…” joked Alexander.

“I’m serious, Hamilton”

“Me too, that’s the saddest part…”

“Hamilton, why did Washington come to thank me for my help?”

“Because you made King change his mind” replied Alexander, taking a few papers that were spread all over the table and putting them inside his briefcase. Except from one.

“You know why I could” retorted Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, this little fella” said Hamilton, showing him the paper he had left out. “Funny how a simple sheet can cause such terror”

“Hamilton…”

“What did you spend all that money on?”

“Excuse me?”

“What did you spend all that money on?” repeated Hamilton, slowly.

“Honestly?”

“If you think you can do such a thing…” said Alexander, with a hint of mock in his voice.

Thomas ignored it completely and replied straightforward: “I don’t want to tell you”

“Hm…”

They stood there in complete silence. If Washington could see them now, able to be silent in each other’s presence. Alexander leveraged the silence to scrutinize the taller man and made him completely uncomfortable. Thomas wanted to snap, to demand him to tell Washington already and
end this sick game. He gave the Caribbean the chance to hit back at him, this time with evidence in his power, and he wasn’t doing it. Why wasn’t he doing it?

Eventually, Hamilton let out a tired sigh.

“How many more people now this?” he asked, with a softer tone.

“James” he replied, without thinking.

“Who else…?” commented Hamilton, shaking his head. “If you make me regret this decision again…” he spat, through gritted teeth.

And Hamilton surprised him again when he broke the paper and then passed him the pieces.

“Throw this away. Now, only we three know” he said, totally serious. “Well, and King, but I don’t think he likes to talk about this subject much”

“Why?” asked Thomas.

“Would you like to talk about it in his situation?”

“No, why are you doing this?” asked Thomas, frowning. “You said it yourself, I wouldn’t have doubted in telling Washington, had our roles being reversed”

“Well, it’s not the first time we see who’s best between us” replied Hamilton, a bit bitterly.

“Does this mean that you forgave me?” asked Thomas, arching one curious eyebrow.

“No” snapped Alexander, making his way to the door. “Now, if you excuse me, they are waiting for me. Get out of here before Eliza offers you something to drink or eat, you don’t deserve her kindness”

Thomas followed him out of the house and stood there, seeing Washington driving them away. James was waiting for him at the porch.

“So?” he inquired, as soon as Thomas was close enough to hear him. Thomas showed him the pieces of paper. “I’ll take you making me breakfast as a ‘I admit you were right’” commented James, with a cocky smile as he made his way into the house.

And Thomas envied his attitude before the situation.
John followed the headwaiter to the table where Nestor was waiting for him. He thanked the guy and stood there a few moments, preparing himself. He gave a couple of taps to the pocket on his jacket, feeling the bulge of what he put inside there before leaving the house and smiled as sincerely as he could.

“Sorry for being late” he apologised, taking a seat across Nestor.

“It’s alright” dismissed the man, smiley.

“It’s just that my friend kept insisting and insisting on coming with me and I eventually gave in” he explained, with a face of resignation.

Nestor moved his eyes, in search for someone else. “What friend??”

“Benjamin” answered John, as a matter-of-a-fact. “He lives with me as well. Wait, I’ll introduce you”

With a wide smile – the look of confusion on Nestor’s face was putting his hopes up – he took out the little figure of a bird he’d kept since he was little. He turned the figure so it was facing Nestor, who looked at the bird with a funny expression.

“Benjamin, this is Nestor. Nestor, this is Benjamin” said Laurens, slowly, as if he was talking to little children.

“Uh… Nice to meet you, Benjamin” said Nestor, with a wee smile.

“What? He’s talking to you, answer him!” He frowned at the bird. “That’s why you insisted to come!? Huh?! FOR EMBARRASING ME?! HUH?!” he shouted, hitting the figure on the table a couple of times before changing his mood drastically. “Aaaw, my poor little one, come here, don’t cry! I didn’t mean to!” he apologised, kissing the bird repeatedly. He put it back on his pocket, now with its head out. “Well, shall we eat?” he asked, smiling widely.

“Uh, yeah, of course” said Nestor, shrugging.

They read the menu in silence. Suddenly, Laurens began to make noises with his mouth. He clicked his tongue, popped his lips or made the sound of the letter ‘L’ loudly enough to make a few people to look in his direction. Nestor, without raising his glare from the menu card, added his two cents to the show. He imitated the motor of a car and repeated the five vowels aloud. A waiter passed their table by in a hurry, throwing them a curious look, before going to attend other clients, a few tables further.

“Eh?” said Laurens, interrupting the noises and finally making Nestor raise his glare. Laurens looked
straight at the waiter and then whispered to the bird toy in his pocket. “No, I don’t think he is one of them”

“What are you two murmuring about?” asked Nestor, curious.

“Hm? Nothing. Benjamin thinks… Well, he thinks that the waiter…” he leaned closer, to whisper. “…is one of them”

“Of them who?” asked Nestor, also in a quiet voice.

“You know, them…” repeated Laurens, looking up for a brief moment. “The extra-terrestrial” he clarified, waggling his eyebrows.

“What?” asked Nestor, with a laugh in the end.

“Yes, laugh. You laugh. Why don’t you call me crazy, as everybody else, huh?” complained Laurens, pretending to be indignant. “Always the same with people… But I know what I lived! I was with them, and Benjamin as well!” He lowered his voice as well, adding a dark tone to his voice. “They think I swallowed the pill they gave me, but noooo. No. Because I put the pill under my tongue, like this… And I remember everything. Everything” he declared, looking at his sides, as if he was being watched by someone dangerous. “But, nothing. Laugh if you want. Make fun of John Laurens, the crazy man. Of course, as John spent his college years smoking pots, he started seeing UFOs where there were only clouds. Yeah, yeah, I know the drill…”

“No, no, John, sorry, I didn’t want to offend you” hurried to say Nestor. “It’s just that… I didn’t want to tell you either, because I do know the drill”

“… … What?” asked Laurens, his confident façade breaking slowly.

“Yeah, I was taken as well” he whispered.

“What?” exclaimed Laurens, now ignoring all the eyes that were on them. “What are you saying?”

“God, isn’t it amazing how we three lived the same?” asked Nestor, with excitement.

Laurens buried his face in his hands, feeling it hot from the flush of anger and impotence, while Nestor spent almost twenty minutes talking about his experiences and theories, only stopping to eat his food. Laurens’ remained untouched.

“And the pope as well” kept saying Nestor. “All those things he said about the light’s gonna save us, that if we all are going to end up up there…”

Eh… Yes, yes, yes…” interrupted Laurens, fidgeting with his hand. “But… But I’ve got other, very strange things” he kept saying, gaining a confused look from the man across. “Sometimes… Sometimes I’d love to grab a gun, get out of my house and start shooting at any living thing that crosses my path” explained Laurens, smiling wickedly, as he saw Nestor’s frown. “Adults, kids, elders, dogs, all of them”

“Fuck, me as well” admitted Nestor, sighing with relief.

“Excuse me?” said Laurens, dropping his arms in shock.
Especially the old ladies that crosses the street where it’s not allowed” kept saying Nestor. “And then they look at you with superiority, like they owned the place!”

Laurens punched the table with fury, then, unable to contain his frustration, and got up.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, Nestor, you must be locked up for the rest of your days!” he shouted, gaining a few scared looks from near tables and a shocked one from Nestor. “Do you hear the idiocies that come out from your mouth or what?! How on Earth is Sofía Vergara gonna be a reptilian, if Latinos are known for being hot blooded!? It makes no fucking sense!”

“Then WHAT?!” screamed Nestor, also punching the table. “Have you been making fun of me all along?!”

“No! I was trying to make you get lost, you fucking madman!”

“Worry no more, because you and I are over!” declared Nestor, getting up from the chair. “Did you hear me?! Over!”

Laurens was left there, watching him run away. He gasped a few times, still not believing it had happened. Eventually, he let himself drop on the chair.

“Laurens, the heartbreaker is back. Huh, trying to tie me up. Me. Ha” he said, congratulating himself with a happy smile. He grabbed the wrist of one waitress that walked past his table. “Please, can you serve me the most expensive wine you have? I’m celebrating. Charge it in this card” he ordered, passing her a credit card.

The waitress smiled politely at him after reading the card. “Alright, Mr. Mulligan. I’ll be right…”

The waitress could never finish the sentence, as a scream was heard from the end of the hall and getting closer to them. People screamed as they saw Nestor sprinting to where Laurens was sitting, shaking one of the decorative swords in front of him. The waitress was pushed to the side, and helped by the people dining next to Laurens, while John jumped from his seat when Nestor let the sword fall on the table. Two waiters came running and held him by the arms.

“Get off me! Get off me so I can kill this son of a bitch!” screamed Nestor, kicking blindly.

Laurens’ shock broke at the man’s threat and sprinted in the opposite direction, his scream becoming distant as he left the restaurant.

The scream grew louder all of a sudden when Laurens came back. People saw him kneeling
to pick something from the floor.

“Benjamin, run!” he said, before screaming at the top of his lungs again, now with the bird figure in one hand and sprinting out of the restaurant again.

Hercules and Godfred came back home after their nightly walk. This time, they found no neighbours on the way. Thankfully. Hercules took the leash off Godfred, who shook in spot as he opened the door for them to get in. Just when he had the door opened ajar, he heard a scream coming from the stairs in their direction.

“DON’T CLOSE THE DOOR, DON’T CLOSE THE DOOR!”

Hercules turned around, seeing John running in their direction. The dog got in the house, leaving the two men to collide into each other when Laurens pushed Hercules to the side, opening the door completely. He fell to the floor, while Hercules kept his balance by grabbing the knob.

“John, what the hell?!?”

John turned around, still not getting up. “Close the door! Close the door!” he demanded.

“What’s happening?” asked Lafayette, coming out his bedroom with a book in his hands.

“HERCULES, CLOSE THE FUCKING DOOR!” shouted Laurens.

Without knowing why, he obliged. Laurens let out a breath of relief. The couple shared a look of confusion, and Godfred saw everything from the security of his kennel.

“John, what’s wrong?” asked Lafayette.

“Huh? Nothing, what could possible be wrong?” asked Laurens, jumping to his feet. He looked at his two friends, out of breath. “So… Wanna watch TV?” he proposed, walking in the living room in a hurry.

“TV?” echoed Hercules, blinking dumbfounded. “John, what the hell is wrong?”

“Nothing, why do you ask?”
Hercules’ reply was muted when someone started to bang on their door, shouting curses and threats.

“GET OUT, GET OUT, YOU LIAR BITCH!”

“Who the hell is that?” asked Lafayette, paling.

“Nobody, a salesman, probably” dismissed Laurens.

“A salesman? Insulting the people living in here?” asked Hercules, arms in akimbo.

“People these days are very violent”

“John…”

“Look, let’s watch TV…” he said, zapping nervously.

“John!”

The door then was broken down, and Lafayette screamed as he hugged Hercules, afraid.

“Where the fuck is he?!” asked Nestor, red from fury.

“In the living room, he’s all yours”

“HERCULES” scolded Laf, his accent thicker than ever.

Nestor looked in the direction Hercules had pointed at and lifted one foot to start walking in that direction. Laurens curled himself in a ball, trembling. Nestor never reached him though, as he fell to the floor after something hit him in the back of the head. The couple saw the man falling unconscious. Then, they looked up, seeing Mr. Garret with a baseball bat in his hands and a serious expression on his face.

Lafayette gasped, clinging to Hercules’ shirt as if his life depended on it and then let himself fall to the floor, his legs shaking uncontrollably. Hercules knelt by his side, his eyes focused on their downstairs neighbour. Laurens came out the living room, before the silence. Godfred also stuck his head out the door, seeing the collapsed man with curiosity.

“Mr. Garret, you just saved my life!” said Laurens, walking to the old man with arms wide open. “I’m sorry I vomited on your flowers that night I came late for partying, I misjudged you!”

Garret punched the freckled man in the jaw, making Laurens hit the wall at his right. The
three men looked at him with surprise, then.

“I told you that if you and your friends bothered me again with your annoying shit, I’d come up here to give you two blows” said Garret, calmly, as he looked at Hercules, who only nodded. “Good night” said the man, leaving with the baseball bat over his shoulder.

“I need vacation” complained Lafayette, with a lost glare. “From all of you…”

And Godfred barked, as if he agreed.

A few weeks later, the staff could meet again at the entrance of what it would be their new law firm. It was bigger than the previous one they had worked at, with four floors (Washington and Alexander had started making plans on how to find new people to hire); a spacious counter for Maria to attend clients and do her job comfortably, a room dedicated for photocopying and printing important documents and another to keep all the important documents in fillers; a break room bigger than the one they used to have (Washington looked at it as much as he could to always remember how clean it was before anyone put a foot in there); and something else that Alexander had insisted in having. Washington didn’t complain about it, as he made King pay it. And seeing that face was enough to let the Caribbean ask for everything he wanted and more. Besides, it was for something useful. He couldn’t expect less from Alexander, honestly.

Washington let the CFO explain it, as it was his idea to have this. The staff muttered in confusion as Maria handed them all black clickers. When she was finished, Alexander spoke.

“Alright, as Mr. Washington explained, this building has a security system. The remotes Maria’s given you are the way you’ll be able to open and lock the doors from now on” said Alexander.

“But we used to open and lock the doors without any remotes before” complained Adams.

“Yes, but now the system is different, now it’s automatic, so you can have more security and privacy while working” said Alexander, calmly.

“And why would I want to lock the front door?” asked Peggy, looking at the clicker with a frown. “The clients don’t have remotes. Or do they?”

“No, but this is for your doors as well” clarified Madison.

“Listen, people, this clicker belongs to a highly-security system. It has a variable code by radio frequency, alright?” explained Alexander, slowly.

“Ah, it’s a radio?” asked Peggy, now looking at the item with new interest.
“No, Peggy, no…” said Alexander, starting to feel exasperated.

“And where’s the code?” asked Angelica.

“And with how much frequency will it change?” asked Madison.

“No, no, it changes the whole time” said Alexander.

“And how are we supposed to learn it, then?” asked Laurens.

“I’ve got enough things in my head already, I don’t need to learn new codes every hour” complained Hercules.

“No, you don’t have to learn anything! It…!” tried to explain Alexander, raising his voice.

“This is absurd” concluded Adams. “Give us the old keys and let’s keep doing our lives as we used to”

“No! The doors are now automatic, the old key is useless now!”

“What??? Then we can’t get in our offices now!!”

“And where will we work?” asked Peggy, indignant.

“Don’t you mean ‘sleep’?” asked Laurens, with mockery.

Peggy flipping him the bird was enough to trigger a fight between the workers. Washington sighed while Alexander clicked his tongue in annoyance.

“Could you please listen?!” he shouted, silencing their quarrel. “I meant that you can’t get in your offices by the old keys, you have to use this, the clicker!” he explained, raising the object.

“Button one” said Washington, with one finger on said button.

“What one?” asked Lafayette, squinting his eyes to see better.

“And why are there three buttons?” asked Aaron.

“For turning it on and off, and the volume” said Peggy.

“What volume?” said Aaron, more confused than before.

“Peggy, you haven’t slept your thirteen hours, have you?” asked Angelica.

“Listen!” said Alexander, with a sigh of tedium. “Button one, for opening the door, button two, for locking it, and the button three is for turning on and off the alarm”

“The problem in here is that it has no numbers on it, or signs” complained Thomas.

“Man, put on some stickers or something!” said Laurens.

“Oh, I’ve got ones that are star-shaped! We could use the blue ones for the ones, the purple ones for the twos, and the yellow ones for the threes” suggested Maria.
“And what if we hire a colour-blind person?” asked Thomas.

“You live off of bringing down all my ideas or what?” spat Maria, upset.

“Hey, look, the one in the middle is number two, no matter which way you turn it” said Peggy.

“What would we do without you, Pegs?” joked Angelica.

“Well, at least she knows how to lock her door” said Thomas, looking at the vice president.

“And what do we need a lock-button for?” asked Madison. “Wouldn’t it be easier if it locks when you close it?”

“Yes, but how will the door know that you’re going back home and not going in to work?” said Alexander.

“Put a clock on it”

“A clock…?”

“Or let the door opened” suggested Maria.

“There are people who like to work with the doors closed” said Lafayette, throwing a knowing glare to Thomas.

“People, the second button is in case you are working and at last minute decide you want to be left alone” said Alexander. “There are people in here who come in the offices without knocking”

“Aka, you” said Thomas.

“Whoever!” snapped Alexander, looking enraged at the secretary. “With this you can lock it from your desk if you want some privacy at some point”

“Fuck, Alex, we don’t work for the government to need so much privacy…” said Laurens, scratching the back of his head.

“And what about if I locked it before I wanted to?” asked Hercules.

“True, what if I pressed the button and my fingers got caught in the door?” asked Angelica.

“Uf, that’s pain” commented Maria, paling at the image.

“And why would your fingers get caught?!” asked Alexander, enraged.

“It can happen!” Angelica defended her stance.

“It can also happen that the clicker broke just when you locked. Will you be left locked forever in there?” asked Madison.

“Son, we’ll call for a locksmith” said Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“But I don’t like to be locked”

“You or anyone else” said Hercules, laughing a bit.

“And why would the clicker break?” asked Alexander, rubbing his temples. “It’s just all the same than with Angelica’s supposition!”
“Because they’re things that can happen!” insisted the vice president.

“Besides, this is kindergarten” commented Lafayette.

“I’ll give we all two days before someone loses the clicker” half-joked Thomas.

“I want the old key back” said Laurens, shaking his head.

“You can lose the old key as well!” complained Alexander.

“Talking about that” said Madison, looking at Jefferson. “I lost the house key”

“Again??” asked Thomas.

“See?” said Alexander. “Wait, you lost the fucking key WHEN?” he inquired when he remembered that that was his rented house.

“Wait, wait, wait” said Maria. “Then we have to lock it with this and with the key?”

“Did anyone read the instructions for this?” asked Hercules, looking at the whole group, who shook their heads.

“Sweet lord…” muttered Washington.


“Why an alarm button?!” asked Adams, angry. “The alarm must go off on its own!”

“AND ON ITS OWN IT’S GONNA GO OFF, DEAR ADAMS, BUT WE’LL HAVE TO TURN IT OFF AT SOME POINT, OR ARE WE GOING TO LET IT SOUND TILL THE END OF TIMES?!!”

“That’s button three, right?” asked Maria, lost.

“And it weighs as much as a rock” complained Madison.

“Don’t exaggerate either!” said Aaron. “It’s a little heavier than a key, but…”

“There we go again with the keys…” complained Alexander, muffling his voice with his hands as he buried his red face in them. “Forget about the damned keys, people!!”

“We can’t when you give us this shit, man!” complained Adams.

“But why are you complaining? If you only come to work twice a month!” said Aaron.

“And that’s an overstatement” laughed Angelica.

“Alex, where do I plug in the earbuds?” asked Peggy.

“What’s she talking about?” asked Hercules.

“Why is she here, in the first place? She doesn’t get a thing” complained Thomas.

“Look, DO WHATEVER THE HELL YOU WANT!” shouted Alexander, fed up. “KEEP EVERYTHING OPENED AND LET BURGLARS ROB US, I DON’T CARE ANYMORE!”
“Son…” tried to say Washington.

“Man, nothing happened in months with Burr’s hole, why will it happen now?” asked Angelica.

The rest nodded and commented against the system security, as they entered the building. Washington gave Alexander a pat on the back before getting in as well, leaving the CFO there to calm his nerves. Eventually, he cursed everyone’s names and turned on his heels. Some work will calm him down.

“Alex!” a cheerful voice called in the distance. “Alex, wait!”

“Eliza?” he said, confused, as his wife trotted to where he was. “What are you doing in here?”

Eliza gasped a few times and then passed him a folder. “You forgot this this morning!” she said.

“Oh, yes, I left in a hurry” he nodded. “Thank you, dear”

“It was nothing” assured Eliza, with a smile. “How is everything going on your ‘first day’?” she asked.

“Bah, I tried to explain how to use the clicker, but when you get these people out of the two plus two, the chaos is served”

Eliza laughed and took the clicker. “Don’t worry about it, hun”

“I give them security and that’s how they thank me” complained Alexander.

“Look, you’re safe now, that’s the important part” Eliza, as always, so optimistic.

“Button one: open. Button two: lock. Button three: alarm. It is not that fucking difficult” muttered Alexander under his breath, feeling his cheeks burning from fury again.

“The lack of numbers is confusing” commented Eliza, after watching the clicker closely. She passed it back to her husband. “You should put stickers or something”

Alexander looked at the clicker and then looked up slowly to look at a smiling Eliza. He clicked his tongue in annoyance.

“Eliza, honey, go to hell” he said, taking the clicker away from her brusquely.

“Bah… Why do you get angry now?!” she asked, perplexed, seeing him walk in the building without looking back at her. She shrugged. “This man is so weird…”

Chapter End Notes
"Pretty face": I don't know if in English it has the meaning I wanted to give it. In Spanish, we can call people "guapo/guapa" (or in its diminutive "guapito/guapita") as a mock. For example, you can say someone is pretty (es guapo), but when you say something as "Eso es cosa tuya, guapito (That's your problem, pretty face)", it's not a compliment.

The same can happen with the word "listo/lista (smart)". You can say "Es muy listo (He's very smart)", but you can also use it as: "¿Pues qué propones tú que hagamos, listo? (What do you propose us to do then, you smart?)".

Sursum corda!
The prank call 2: John Adams

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, things escalating insanely quick.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

The next (real) chapter will be angsty and it's taking me a bit longer than I thought, so I decided to post this in the meanwhile.
I decided not to use the name of any airlines. Choose whatever you like XD
This is based on two prank calls I mixed together, with a touch of my own nocturnal craziness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alexander Hamilton was an asshole.

It was a true fact. His friends knew after a few days of studying with him. His colleagues came to the same conclusion after some time working with him. His boss realised the same a couple of days after hiring him. Eliza knew since she laid her eyes on him and stood by his side, being the supporting and cheerful friend. The Schuyler family knew once Eliza and Alexander started dating and she introduced him properly to them. Damn, even Alexander’s children knew, though they still didn’t know the exact word to define their father.

It wasn’t needed to be very observant to know Alexander enjoyed taking revenge on someone who had offended him. The thing sometimes came to a point where his friends would swear Alexander wanted to be pissed off just to have a reason to get it back.

There were only a few times when Alexander didn’t scheme an evil plan. Those few people should be grateful. Especially to Eliza and John, who knew how to put the man under control when his hot-headed temperament took out the worst of him. Other times, though, it was the own Alexander the one who didn’t want to get involved with the one who had wronged him. He decided to use his cold indifference towards them. And, sometimes, those silences were worse than any verbal attack. James Monroe had been a very good example of it (though, this time, surprisingly, it was Eliza the one who would never let it go); and now Thomas Jefferson was the other. Maybe his position as a workmate of the Caribbean made the silence not to be eternal, but the coldness was still there. And damn if it didn’t bother him way more than Alexander’s sharp tongue.

And yet, Thomas didn’t know if he’d rather let it be or be in Adams’ shoes. The man infuriated Hamilton for some insults he had thrown at the immigrant’s past cost at some point and
Alexander, being Alexander had heard every word of John’s ramble. That day started the war.

And it wasn’t like John Adams cared. Because Thomas, as an ex-friend and college roommate of Adams, knew that the man was also an asshole. With the same sharp tongue and venom to give to whomever offended him. The difference was that Hamilton had a humour proper of a four-years-old, while Adams had just the attitude of a four-years-old. A spoiled four-years-old.

That was how all this began.

John Adams wasn’t good at technology, and that wasn’t a secret. Just as it wasn’t a secret the report he had written to his airline that somehow he had made public on his social media. When James showed the caption to Thomas, he guessed Adams had wanted his closer friends to see but managed to put the text public and now, no matter if he deleted it or not, the whole world saw.

“It’s not the first time he does something like this” he explained, as he read the long paragraph on James’ phone screen. “One day, at college, he sent part of his diary along with an essay. Somehow, the whole class knew and next thing he knew, everyone was laughing at him”

“Poor man” said James, though smiling a bit.

Laurens’ laugh resounded throughout the whole building then. Thomas and James made their way automatically to the break room, where most part of the staff spent their day. Different building, same habits, it seemed. When the two friends walked in the room, they found everyone there, expect Washington. His rocking chair sounding in the distance, the only sign that he had come to work that day.

“The worst of this is his misspelling” commented Lafayette, who was the only one in that room laughing discreetly. “I mean, English isn’t my native language, and my eyes hurt…”

“Huh, try to proofread his paperwork” said Thomas, taking a seat in front of his friend.

“Man, he wrote his own name wrong” said Angelica, crying from laughter.

“You’d be surprised at how tired I am of crossing that second D he writes…” said Alexander, smiling at his sister-in-law.

“Send it to Eliza” said Peggy, tapping Laurens on the shoulder.

“I already did, but I didn’t have time to see the response” explained John, red from laughter. “Gosh, what an idiotic thing…” he muttered, to himself.

“But what happened?” asked Hercules.

“He wanted to spend a weekend with his wife in Boston” explained Maria.
“How do you know?” asked Madison.

Maria shrugged. “I’m the receptionist, my job is to know all the gossip in the office”

“Wait, I thought he was sick?” asked Peggy, cocking an eyebrow.

“According to him, he’s always sick” said Alexander, rolling his eyes.

“This man is an idiot” declared Hercules. “If you’re going to lie, at least do it well”

“That’s asking too much”

“Besides, he did it by accident” said James.

“Like everything else in his life”

“Alex, you’re on fire today” commented Peggy.

“We’re about to run out of coffee and so he needs to feed on his bile” said Thomas, making the two Schuyler sisters to contain their laughter.

“I’m in a good mood today…” Alexander defended himself, almost pouting.

“Fuck, warn us when you’re in a bad mood, so we can run away, then” joked Angelica, laughing.

“That’s Eliza’s job” said Alexander, with a thoughtful expression.

“I’m feeling bad for the guy” said Aaron, eventually. “He can delete it, but a lot of people must’ve made a screenshot of it”

“No, and that without taking into account the fact that he put the airline name in it like a hundred times” said Laurens.

“But if it’s true what he’s saying…” said Maria, with an understanding tone.

“Hey, John” Alexander said all of a sudden. “Do you still hang out with that Alfred guy, right?”

“Hang out is an understatement” chimed in Hercules. “He lunches with us almost every day”

Lafayette shook his head at Alexander. “He’s obsessed with food and money…”

“Fuck, he can’t even wash his dish!”

“Who’s Alfred?” asked Thomas.

“A prostitute Laf hired for John. They became friends after the whole thing came out” explained Peggy.

“Thanks to you” complained Hercules.

“Trifles, trifles…”

Thomas looked at Lafayette with eyes half-closed. “Really, this company is making you no good” he commented, addressing the other side of the table completely.

Laurens turned his head to his ex. “Alex, are you thinking about what I think you’re thinking?” he asked.
“Maybe” said the CFO, taking a sip of his coffee.

“Yeah, maybe…” said Angelica, with a knowing smile. “That’s the same smirk you had on your face when you took revenge on that Monroe guy”

“To be fair, that was all Eliza’s doing. I just sat in the shadows, seeing her do” clarified Alexander. “I think I started to like her a lot more then”

“Man, you were still dating me…” complained Laurens.

“What did Monroe do to you?” asked James. “He seemed like an alright guy when I met him”

“Yeah, you’ve never told me” said Aaron, also curious.

“That’s an story for another time” replied Alexander.

“True, true, right now we’re talking about pranking Adams” said Maria, rubbing her hands with an evil smile.

“Prank?” repeated Thomas. “Be careful, the man has a lot of bad temper and no sense of humour. That’s a bad combination” he warned.

“The perfect combination” said Lafayette.

“Come on, don’t ruin it, Lemongrab. I couldn’t be in the last one” pleaded Maria.

“No, no, I’m just warning. Do whatever you want, I don’t mind” said Thomas, making a dismissive gesture with the hand.

“But nothing of putting it on the Internet” said Lafayette.

“I won’t make promises” Angelica and Alexander said at the same time.

“I’m gonna start to charge you” joked Alfred, as soon as Peggy opened the door.

The youngest Schuyler sister rolled her eyes. “Don’t be an actual asshole” she commented, as she pulled the man into the house. “Eliza is preparing snacks”

“Nice”

“They are bought from the grocery shop. So we can eat them”

“Alright?” he said, a bit confused.

Peggy shook her head. “I’ll never understand how someone who is so good at cooking in general can be so horrible at making her own snacks”

“You’ll have nothing” declared Eliza, who was making her way into the living room with her husband.
“Aaaw” complained Peggy.

“You have to make sure she is far away” Alexander whispered in her ear.

“You will have nothing either!” said Eliza, now frowning at him.

“Damn, what a hearing…”

“So” said Alfred, after a brief laugh. “Someone will explain me what I’ve gotta do now?”

“Let me look for the photo” said Laurens, fishing his phone out his back pocket.

Lafayette used the time John took to find the caption to introduce Thomas and James to Alfred, who let all the talking to the Frenchman, more than comfortable with that option. Alfred sensed their discomfort and tried to be as easy-going as he could with the two shy men. That made both Jefferson and Madison to like him.

Laurens exclaimed an ‘aha!’ when he finally found the caption and showed it to Alf, who read it as the same time everyone suggested things he could say to Adams through the phone. Jefferson gave him the same warning about Adams’ bad temper.

“I once made a joke to Alexander” laughed Alfred. “I think I come prepared”

And that made everyone, except Hamilton, to laugh loudly. Alexander just looked angrily at his political family and wife. Eliza stuck her tongue out in a playful way.

The doorbell rang and she trotted to open the door. Peggy and Alexander filled their pockets with snacks in the meantime.

“Martha!” she said, a mix of surprise and happiness in her tone. “What are you doing in here?”

“Are you kidding? You’re going to play a prank on Adams and thought I didn’t want to come?” asked Mrs. Washington, giving Eliza a tight hug that she reciprocated immediately.

“Oh, well, we didn’t want to get you in trouble with George!” she explained.

“Nonsense! At much, he would get in trouble if he says anything to any of you guys for having a little fun”

“Martha Washington: always better on your side than against you” joked Alexander, with a gentle smile.

“You can bet” nodded the woman. She opened her arms.
Alexander saw her intentions clearly. “Nope”

“Alexander”

“Christmas and special occasions. I made myself clear with all of you” he explained, crossing both arms.

“Alexander, I came all this way!” pouted Martha.

“She came all this way!” the Schuyler sisters teased.

Alexander sighed. “Four against one is cheating” he complained, though he got up and let Martha embrace him.

“All is fair in love and war” said Martha.

“And he needs more love than war” commented Eliza, sitting beside the vacant seat her husband had made.

Alfred interrupted whatever retort Alexander might’ve thought. “Alright, I think I’ve got it”

“Yay!” cheered Maria.

“Wait, wait, let me record it” said Angelica, looking for her phone.

“No YouTube” reminded Lafayette.

“And Twitter?”

“Angelica!”

“Alright… Instagram?”

“Angelica” said Lafayette, sterner this time.

The oldest sister sighed. “Alright… Killjoy”

It was the third time Alfred had to call, everyone in the living room waited with tired expressions. Angelica had her phone on the table, finding stupid to hold it when she wasn’t recording anything.

“He must be sleeping” said Thomas.

“It’s five o’clock…” said Theodosia.

“You don’t know Adams” said Aaron.

“Lucky” chimed in Alexander.
“Gosh, since he said that of the favourite treatment, he’s more unbearable with the man than ever” commented Madison.

“What an epic day that was” recalled Peggy, trying to open a chocolate bar without making any noise.

“What happened?” asked Martha curious.

“Angelica records all the fights” said Madison.

“You must send them all to me”

“Okay”

“We should make a remix for Christmas” joked Hercules.

“Yes, we put carol music in the background” planned Laurens.

“He doesn’t answer” said Alfred, hanging up. “Shall I call again?”

“Yes, yes” nodded Alexander.

“For the sole reason of bothering him, Alex is capable of spending the whole night calling” said Eliza, with a shy laugh.

“Buf, you don’t know how right you are” commented Laurens. “Do you remember that time with that guy…”

“So concise” joked Hercules.

“Man, that guy… I don’t remember the name…” Laurens struggled to remember. “Well, I don’t remember, but there was a guy Alexander didn’t like for something he said about him…”

“Like half of humanity he comes across to…” commented Thomas.

“You’re in my house, Jefferson” warned Alexander.

“Like the rest of the days” laughed Maria, gaining a dirty look from the secretary.

“And… And he spent the whole year calling him with a private number at night” kept saying Laurens.

“Oh, I remember” said Lafayette.

“What a year!” laughed Hercules.

“Really, Betsey, this man was the best option to marry to” commented Peggy, still fighting with the envelope of the bar.

“Call again” proposed Thomas, after the laughter of Alexander’s friends and family died down. “Abigail would pick up eventually”

“Alright” gave in Alfred.

They had to try a couple of times more, until finally someone picked at the other line. There
was a moment of silence (that Angelica took advantage of to pick her phone and record) before they heard Abigail fighting with Adams in whispers.

“They’ve called six times or I don’t know how many anymore!” she complained, receiving a series of grumbles as a response. “Here!” she insisted, and they imagined her tossing the phone to her husband.

They heard Adams clearing his throat before answering with a raspy voice. “Yes?”

“And that voice?” asked Theodosia, under her breath. Aaron just shrugged, as lost as her.

“Hello?” said Alfred, a bit confused.

“Yes, yes, who is it?” said Adams, with a groggy and hoarse voice.

“Hello, good afternoon, sir” greeted Alfred, changing his tone into a serious one. “Am…”

“Good afternoon” replied Adams, clearing his throat in the end.

“Am I talking to Mr. John Adams?”

“Yes”

“Look, Mr. Adams, I call from the airline [***]”

“Yes”

“As long as I know you presented a complaint?”

“Yes”

“He took your rhetoric” joked Theodosia in her husband’s ear. Aaron just half-closed his eyes.

“Could you please explain me what…?” tried to ask Alfred, just to be interrupted by a series of coughs. “Sir?”

“Aw, he was ill for real” commented Maria, now feeling bad.

“Sir, are you alright?” asked Alfred, a bit concerned. “I hear you a bit…”

“Yeah, I’ll explain: last night I went out to a birthday party and… Well, I got cold” explained Adams.

“Ah, alright…” said Alfred, smiling a bit at the group.

Alexander looked at Maria. “Never feel bad for him” he advised.

“What a life” commented Lafayette, shaking his head in disapproval.

“Tell me, what were you saying?” asked Adams.

“Yes. I called in case you wanted to explain whatever happened to you a bit further? Please?” said Alfred.

“Yeah”
“…”
“…”
“…”
“…”
“…”
“… Sir?”

“Yep”

“Are you going to explain…?”

“Ah, yes, yes” he nodded, coughing a bit in the end.

“What an exasperation” complained Martha.

“What happened was that one of your workers, one, uh… One of those… The ones who serve… Uh… The things…” Adams struggled to explain.

“A flight attendant?” helped Alfred.

“Yeah, that… Well, actually, the problem was… What happened was… three little things”

“Okay… Tell me” said Alfred, frowning in confusion.

“He’s putting me on my nerves” muttered Angelica, tapping her fingers on the couch with impatience.

“He can barely explain himself when he’s awake, imagine now that he just woke up” Thomas told her.

“The first thing…” kept talking Adams. He let out a sigh.

“Yes?”

“The first one is that the… attendant or whatever… served me last. My food I mean”

“You were the last one to be given the food by him” stated Alfred.

“Yes, that” nodded Adams. “And that taking into account that I asked for it first”

“Okay.

“And…”

“But, sir, wait” interrupted Alfred. “We normally serve the food in the order our clients are sat. Where were you located?”

“I…”

“Located” repeated Alfred.

“Yeah, yeah, sat at” clarified Adams, to let him know he’d understood.

“Located” said Alfred again, nonetheless.
“Yes, goddamnit!” exploded Adams again, making Peggy to tremble in her seat. Aaron shushed her a bit. “I was sat next to the emergency door”

“That can’t be. There are no sits there” denied Alfred. “Wouldn’t you mean next to the window by the emergency door?”

“Uh, yeah, if we’re going to be technical, I guess” said Adams.

“Okay, good. Proceed, please”

“Yeah. Well, when he came to me… Well, my wife was there as well, but… But she didn’t want to complain or anything…”

“Alright. That’s okay”

“Well, when the boy came with my food, he practically threw my food at me” concluded Adams, when he found no better way to explain it.

“Threw the food at you?” repeated Alfred, confused.

“Yes”

“Like a monkey in the zoo???”

Alexander had to put a hand on his mouth to drown the laughter. Eliza was red in the face at seeing her husband’s struggles and looking at Theodosia, who was crying silently with a large smile on her face, didn’t help her to calm down.

“Nooo, nooo” hurried to say Adams. “I meant that he threw the… The… Damn, the thing where you put the food”

“The tray” said Alfred, trying not to laugh while talking.

“That, that, that. Sorry, I… I’m a bit far away… Hehehehe” laughed Adams.

“Don’t worry, sir”

“Well, what I was saying”

“Yes”

“The boy came and threw the tray on that little table”

“On the table” repeated Alfred.

“On the table” assured Adams.

“On the table?”

“…On the table, yes”

“On the table”
“On the table, bullocks, yes!” said Adams, raising his voice considerably.

A faint giggle escaped Laurens’ lips and that made the whole living room to hunch over themselves, containing their laughter. Lafayette and Eliza were the only ones who tried to calm the others. Alfred had a hard time as he tried not to laugh while talking.

“Alright, Mr. Adams, I’m writing all down” he promised.

“Good” He coughed loudly in the end. “Sorry... Agh...”

“Don’t worry, don’t worry”

Eliza got up suddenly, calling the attention of the whole room. She walked out without making too much noise. Alexander thought about following her, but Adams talked again, and the attention of the group was back on him.

“Then... I mean, I can believe that maybe I was the last one to be served for a coincidence or something that went wrong that day or... Or whatever”

“Yes”

“But that behaviour he had...”

“What behaviour?”

“Damn, I just told you he threw the tray at me” complained Adams, irritated. “He was very disrespectful towards me”

“Are you sure? Maybe he had a way of working that you didn’t like very much, but...”

“Nooo, no, no, no, no” interrupted Adams sharply, making Alfred to look the other side in order not to laugh on the phone. The group watched this and also struggled to control themselves. “No, sir, no. The boy treated everyone else very respectfully. He said ‘good trip’, ‘bu... bo... bona petiti’ or something like that...”

“Bon appétit?” guessed Alfred, his voice shaking a bit.

“That petiti thing, yes”

Maria, who was now kneeling on the floor and crying from laughter, swore under her breath: “I’m going to call him Mr. Petiti in the next meeting”

“Do it, do it” encouraged Laurens.

“He didn’t have a nickname, did he?” asked Madison, giggling more sheepishly than the rest.

“Now, he does” declared Angelica.
“Alright, sir” nodded Alfred, finally able to control himself. “Did anything else happen?”

“Yeah, yeah… The last thing was that I asked him for some earphones, and he gave ones to me that were clearly used. O…”

“Used?”

“Overused” stated Adams.

“Overused?” echoed Alfred. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that that thing had more wax than… than…”

“Gross” complained Peggy, wrinkling her nose in disgust.

“With all that wax I can open a shop of candles and never run out of material”

“Human wax, we’re talking about?” asked Alfred.

“Huh, I hope so. Last thing I need to know is that it was his dog’s”

Eliza came back then, with a keyboard in her hands. She put it on the table, in front of Alfred, who looked at her with a knowing smile. She blinked with complicity at him and sat down next to her husband again.

“Okay, Mr. Adams, is that all?” asked Alfred.

“Yep”

“Alright. Then, I guess you want to present a complaint? An official one, I mean?”

“Official?” asked Adams, lost.

“Yes, you’ve already told one of us your version, and now we can write a more complete complaint. If you want; if you don’t, we can use the one you…”

“No, no, let’s do that” interrupted Adams.

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely” he assured.

“Alright, in that case, I’ll send all I’ve written from what you’ve told me?”

“Yep”

“Okay. For doing that, you have to give me permission to access the system, Mr. Adams”

“I do, I do”

“Good” Alfred pressed random letters on the keyboard Eliza had brought him. “For accessing the system, please, press number 5”
There was a brief pause, and then they heard the sound ‘beep’ from the other side of the line.

“Going into the system” proclaimed Alfred.

“Good”

Alfred let a moment pass. The group at his back had already calmed down considerably.

“Are you waiting?” asked Alfred suddenly.

“Yes, yes, I’m…”

“Keep waiting, then” ordered Alfred.

“Uh, okay…”

… … …

“Are you there, sir?” asked Alfred, after another pause.

“Yes, yes”

“Keep being there, sir” he replied, with a mocking smile.

“…” Adams sighed deeply.

… … … …

“Sir?”

“Yes, yes” said Adams, impatiently.

“Are you still waiting?”

“Of course!” he answered, now rather irritated.

“Keep waiting, please”

“… You could talk to me when I don’t have to wait anymore, fuck…” muttered Adams.
Laurens began to laugh uncontrollably under his breath, then, unable to stop. Peggy, closer to him, was contaminated by this and imitated the freckled man’s behaviour. Lafayette tried to calm them down, as they now had to be in complete silence. Laurens opted for getting up and walk to a corner. Theodosia soon followed him, wanting to catch her breath.

“Mr. Adams?” said Alfred, eventually.

“Yes, I’m here and waiting” replied Adams, boringly.

“I’m back, sir”

“Finally!”

“Look, we asked for the boy’s version, sir” he explained.

“Ah, but weren’t you going to send…?”

“Yes, yes, but as I was doing it, I saw the boy’s version was there as well. Because he saw the short and first one you wrote when you left a few days ago” explained Alfred.

“What a gift for lying” commented Madison, impressed.

“Ah, well, okay”

“Do you want to hear what he told us?”

“Well, I guess the boy has the right to defend himself…”

“Okay. The boy told us he was never disrespectful towards you…” said Alfred, receiving a dry and upset laugh from the older man. “…and that you insulted him”

“That’s a lie” said Adams immediately.

“Sir…”

“A lie”

“Sir, he said…”

“A lie!” insisted Adams, almost shouting.

“Sir, please, calm down” said Alfred, serene. “Our workmate told us that you called him salad face”

“I didn’t say anything to that boy” said Adams, totally serious.

“According to him…” insisted Alfred.

“I didn’t say anything” interrupted Adams, angry. “He has a vinegar face, the bitter little asshole, but I didn’t call him anything”

“There he goes” said Thomas, knowing what was about to come.

“Ah, so you’re admitting you called him…” said Alfred.

“No, no!” interrupted Adams. “I didn’t call him anything! At much, I told him to rush a little bit
when I saw he was ignoring me outrageously"

“Well, I’m just the messenger” Alfred defended himself. “And I’ve gotta tell you that our workmate claims that you told him: ‘Give me my food immediately, you salad face’”

“No” denied Adams, stubbornly. “I asked how long the food was gonna take, but nothing near that”

“You’re saying that you didn’t insult him, then?”

“No!”

“Okay… Then…”

“Though, let me tell you something”

“Yes”

“I didn’t insult him in the plane, but I remember his face. Tell him to pray so he doesn’t cross paths with me in a near future, because I’ll punch him so hard that…”

“No, no, Mr. Adams. Violence is never the solution!” interrupted Alfred.

“Well…”

“I’m here, taking care of the problem as well as I can, and…”

“Yes, you’re nice. But your workmate is… Is…” Adams struggled to find the right word.

“Okay, it’s alright. We can solve this” said Alfred, supportive.

“Yes. But your workmate is a liar” declared Adams.

“Well, please, trust us and the system. We are going to put a happy ending to this story” promised Alfred.

“If he got fired, that would be awesome”

“There’s his evil vein” commented Thomas, gaining a knowing look from Angelica and a scared one from Eliza.

“Trust me, Mr. Adams” insisted Alfred. “I’m here to help you”

“I hope so” warned the man.

“Now, we’re going to send your version”

“Good”

“Do you give me permission to…?”

“I do, I do” hurried Adams.

“Alright. Good. Then, please, press number 7”

Adams made a noise of complaint and then the ‘beep’ sounded. Alfred smiled mischievously.
“Wrong key” he informed.

“… Wrong key?” repeated Adams, confused. The ‘beep’ sounded again.

“Wrong key” insisted Alfred.

“Wrong key how” inquired Adams, getting upset again. Another ‘beep’ sounded.

“Wrong key” said Alfred, nonchalantly.

“Wrong key HOW” hollered Adams, frustrated. “Hello?!”

“Sir?”

“Mister, this thing is broken”

“Sir, please, press seven”

“Are you kidding me, mister?! I’ve pressed seven a thousand times already!” complained Adams.

“Press it again, please?” pleaded Alfred. He waited until the ‘beep’ sounded and then shook his head. “That’s the sound of a three, sir…”

“What three?!” exploded Adams.

“Please, press seven so I can get into the system” Alfred asked for one more time.

“I’ve been pressing seven! Now you say it’s three, but it’s seven! They’re not even close to each other!”

Adams began to gasp and cough a bit, his hoarse voice making the group and Alf himself laugh under their breaths uncontrollably.

“Sir…”

“What more numbers do you possibly want!!” spat Adams. “Seven is seven! Seven!” he shouted, pressing the key again.

“Getting into the system” informed Alfred.

“Thank fucking goodness” sighed Adams.

Alfred let time pass, this time for the sake of calming himself before talking again. Adams coughed and cursed a few times. None of them understood him, but it was enough to make the contained laughter to be reborn. Even Aaron was starting to match his wife’s red face. Theodosia and Laurens were looking out the balcony, trying to focus their attention on anything else to calm themselves. Alexander and Eliza were already hunched over themselves, as Angelica pressed her face against her brother-in-law’s shoulder; the hand that was holding her phone shaking slightly.
Martha Washington was having her own internal fight and decided to sit up behind the couch to not look at anyone and spoil the prank with a loud and clear laugh.

“Mr. John Adams?” said Alfred, eventually.

“Yeah, I’m here” responded Adams, automatically.

“We’re accessing to your profile” informed Alfred.

“Good…”

“Please, wait. This could take a couple of minutes”

“Odd” commented Adams, sarcastically.

Thomas and James were already looking down, Peggy by their side with her face buried in her knees and shaking as she giggled quietly. Maria went to bury her own face against Eliza’s neck, but that only made the two women to have a less controlled fit of laughter. The younger girl started to cough, and James passed him a cushion to drown the sound.

Alfred began to shake in his spot as he smiled. He opened his mouth to talk, but closed it immediately when he heard Adams sighing tiredly at the other side. He breathed in and out a few times, and then kept going.

“Buying tickets to the Fiji Islands” informed Alfred, managing to contain his laughter until the end of the sentence.

“… What do you mean ‘buying tickets’?” asked Adams, after a brief moment of shock.

“To confirm, press 1. To cancel, press 2” he explained.

“Cancel. No” said Adams immediately, as he pressed some key twice.

“He’s nervous” commented Aaron, feeling a bit bad for him.

“Buying tickets” informed Alfred, monotonous.

“No, no, no” said Adams, angrily. “Cancel that. Listen, cancel that!” he ordered, raising his hoarse voice. “Cancel it NOW!”

“Tickets bought successfully” declared Alfred.

“No, no, I pressed two!” complained Adams, horrified. “No! Hold on! Wait! Wa…!”

“Hello, Mr. Adams” said Alfred, as if nothing had happened. “Could you solve the problem?”

“No! The machine bought me tickets!” explained Adams, anxiously.

“Hm, the machine can’t do that, sir…”
“Of course it can, it did to me!” complained Adams.

“The machine is a machine. It can’t do anything on its own. You must’ve pressed something wrong” said Alfred, calmly.

“No! I pressed the numbers it told me to and yet…!”

“Sir, no…” denied Alfred, with indifference.

“Well, whatever. Undo that” he ordered.

Alfred blinked confusedly at the phone. “I can’t do that, sir. The tickets are bought”

“No” said Adams, sternly. “Undo that shit. I don’t want them”

“I can’t undo that action, Mr. Adams”

“What do you mean you can’t?!” yelled the older man, startling Alf and the rest a bit.

“There, there” said Angelica, enjoying the scene.

“Push him, push him” said Alexander, giggling along with his wife.

“Sir…” said Alfred, after a nod to his friends. “Sir, I can’t, sir”

“You…”

“You have bought some tickets…”

“No, I have not!”

“And, as you’re our client, the price will show up on your…”

“If I see the price on my bank account…” warned Adams, darkly. “If I see the fucking price on my account… Bf. I’ll go to your office and I’ll burn it down” he threatened.

“One of yours, Betsey” said Peggy.

“Listen” continued Adams, with that menacing tone of voice. “Cancel that right now”

“Hm… I don’t know if I can” said Alfred, pretending to be unsure. “But I can try”

“Yes, do it”

“Do you want me to go into the system again?” asked Alfred.

“Yes” spat Adams.

“Alright. Please… Be careful with what you press this time!” warned Alfred.

“… Be careful? Be careful with WHAT?” exploded Adams once again, making Alf to contain his shocked laugh. “It’s the system the one that’s wrong!”

“I was just saying, sir” said Alfred, innocently. “Please, press the keys 5, 8 and 13”

“Fucking keys” complained Adams. “Let’s see… Uh… 5… 8… … … … I guess there’s no 13… There’s no thirteeeeeeen!” he complained, in an enraged yell.
“Gosh, he’s losing it” said James.

“This is more surrealist than Alexander’s prank” commented Peggy, crying from contained giggles.

“Please, let me put this on YouTube, I beg you” muttered Angelica to Lafayette.

“Non, non…” insisted the Frenchman, though he was unable to control the shake of his voice.

“Where’s thirteen?” kept complaining Adams, his voice turning hoarser.

Alfred lost it as well, hunching over himself, a hand on his stomach and with a mute laugh. That just made the group of people behind him to lose control as well.

“I can’t, I can’t” declared Hercules, getting up. “Bathroom?” he asked to the hosts.

Eliza made a weak gesture with the hand. “Some door down the hall, I don’t know” she said, between giggles.

“Hello??” said Adams, getting angrier and angrier. “Hello!” he shouted against the mic. “Fucking hell…”

Alfred tried to respond a few times, but couldn’t manage to calm his breathing enough. Thomas and Aaron were the last ones to crumble, and also began to laugh discreetly under their breaths.

“One, three, Mr. Adams” Alfred finally managed to say. “One, three” His voice broke a bit at the end.

“Say it like that, fuck!” complained Adams, pressing the two numbers. “Waking me up for this…” he muttered.

“What a show of a man” commented James.

“Welcome again, Mr. Adams” talked Alfred, with a calm tone of voice. “If you want to buy more tickets, press 1. If you want to cancel some tickets, press 2”

“Two. To hell” talked Adams, pressing the key.

“Buying more tickets” informed Alf.

“… Eh?”

“Please, wait”

“No, Cancel”

Adams began to press some key repeatedly. Alfred looked at the phone, perplexed, while the
rest exchanged glares of shock.

“He’s gonna break the phone…” commented James.

“Wouldn’t be the first time” said Thomas.

“I need to go to a meeting when he’s there” said Eliza. Looking at her sister, she added. “Angel, let me know when that happens. I wanna see Alex and Adams in the same room”

Alexander looked nastily at her. “What have I done to deserve this from you?”

“Drama king…” said Eliza, with affection.

“Tickets bought successfully” declared Alfred.

“WHAT TICKETS. NO” shouted Adams, still pressing the key. “Cancel, cancel!”

“Mr. Adams…” tried to say Alfred.

“Cancel, cancel!” kept saying Adams, stubbornly, as he pressed number two incessantly.

“My God” whispered Martha Washington, with a tiny voice that made the rest to struggle more to not laugh out loud.

Hercules came back just then, and when he heard Adams repeating ‘cancel’ as a mantra and the sound of the keys being pressed, he turned on his heels and marched down the hall again. Lafayette saw this and giggled against a cushion.

“Tell him to stop or he’ll break the phone” advised Thomas.

“Mr. Adams” Alfred tried again.

“Cancel!” insisted Adams.

“Mr. Adams!”

“What? You…”

“How did it go?” asked Alfred. “Did you resolve…?”

“Sir, please, do the cancelation yourself, because this system is fucking crazy!” complained Adams.

“Again, Mr. Adams?” asked Alfred, boringly.

“Yes!”

“I told you to be careful with the keys”

And that was enough to make something inside Adams’ brain to click.
“WHAT CAREFUL, GOD DAMNIT!” he shouted, at the top of his lungs. “I PRESSED THE FUCKING KEYS THAT STUPID MACHINE OF HELL TOLD ME TO!”

“Mr. Adams, don’t raise your voice and don’t swear, please” said Alfred, totally calm.

“I’LL TALK ANY FUCKING WAY I WANT!” argued Adams, his voice cracking from the hoarseness. “FIX THIS MESS NOW!”

“Sir…”

“FIX THIS FUCKING MESS NOW!” he ordered.

“Sir”

“What”

“I hope you enjoy your stay at the Fiji Islands” said Alfred, with a mocking smile on his face.

“Oh, gosh” said Thomas, smiling nervously at the young man.

“DON’T ‘FIFJY ISLANDS’ ME, SIR!”

“He can’t talk” commented Theodosia, with trembling voice and making Laurens to kneel on the floor, unable to control his laughter.

“I have to show you the caption” was the only thing Laurens managed to say.

“Sir, the Fiji Islands are very pretty. I hope you enjoy them” wished Alfred, unable to stop the little laugh at the end.

That ignited even more the fire. “THE FIFJY… FIFTY PUNCHES IN THE GUT IS WHAT I’M GONNA GIVE YOU, YOU ASSHOLE!”

Hercules came back running, the screaming able to be heard from where he was. He looked a bit scared at Alfred, who was looking at the phone, surprised. He looked at Eliza, who shrugged, as lost as him.

“CANCEL THAT SHIT NOW!” ordered Adams.

“Look, sir, if you can’t press four keys is your problem!” spat Alfred, raising his voice considerably as well.

Adams inspired through his nostrils noisily. “Look, you fucking…”

“The system works just fine!” said Alfred, offended. “If you’re unable to follow its instructions, that’s not this company’s problem!”

“You’re making maaad” warned Adams, darkly. “You’re making me maaaaad, and you won’t like me when I’m maaad”
“The system works fine” repeated Alfred, seriously. “You have bought some tickets, and now you must…”

“I HAVE NOT BOUGHT ANY TICKETS!”

“You have, because it’s written in here, I’m reading it, Mr. Adams!” screamed Alfred. “Don’t be a sea urchin”

“There he goes with the zoo” commented Alexander, between giggles.

“WHAT ARE YOU SAYING ABOUT SEA URCHINS, YOU CAPER FACE?!”

“Oh, jeez” muttered James, also getting up and walking out the room, coughing a bit from laughter.

“YOU DON’T KNOW WHO YOU’RE TALKING TO, RIGHT?!”

“I’m talking to a man that lost his vocal chord at Penguin’s birthday party” answered Alfred, right away.

“I lost it at the birthday party of a friend, got a problem with that?”

“A man who insulted our workmate!” kept accusing Alfred.

“I did not…”

“And we love him very, very much! This offense will not go unpunished!” declared Alfred, raising his fist in the air though Adams couldn’t see him.

“I wanna see you try” challenged Adams. “What’s your name?”

“I’ll make sure you pay for insulting my workmate and for trying to get him fired!”

“Whatever the fuck you say! I asked what’s your name?!” Adams demanded to know.

“My name’s Shawn” replied Alfred

“Well, Shawn…”

“Shaw Goku” he clarified, making Maria to kneel on the floor, having a fit of mute laughter.

Adams clicked his tongue in annoyance. “What are you? The funniest in the group?” he asked, with mockery.

“Sorta, yes”

“Well, maybe I take all the funny from you with the hundred of blows I’m gonna give you”

“Do you think I’m scared of you, mister?” asked Alfred, with a disgusted face. “With that ‘The Godfather’-like voice you have?”

“Whatever you say, you’re going to cancel me those tickets as my name’s John Adam!” he swore.

“And I’m going to go to the office and… Bbbrrffft!”

“Look, Mr. Adams, don’t make me madder than I am” warned Alfred.

“That’s what I should tell you” spat Adams, in a deep voice. “I’m gonna... Gonna... I don’t know what I’m gonna do, but I’m, I’m... I’m…”
“It’s a pity I wasn’t the one serving you the food that day” commented Alfred, casually. “I would’ve thrown the tray directly to your nose”

“And I would’ve… I would’ve…” Adams inspired, growling like a rabid dog under his breath. “I’ll pass over the skulls of your dead ones with the drinks trolley” he swore, in a hoarse, dark and low voice.

“Sir, if you’re so brave, come to the office and here…” suggested Alfred, defiantly.

“You’re making my blood boil so much…” complained Adams, in the same terrifying tone. Everyone looked at the phone with scared expressions at how he sounded.

“You’re going to eat those tickets with French fries, pal” Alfred rubbed in his face.

“I’m gonna eat your bile and your life with French fries, that’s what I’m going to eat with French Fries”

“Gosh, he’s insane” said Maria, giggling nervously.

“I swear to God… Look, don’t make me angry, because I’ll end up being the one going to you” warned Alfred.

“Come, cooome” encouraged Adams, his hoarse voice turning darker. “Come, I’m going to eat your liiiife”

“Lol…” said Lafayette, sharing a nervous glare with Thomas.

“Don’t threaten me, sir” advised Alfred. “I only need a click to delete your complaint”

“Listen…”

“All it takes is that. A click”

“Listen, you can delete my complaint, but I delete lives” declared Adams.

“We’ve got a security guard in here…”

“I want you to come over here” repeated Adams.

“He’s so lazy that he can’t even go to the office though he’s insanely angry” commented Alexander.

“You want me…?” repeated Alfred, perplexed. “Fucking hell… Wait there, I’ll call our guard and we’ll be there in a bit. Bri, come over here!” he pretended to call.

“Nooo, nooo, don’t call Bri, nooooo” said Adams in a low and guttural tone. “Come you all alone, brave guy”

“What’s going on…?” asked Hercules, who was listening to the whole thing with James at the doorframe.

“Come!” ordered Adams, in a louder tone. “Come here, so I can tell you in your face how much I’m going to damn your whole fucking family tree, you fucking son of a bitch!!”

Martha stuck half of her face out the couch she had been sat behind of. “Someone calms him down, he’s gonna have a stroke”
“Mr. Adams” said Alfred, now with a normal tone of voice.

“Cooome”

“Mr. Adams, please, wait”

“Cooooome, and tell vinegar face to come as weeeell”

“Mr. Adams, hold a minute, you’re on drugs” said Alfred, laughing a bit at the end at how ridiculous all this had started to be.

“Nooooo” shouted Adams, with the same dark tone of voice. “I don’t fucking care what you’ve gotta tell me! I’ve heard enough!”

“That’s the voice of a demon” commented Theodosia, afraid.

“He is” nodded Thomas, looking at her seriously. “That man is a demon when angry”

“Sweet Lord…” muttered James.

“Gosh, he’s like a hybrid between Angel and Alex when they’re angry” said Eliza, looking at Madison and Hercules, who nodded in agreement.

“Mr. Adams” Alfred tried once again.

“You’ve made lose my time and my hours of sleep! Now come here, because you’ve won a prize to the biggest son of a bitch of the universe!” Adams screamed.

“Tell him it’s a joke” advised Thomas.

“He doesn’t listen” Alfred defended himself.

“What a chaos” commented Alex, under his breath.

“YOU DON’T KNOW WHO YOU’VE PISSED OFF TODAY, LAD!”

“Mr. Adams, please, listen to me” begged Alfred.

“NOOOO, I DON’T CARE ABOUT WHATEVER SHIT YOU WANNA TALK TO ME ABOUT NOW!” he shouted through the phone, with rage. “I’M FUCKING CRAZY, YOU ASSHOLE! YOU MADE THE WORST MISTAKE OF YOUR LIFE BY CALLING ME TODAY, AFTER ONLY NINE HOURS OF SLEEP!”

“Mr. Adams…” said Alfred, laughing a bit.

“COME, SO I CAN THANK YOU WITH A SLAP IN EACH CHEEK. COME. OR I’LL LOOK FOR YOU! I KNOW HOW TO FIND YOU, I’M TRACKING YOU DOWN, MISTER’

“But if he doesn’t know how to use Google Maps” commented Laurens, laughing.

“Mr. Adams…”

“I’M GOING TO RUIN YOU AND YOUR FUCKING COMPANY. BE…!”

“What’s all this shouting?” a female voice asked.

“Nothing, honey, go back to watch TV” said Adams, with a normal voice.
“That man is bipolar” laughed Hercules.

“John, I was hearing you from downstairs. What’s going on?” inquired Abigail.

“Nothing, I…”

“Give me the phone!” she ordered.

Thomas got up to walk to Alfred, who was listening to the struggle in amazement. Suddenly, they heard a slap and Adams hissing. Alexander and Laurens bent over and laughed under their breaths uncontrollably.

“Who is it?” asked Abigail, clearly annoyed. “What’s going on?”

“It’s a prank, Abi” explained Thomas, taking the phone for a moment.

“A prank?” she repeated, a bit surprised.

“What prank?” howled Adams. He might’ve taken the phone away from his wife, because his voice was clearer now. “What prank?”

“We’re all here, Adams!” explained Martha.

“It was all a joke, man, you need to learn how to chill!” added Peggy.

“… You fucking…”

“Well, now we know how he wins some cases” joked Alexander, laughing with Laurens.

“Who was I talking to? Who was...?” Adams wanted to know.

“A friend of mine” Laurens replied.

“You don’t know him” added Hercules.

“Luckily for him” commented James.

“You bunch of assholes…” cursed Adams under his breath.

Then, they heard a thump that startled them.

“John, are you crazy?!” screamed Abigail.

“To hell! Fucking workmates, damn you to hell!” he shouted, in the distance.

“This man has no sense of humour or human decency, Jesus” complained Abigail. “Hello?” she said, sounding clearer now.

“What happened?” asked Theodosia.
“Nothing, this man threw the phone out of the room”

BANG.

“And that???” asked Eliza.

“He slammed the door shut” she explained.

“I told them not to go too over the limit, but…” tried to excuse Thomas.

“Don’t worry, darling. It’s him, he’s an idiot” said Abigail, boringly. “But let me tell you something... I wanna be there next time”

“If there’s a next time, we’ll remember you” promised Lafayette.

“Good” she said.

“I’ve recorded it!” said Angelica. “Do you want me to send it to you?”

“Of course. And to punish him for his childish behaviour, I’ll put it on YouTube” decided Abagail.

Lafayette turned to a smiling Angelica. “You’re satisfied now, I guess”

“Like I’ll never be” she replied.

“This went down quickly” commented Eliza. “Angel, remember to inform me when Adams go on a meeting day. Now, I don’t want to miss that”

“Yep, promised” she gave her a thumb up, while scrolling through her contacts.

A month and a half passed. Eliza talked about the issue with Alex, thinking maybe her sister or even he had forgotten. Alexander surprised her when he explained that Adams hadn’t come to work in all that time, claiming to be ill from different things each week.

“I feel less bad for pranking him” commented Eliza.

“You’re feeling well, my dear Betsey” said Alexander, nodding with a smile.

Chapter End Notes

Sursum corda!
George Washington's infamous fishing trip finally makes an appearance in this AU. Augustine comes to stay, and Aaron is going to have trouble by this. Angst, basically.

Chapter Notes

PLEASE READ:

This time, my way of separating the episode will be different.

Usually, I write the episode, divide it by two (or three) parts, and post it.

This will not be the case here.

When I wrote "Of frogs and scorpions" I wrote four or three flashbacks that helped seeing why Thomas made the mistake he made. In the beginning, this was going to be the same, but I realised I wasn't telling single flashbacks, as it happened with Jefferson; I was telling a story with flashbacks. For the first time, the flashbacks are not a bit of light to understand why the character is acting the way is doing it, it's doing that along with telling a whole story. In fact, I realised, the flashbacks had stolen the spotlight of the main plot of this episode: the fishing trip George Washington decided to do with Alex and Thomas.

The flashbacks are sections of Alexander's past. His childhood at Nevis; he coming to America; he meeting the characters that are his friends and family; he practising law. The fishing trip was push to the second place these flashbacks were supposed to occupy. This is reason one why I decided to take the separation mode according to Alexander's background instead of by dividing the pages as much equally as I could. That's why the chapters will not only be titled "The fishing trip (Part whatever)", but also what the flashback is telling us about.

Reason two: I'm taking my time, more than my inner turtle writer usually does, to write these flashbacks. I'm trying not to paraphrase Ron Chernow's book, but taking into account the work he made to make this AU story also faithful to the true events but explaining why the Alexander I'm writing for this AU is the way he is as well.

I'm not a psychologist (though I'm very interested in that field), but I'm a perfectionist, and I'm trying to do my best to write Alexander's complexity.

Reason three: angst. Damn, that label of 'humor' in this fanfic is starting to be more a lie than anything else by each chapter I write XD. I don't want to overwhelm anybody by it. Really, I read the first 40 pages of Chernow's biography and I had to stop because I felt so powerless reading so many bad things happening to two innocent and young children. I'm taking my time to read (in a foreign language, what did this musical did to me? XD), comprehend, put in Alex's shoes, 'modernize' his backgrounds for the sake of
the AU and write the characters as well as I can, as I try to imagine how each one should react to certain events; to put the past sections where they should be, to write hints in the present sections that match the past I just wrote about.

Reason four: My English is not the best. I feel this chapter one of the most difficult, and my messy English along with my messy explanations are not a good mix, but I'll try.

Reason five: As difficult as this part of this AU is, I'm enjoying myself so much writing it, understanding not only musical Alex but historical Alexander as well. I'm relishing writing and I hope to give you the same sensation by reading it.

Reason six: I feel this episode more of a 'To be continued' annoying episode. That's why, after a lot of thought, I decided to be posting this episode as each past section told its part of the story. Here, we've got a bit of Alex's childhood, until before the hurricane. When the hurricane part is finished, I'd post that. And so on.

And I'll shut up now, because I'm starting to ramble as much as Alexander. Hope you enjoy reading this episode and I'm able to make you feel something by my poor English rhetoric.

TRIGGER WARNING: Mention of blood, dead, suicide, intolerance.
WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Thank you for the views and comments, it means a lot!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Let us pause briefly to tally the grim catalogue of disasters that had befallen these two boys between 1765 and 1769: their father had vanished, their mother had died, their cousin and supposed protector had committed bloody suicide, and their aunt, uncle, and grandmother had all died. James, sixteen, and Alexander, fourteen, were now left alone, largely friendless and penniless” — Ron Chernow in ‘Alexander Hamilton’.

Alexander was never liked by the other children. It was not an assumption or a thought product of his insecurities. It was a fact. As true as the sun rises in the East or that water boils at 100 degrees. Alexander couldn’t blame them, though. Children just copy the way adults act and the words they say in their presence. If you were born in a house full of two-faced adults, the result would be kids just as two-faced. And Alexander wouldn’t mind that much if he didn’t have to stand those kids while in school or when he was trying to read or write outside the shop his mother worked at.

His brother was out of the equation that afternoon. Something about an exam he had to study for. Bullshit. Alexander could almost hear his snores and feel his procrastinating attitude all
the way from there. But that day he decided to say nothing. It wasn’t like Rachel didn’t suspect the same, anyways. His mother was a pillar to support, a hand to hold and a shoulder to cry on (if Alexander were that kind of child to cry at all), but, above all that, she was the only soul in that island who seemed to understand his curious and free nature, his internal fire and his will to do something of value for the world and the people who lived in it.

Alexander wouldn’t understand why until later in his life. He wouldn’t be able to name that sad yet bright spark in his mother’s eyes whenever he started to ramble about all the things he wanted to achieve, all his dreams and plans he was preparing for his future. He would only know what that feeling his mother’s eyes wore was called when he became older. Longing. For something she could not have or once had and had lost, Alexander wouldn’t know very clear. But there was also hope, there was also shared enthusiasm when he talked non-stop for hours and, more especially, there was understanding. And Alexander needed that. He’d never admit it, but it was his weakness.

He couldn’t work, he couldn’t write, he couldn’t talk, he couldn’t dream, he couldn’t imagine, he couldn’t hope without his mother being his pillar, his source of inspiration. He’d grown used to the absence of his father (he wasn’t around very often before he left them for good, anyways) and he was equally accustomed to his brother’s habit of disappearing when he was needed the most (of all the traits their parents had, why did James have to inherit that one?), but his mother had been there since he was born. She’d been there even before he had any memories or conscience. She was the one who brought him into the world and the one who convinced him he could change it for the better.

And there were times when Rachel and Alexander would fight as well. If James had inherited their father’s speciality of disappearing when people needed them the most, Alexander took after their mother’s fierce nature. Rachel could change from angel to demon in record speed; she could give you the most encouraging words to raise you back to your feet or the most demolishing ones to bring you down. Two faces, the same person, but all depending on how you treated her and, especially, her children.

Those times, when mother and son would disrupt the usual quietness of their neighbourhood, were the worst. Because Alexander had no filter and he could be very harmful if he wanted to. It wasn’t enough that his mother was forgiving when she saw regret. She could say she forgave him, but Alexander would not. There would be times when he repeated the words spoken by him over and over again, until his stomach would hurt, and his throat closed, and he wanted to do nothing more than vomit, feeling repulsed by himself. Those nights he would climb to his mother’s bed and sleep with her, hugging her and refusing to give her any explanation of what was wrong.

Alexander suspected Rachel knew. She had a very strong sixth sense. A mother knows everything and all that she used to say.
The case was not everybody was as fan of his mother as he was. And that could be okay. Alexander would only think you were wrong and would debate you until you gave up, admitting defeat, but it was fine, really...

Well, no, it was not. And there were not enough won debates and won fights about the matter to make Alexander feel truly victorious. He hated when people whispered about his mother. He hated when he heard the words. He hated when he saw the mocking smiles. He hated when he saw those hateful and disgusted looks. He hated them because he didn’t understand them, because they were based on false accusations and prejudice.

He was raised hearing people calling Rachel numerous thing. He was raised hearing all theories those idiots were able to make up with the remaining neuron they had left. Alexander had heard it all. From the ones who said Rachel was an egotistical woman who abandoned her son to the ones that said she had to start anew there because back at her old home she had gained a bad reputation for being an unfaithful wife. Alexander heard the rumours that claimed she had worked as a prostitute (and Alexander later found out what that was, on his own, he didn’t want to trigger any emotions in his mother by saying the word) and the ones that claimed she still practised. That last one provoked every woman in town to look at Rachel with disdain and rage.

“She can’t keep any men around her, so she has to steal other people’s” some whispered.

“James did the right thing by leaving her; only God knows how much he’ll have endured!” others said.

“Those poor children, what an education” a fake worried mother would comment.

“Someone should do something about it” the friend would response, gaining a nod of agreement.

Alexander, for once, didn’t say anything about it. One: because they were adults, and they were superior to him, and, despite popular opinion, he knew his limitations. If he were an adult, he’d snap at them all without second thought, but for the moment, Alexander would have to wait. Two: because if he did, his mother would know and that would disappoint her. And there was no bigger fear Alexander had than disappointing the woman he loved the most.

So, it was in these occasions when he’d bite his tongue and go somewhere else to write countless pages of all the responses he would’ve given. It was therapeutic. Or so he wanted to think.

Alexander never understood why his mother never said anything. He knew she knew. Everyone knew she knew. Rachel wasn’t noisy by any means, by her quiet demeanour played to her advantage when it came to realise things the common eye didn’t catch. And yet, she never opened her mouth to prove them wrong. Worse than that, she smiled at them. She smiled at the teachers when she went to pick Alex and his brother up from school; she smiled at the mothers while in the park; she smiled at the people who would go to the shop she worked in to buy some flowers and
she’d help them with a kindness they didn’t deserve.

It made Alexander’s blood boil.

One day, he couldn’t take it anymore and asked. And, seriously, with Alexander’s motormouth and never ending talking, it was a miracle he had lasted that long without formulating the question as to why she never did anything about it.

“Because I like to win” was the simple response Rachel gave.

Alexander blinked once. Twice. A third time. A soft breeze made its way through the living room window, moving Rachel’s raven hair. She had it tied in a ponytail. Alexander loved it when she tied it up; it was easier to see her bright and intelligent brown eyes, which were smiling though her lips were busy taking a sip of her nightly tea.

“What?” asked Alexander, perplexed.

Rachel laughed, as if anticipating his surprise. “I like to win” she repeated, slowly.

“I heard you” replied Alex, frowning. “But I don’t understand”

Rachel smiled softly at him and put the cup down, gently. “You pay too much attention to my smile and behaviour” she stated. “But have you taken the time to look at their expressions?”

Alexander thought for a moment. Eventually, he shook his head, feeling more lost than before he asked. And that was another thing he liked about his mother: she always found the way to surprise him, to make him rethink things and watch them in a new perspective.

Rachel’s smile grew fonder and gentler at her son’s reaction.

“Don’t you see how they leave, fuming mad? Don’t you see the frown in their faces whenever I smiled at them, whish them to have a good day? Don’t you see how enraged they become when I’m kind to them, when I offer them my altruistic help?” she began to ask, her smile turning mischievous. “There are going to be people who will love you. Those you have to keep close, those you have to take care of and love as unconditionally as they love you. But then, there are going to be people who will hate you. Sometimes with reasons, sometimes for the sake of it. Maybe they see something in you they want to have, maybe they think you are the person they want to be but, for some reason, can’t. Those will try to break you”
Alexander frowned. His mother’s tone turned a bit darker, dryer and bitter. Three things that weren’t traits of her. At all. Rachel raised her eyes – she’d been looking at the half full cup during her whole speech – to look at him. Her eyes were shining. With happiness, with excitement, with sadness, with rage and with other emotions Alexander couldn’t name (like now), but they were always shining. Rachel was always feeling and the only way to know what she was feeling was by looking into her eyes, not at the mask she put on to fool the world. The world has no right to my heart, he’d heard her say.

Alexander was taken back to the present when Rachel’s hand was upon his. A soft and reassuring smile made its way onto her face.

“Alex, those are the most fool” she promised, solemnly.

“People trying to break you?” he asked, for an instance losing track of their conversation.

Rachel nodded. “People can’t be broken. But they would try. They would try to hurt you. But they won’t if you don’t let them” She squeezed his hand. “Promise me, mon cher, that you’d be true to your heart, no matter how hard the world tries to make you change your mind”

Alexander nodded and shrugged almost at the same time. “I’m not one to back down regarding my opinions”

Rachel laughed. “I know that, mon cher” She got up and sat next to him, to envelop him in a hug. “But I want you to always remember that you know yourself better than anyone else… I know who I am. And I will not give anyone else the power to define me. That’s why I smile at them and treat them with kindness” she explained, receiving a small ‘hm’ from Alexander. She began to caress his hair. “For each day I spend on being true to myself and they on trying to bring me down, I win”

Alexander thought back on a sentence he heard the other day from one of his teachers, one of the only ones who could tolerate him and vice versa. ‘Kill them with kindness’. Was she referring to that? He didn’t find the sense into it. Why smiling when you could defend yourself, why let someone think wrongly of you and spread those erroneous thoughts? Alexander didn’t think he’d ever be able to do such a thing. If you didn’t like him, that was your problem; but Alex would never let you spread lies about himself or someone close to him. That was another level.

But he never got the chance to speak his mind, as a series of crashes were heard from the kitchen. Rachel sighed, kissed his head and got up.

“That brother of yours, I can’t leave him alone for more than one minute” she commented, walking to the source of the noise.

He giggled at how true that statement was. He would debate about this whole issue later or tomorrow. He’d make time for it.
Alexander remembered that thought, he remembered the conversation and stopped reading abruptly. True. He still had to understand better his mother’s position or make her see reason in his. He looked up. The florist was in front of the bench he was told to wait on, until his mother was finished for the day and they could go home. Alexander had helped his mother on a few orders when the shop was full of clients, but now that it was about to close, she let him to his books and writings. She always had some book or paper and pen he could use, well aware of how Alexander was unable to wait patiently with nothing to busy his mind with.

Rachel smiled at the group of parents she was helping, nodding as they explained what kind of flowers they wanted. Alexander looked at her. Though he didn’t understand her attitude before those persons, he could still admire how strong she was for smiling at them after all they said about her.

“Hey, there’s the bastard”

Why did the parents of the stupidest kids in his class have to come there today? And with their annoying children, to make matters worse? Alexander rolled his eyes and stuck his nose in the book he was reading. He wasn’t going to make a fuss in front of his tired mother. She’d been very weak lately and with a very annoying cough, and the last thing she needed was to be embarrassed by him few minutes prior to the end of her work day.

“Yeah, it’s him. What’s he doing?”

It’s called ‘reading’, you should try it sometime, Alexander thought, biting his tongue, literally.

“Look at him, always studying or writing something”

“He’s always doing homework, even if it’s not due to next month”

“He’s such a nerd”

Did they really think he couldn’t hear them? They were like… twelve steps away from each other… Worse, why weren’t their parents saying anything? Ah, yes, they’d learnt that behaviour from them. Ideal.

“He thinks to be superior to everyone” the kid that saw him first spat darkly.
I don’t think so, I know so… Especially to people that talk about someone next to that said someone, thinking they can’t be heard, thought Alexander, arching an eyebrow involuntarily.

“Yes, someone should really knock him off his high donkey”

It’s high horse, you uncultured brat. Gosh, Alexander was feeling his neurons dying slowly thanks to those idiots. Why was it taking so long to give those disrespectful adults their flowers? Alex looked up discreetly when he heard one of the kids snorting.

“Let’s make him cry” the leader of the trio suddenly proposed, with an evilness one wouldn’t imagine an eleven-year-old would have. “Let’s go to him to tell him about Santa”

“Wouldn’t he know already?”

“No, he spends the recess in the library”

“Freak…”

Oh, so that was why all children were sad after recess. What an ass… he thought, looking at the three kids, now walking in his direction. True, he already knew about how fake Santa Claus was, but he didn’t go around the school breaking the illusion of other kids who still believed in that. Alexander could only hope that kid didn’t tell the youngest children back at school. And then, I’m mean for being honest… he thought, bitterly.

“Hi, Alex!” they greeted him, as if they hadn’t been talking (badmouthing) about him seconds ago.

“Hey” he replied, not even looking up to meet their glares.

“Ax, did you know that Santa Claus is, actually, our parents?” asked the child, clearly offended for his lack of attention.

Alexander always fulfilled his promises. And he always promised he’d try his best. That was not the same as promising to do an action. And trying he did. He really did. But he wasn’t to blame if their classmates were assholes.

He looked up, looked at each of them, not bothering in concealing their smirks and expecting for his reaction. They could only dream with seeing him cry.
“And did you know that your mother is a whore?” he shot back.

The kids’ jaws dropped to the floor. Alexander was able not to smile. The leader of the trio blushed with anger and pointed at him, totally enraged. Oh, this was so funny.

“That’s your mother, bastard”

Alexander did smile then. “How do you think I know about yours, then, huh?”

Checkmate.

The kid started to cry with crocodile tears as he ran back to his parents. His friends followed him, throwing glares at him over their shoulders.

Alexander looked at his mother, as she was told what happened. Rachel looked at him with a frown, and he only shrugged. Alex had tried. Hell, he even smiled while talking to that asshole! Didn’t that count? He saw the kid crying non-stop, clinging to his mother’s leg. Alex smiled mischievously.

Yes. Yes, it counted a lot.

Alexander always even the score. Always. When Washington went to him to tell him he would be absent on another Wednesday, he rapidly made up an excuse about not feeling very well and asked to use one of his accumulated free days. And, well, when Alexander Hamilton asked for one of those, you just had to give it to him. Breaks would do him good.

Though, let’s be realistic, he’d spend all that free day working at home. But a day was a day, and it wasn’t the same to work in a peaceful house on his own than in that day care. Besides, Eliza was there to make sure he didn’t overwork himself and eat as a human being.

So, Washington accepted and let Angelica alone before the weekly meeting. She spent the day walking by Alexander’s office to throw hateful glares in his direction. Alex just smiled at her with superiority.
“One and no more, thank you” he had told her at some point. “Now, it’s your turn, my dear”

Angelica had only hissed in response as a cat you forced to take a bath.

“Alexander, come on, lunchbreak!” Eliza said, coming in his workroom with a dish of food.

“Just one minute” he said, his eyes glued to the computer screen.

Eliza closed it. “Lunchbreak” she repeated, solemnly. When she saw her husband opening his mouth to retort, she went on. “I’m letting you eat in here. Be grateful”

“Okay…” he gave in in a tiny voice.

“Good” she smiled, kissing his forehead. “Bon appétit” she said, taking a seat beside him.

“Aren’t you going to eat?” he asked, arching one eyebrow.

“I’ve already eaten”

“And are you going to watch me eat?”

“That or I’ll take this laptop until you’re finished”

“Controlling…”

“Hi, kettle, I’m pot”

Eliza’s laugh and Alex’s eye-roll was abruptly interrupted when a notification made the man’s phone buzz. Eliza was quick enough to grab it before her husband could drop the spoon.

“You’re not my secretary, I can read my messages!” complained Alexander, slurping the soup, ill-mannered.

“Do not slurp” scolded Eliza, as she read.

“That’s invasion of my privacy!” kept complaining Alexander, slurping louder as a little child.

“We’re married, privacy is nothing now to you. Muahahah-… Hahahaha!” said Eliza, with an evil laugh in the end. It turned more heartfelt and sincere all of a sudden.

“What?” asked Alexander, now curious.

“Hahahaha, hahahahaha, oh, God…”

Alexander saw as Eliza hunched over herself, the phone pressed against her chest and tears
of laughter streaming down her face. Alex tapped his foot on the floor, impatient.

“What is it, woman?” he inquired again, desperate to take a look at the phone.

Eliza finally gave him his phone, unable to stop cackling. Alexander dropped the spoon to grab it with his two hands, a few drops of soup staining his shirt, but he didn’t care. He read the message, which was from Washington. Alex slapped himself mentally. He had wanted to ask him how the visit at the doctor had gone, but he’d forgotten, so stuck in his essay as he was…

He felt a bit better when he read the message his boss had sent him. It was brief and concise, as George used to talk, and it hit Alexander right in the guts. He read the words that made him tremble in his spot as Eliza kept laughing. *I’d like to invite you to a fishing trip; the entire weekend; my family cabinet; along with the company of Mr Jefferson.*

“Motherf…” he muttered, after re-reading it for the seventh time. He still couldn’t believe it.

“Epic” commented Eliza, having calmed down considerably. “Make sure to record it all, I wanna see that”

Alexander snapped at her in that instant. “It’s not funny, Eliza!”

“The heck it’s not… Bf, my tummy hurts…” she breathed in and out a few times.

“And he sent me this through text…” said Alex, under his breath. “I refuse to this!” he declared, going directly to his contacts list.

“But weren’t Jefferson and you getting along? I mean, as along as you two can”

“NO” shouted Alexander, pressing Washington’s contact and waiting impatiently.

“Oh, but you’re talking to him… Or fighting with him again…”

“NO!”

“Alex…”

“NO!”

“Alex, press the restart button, you locked” said Eliza, again giggling uncontrollably. “Gosh, this is gold”

“NO!”

“Ask him if I can go”

“NO! No one will go!”

“Ah, it was good to have monosyllable Alex while it lasted…”
“Why isn’t he answering the phone?!” exclaimed Alexander. “Pick it, god damnit, so I can…!”

“Yes?” George deep voice sounded at the other side, casual. Alexander could swear he could hear a small smile on his lips.

“Sir? Sir, I saw the text. You can’t…!” he tried to argue.

“The phone you called is turned off or out of coverage. Please, leave a message after the beep” said Washington, with an automatic tone of voice.

Alexander’s face flushed with anger. “How am I going to leave a message if the phone is off or out of coverage, sir?! … Sir?!” he looked at the phone, enraged. “He hung up!”

“I wonder why” kept commenting Eliza, with a smile on her lips. She was fast enough to jump from her seat as soon as she saw Alexander prepared to throw the phone to the floor. She grabbed it on time. “You bought it the other day” she reminded.

Alex paced, gasping from ire. “This… This…” He stopped abruptly and squinted his eyes at his wife. “This has the mark of your witch of a sister”

“Yes, totally” Eliza nodded. “I mean, she sent me a text this morning about a sweet revenge…”

“Give me my phone!” interrupted Alex, launching himself to his wife and taking his mobile away from Eliza, who dropped it immediately. “No, wait, she won’t answer… Let me borrow yours!”

Eliza obliged, crossing her arms upon her chest as she watched Alex looking for Angelica’s contact on her phone. He pressed ‘call’ and waited. It rang a few times before someone answered. Alex opened his mouth, prepared to ramble, but Angelica’s cruelly happy tone stopped him.

“Have fun on your trip, my dearest”

And she hung up as well. Eliza, once again, was fast enough to grab the two phones her husband threw, full of anger.

“Fuck! That’s why I refuse to stay at home!” he shouted.

“Hey, hey, don’t take this to your advantage” said Eliza. She followed him with the glare when he strode to the door. “Where are you going?”

“To the garage! I need my punching bag!” he screamed.

Eliza was left there. She looked at the soup with a frown and sighed, resigned.

“I’m going to put this in the microwave. This man’s gonna eat today” she promised, solemnly.
She grabbed the dish and made her way to the kitchen. Thankfully, she had put the dish down on the counter when she jumped afraid at the screamed complaints of her husband. She ran to the garage.

“Honey, what’s wrong?” she asked.

Alexander was just by the door as well, his nose pinched as he murmured curses. Eliza looked around, seeing her car well parked and the punching ball pressed against the wall, making impossible to someone to open the back door at the right side.

“Who in their fucking right mind park the car in the garage?!” asked Alexander, looking at the vehicle with hatred as it became an obstacle to his goal.

“Sorry, hun, I thought that, as you were going to spend the day here, you’d be in a good mood today” explained Eliza.

Alexander narrowed his eyes and talked between clenched teeth. “Never ever think such a thing when it comes to me”

Thomas read the e-mail once he came back from work. Now the devilishly smiles of Angelica had more sense. He read it once. Twice. Thrice… Honestly, he read it more times that he was proud of admitting. He thought maybe if he read it enough times the words would change or the e-mail would disappear.

Not such luck.

If it hadn’t been for James, who came to inform him dinner was ready, he wouldn’t have come back to the real world.

“What’s wrong now?” asked James, cocking an eyebrow at his serious behaviour.

“Washington is going on a fishing trip this weekend, to a family cabin” explained Thomas, after a shake of his head. He turned the monitor off and got up.

“Good for him” said James, shrugging.
“And he invited me”

“Nice, you surely need some rest” nodded James, waiting for him to get out the workroom to slide the wooden door. “You’ve been unbearable lately”

“Love you too” replied Thomas, sharply.

James shrugged. “It’s true”

“Anyways, Hamilton’s invited as well”

“Ah… Gosh, I knew Washington was sick of your bickering, but I didn’t know he was that desperate to get you out of the way…”

“Don’t be such a beast…”

“Think about it. A cabin in the middle of nowhere, where no one can hear you scream” elaborated James. “There are two possible aftermaths: he planning to kill you or he planning to leave you there to scream at each other till the end of times, but this time not bothering anyone”

“Number one is less painful” commented Thomas, with a slight smile.

“I’m going to bet for the second one” admitted James. “Washington wouldn’t lay a hand on his golden boy”

Thomas laughed and nodded in agreement. “True”

Thursday passed slowly. Angelica made sure to walk by her brother-in-law’s office to let him know that when Washington was talking about ‘the whole weekend’ he meant from Friday to Sunday night. Hamilton broke in half the pen he was holding, staining all his surroundings with ink. Angelica’s laugh resounded through the whole building.

Alexander and Thomas avoided each other the whole day. If one saw the other coming in his direction, he’d turn around and entertain his mind with anything until his workmate was finished, so they could go on with their lives. It was childish, but maybe necessary to refill their batteries before having to live under the same roof for three days straight.

Thomas was glad he hadn’t heard his mother’s critics in a while. Though maybe that was because lately it’d been his own voice the one beating his mind uninterruptedlly. It wasn’t as he wasn’t used to Hamilton’s infantile behaviour, Lord knew he was accustomed to that sulking attitude whenever the Caribbean lost any debate he’d gotten himself into; but all those times Thomas kept doing his life until something new arose the fire in the immigrant and yet another quarrel would occur. In a few occasions, it was Thomas the one who started them (though he’d never admit it out loud, and if he did, he’d make sure to let people know he did it because he had a good reason for it, unlike Hamilton).
But this time it was different. They had fought a few times, had exchanged the common taunts their relationship was based on, but all that was lacking any emotion. Because Hamilton was fire. It lit in his eyes, burnt in his words and followed him wherever he went. There was always some emotion in whatever Hamilton did, talked or wrote about. When he rambled, you could hear he fervently believed in what he defended; when he wrote, you could sense how loyal he was to his beliefs; when he fought you could see how passionate he was of being right and win. Hamilton lacked all that when he talked to (argued with) him now. His violet-blue eyes were two pieces of ice, reflecting Thomas’ useless attempts of igniting him; his words were sharp, short and concise (only two out of those three had ever been traits of the immigrant); his attitude left him cold and unsettled, very different from how enraged Thomas had felt since they started that feud they both had been involved into since they knew.

And Thomas didn’t know why it bothered him that much. He was used to the coldness. He was raised in a palace of ice, and that was saying something when he was from Virginia. James had once defined him as cold, hermetic and distant, an enigma difficult to resolve. Thomas had to admit James was right, much to his dislike, because that was what he always thought about his mother. Jane was frozen in the outside and in the inside. You wouldn’t be able to know what was going on in her mind not even by looking at her eyes. They were just two dark holes that would swallow you, and Thomas most of the times avoided looking at them. That action had earned him more than one snap from Jane, but it was still better than let that darkness consume him.

Actually, Thomas didn’t know if it actually had. Not only James had compared him (unintentionally) with his mother, but his daughter as well. True, Patsy usually did it to piss him off, but she did it anyways. And Thomas was sure she said it because, deep down, that’s what she thought about him. Thomas tired not to think about that, because that’d mean his biggest fear had come true: he had turned into his mother, a standoffish parent uncapable of understand his children and who wanted them more than loved them.

Thomas wasn’t an idiot; Jane had wanted him, she had cherished him and all his siblings. Not as a mother loved her baby, but as a rich person cherished and loved their fortune. They would take care of it, make sure everything was under control, show it off in front of their acquaintances. He and his siblings were that to Jane. She wanted the most perfect children a parent could ask for, the ones who knew how to act in social interactions, the ones who knew about etiquette, the ones who knew how to make friends in order to succeed and climb up on the social ladder. She didn’t want a shy, stuttered, socially awkward child as Thomas. She never wanted a child who would run away from a party to be locked up in his room, waiting for it to end and so be able to go back to his books and writings. She never wanted a child unable to interact with persons, to understand how to act towards people.

She always wanted Thomas, but the image of Thomas she’d taught him to be in front of people, not the one he was behind closed doors. Not the Thomas who could spend hours rambling about a topic he found interesting; not the Thomas who liked to be with people like James (a weird quiet man whom she only hired in order to have a good relationship with his parents) or Marisa (that woman who thought an Art School was an actual school) or even his own older sister, Jenny (that
rebel who preferred to hear her instincts instead of her worried mother’s advices, and was giving him a very bad example with that cocky attitude), instead of with stuck-ups she always forced him to interact with (because they were going to be better in the long run); not the Thomas who achieved good marks on written essays and tests but then wasn’t able to reach the C in oral projects because he was barely heard and no one could understand him with that annoying and shameful lisp; not the Thomas who had dropped out from Laws; not the Thomas whose boss had sent him to France after he ruined that important meeting and cooperation with one of the best law firms out there because of his poor oral skills (and though it’d been a miracle that he hadn’t been fired just then, it was still a very disgraceful memory); not the Thomas who hadn’t been able to save his youngest daughter, disappointing his dead wife by that.

And, to be honest, Thomas didn’t want or love that Thomas either. He liked the conceited, sharp, cold and, sometimes, cruel Thomas Jefferson his mother had taught him to be in front of people. He couldn’t be in a crowd, he couldn’t give speeches, but he could put anyone in place, he could remind everybody how they couldn’t reach his level and how they were below him. He couldn’t finish his law studies and was the secretary of a law firm in which he should’ve been working as a lawyer, had the circumstances been different, but he’d always made sure to give his two cents in important discussions.

But he stood up for himself and Martha when his mother wanted to control his life more than she already had; he had started anew with his wife and daughters; he had worked for the money he now owned; he had fought tooth and nail so Hamilton gave something in exchange for his financial plan; he had never given something out of date to Washington; he was always there, doing his work, which was more than anyone in there could say about themselves; he never allowed anyone to disrespect him as King had done; he had put King in place.

He had started the cold war Hamilton was now having with him and didn’t know how to warm it up. He didn’t understand why it bothered him so much. It wasn’t like he and Hamilton were friends. If the immigrant disappeared from his life, perfect. If Thomas could spend the rest of his days not hearing that obnoxious and loud voice, great. Or so he thought, because once he got it, he didn’t like it.

He’d tried to convince himself it was because he hated to be ignored. Fight with him, try to make his life miserable, insult him, go after him, he wouldn’t care, but never ignore him. Never. It put him on his nerves. Since he was little and his mother pretended he was invisible whenever he did something that’d upset her.

Maybe that was the reason. Hamilton always reminded him of his long-gone mother: heartless, selfish, manipulative, more focused on the social class of the people than on their personalities and always able to make the world think he was some kind of victim society had created for its bad treatment. Always wanted to act above his station, always thinking he was more than he actually was, always working for achieving more. Always wanting more, more, more, more, more. Never caring who he could trample on his way to the finish line. Seeing people around him as tools he could use to get there faster. There was a time when Thomas felt bad for Hamilton’s children
and wife. Well he knew Jane never loved any of her five children or husband, and he was sure Hamilton was the same. You can’t love anyone when you don’t know what love is, and he doubted Hamilton knew how to spell the word.

And that was why it confounded him when Hamilton’d bought him food, when he’d argued with Lucy, when he was nice to James, when he promised James his daughters were going to stay with him, when he’d rented his house (more like his foster parents’ house) to him, when he’d never bothered him once while living there, when he’d discovered the money Thomas had taken at some point and said nothing about it. It unsettled him, made him sick to his stomach just imagining what he was planning. Thomas never felt bad or regretful. Whenever guilt wanted to come to visit, he closed the door in its noses and stood his ground. He was wrong about Hamilton taking money from the company, that much he agreed on with the immigrant, but he didn’t feel bad for taking that information and keeping it for when best suited him. If he didn’t get Hamilton out of the way, Hamilton would do it with Thomas. And he wasn’t going to let him do that.

He had only given those accounts to Hamilton because his job (and James’, honestly) depended on them, on having something real to have against King (and, besides, Thomas had waited way too long to give that excuse of a man a taste of his own medicine); he never did it so Hamilton could have something against him he could use at any minute. Thomas refused to live with a wolf on his heels, less a Caribbean wolf with airs.

He wasn’t going to throw all his achievements, all his efforts to become the man he was today away for a bastard, immigrant who acted like fake royalty. Thomas wouldn’t allow it.

Maybe the fishing trip wasn’t so bad. Maybe it was a chance to have Hamilton finally with the guard down and get something to use on his advantage. Thomas began to look forward Friday all of a sudden.

Alexander drove Aaron to work that morning for a reason. Augustine was coming today to start living with his mother and stepfather once and for all. So, Eliza had offered Theodosia to go with them to share such a beautiful moment. Theodosia agreed, Aaron and Alexander followed suit. Aaron and Alexander barely shared a few words that Thursday (the immigrant thought it might have something to do with his bad mood for Angelica’s revenge), but when the work day ended, they chatted as they made their way to the parking lots and Alex drove to the airport.

Honestly, and though it sounded selfish, Alexander now was glad that he had accepted to do this; it was a way to entertain his brain with anything that wasn’t the fishing trip. He wouldn’t mind if it’d been only him and Washington, but why did his boss decide to invite Jefferson as well was
beyond his reasoning. He knew Angelica had something to do with it: not only he’d have to take a
break but he’d have to share 72 hours with Jefferson. It was cruel. He knew leaving her alone in
charge of a meeting was mean, but this was just cruel. Alexander made a mental note of even the
score as soon as possible. This revenge was not going to go unpunished.

The worst part was that he wouldn’t have minded that much if this had happened a couple of
months ago. Yes, Jefferson was the personification of all Alexander hated, but he was tolerable with
his quick wits and his good oratory. He was one of the few people Alexander could compare his
intelligence with, and that was saying something. Debating with Jefferson maintained his brain
working and alive, always making up a retort, always thinking about how to equal the insult or the
taunt that had been thrown in his direction. It was fun, as shocking as it was to admit it. Alexander
was used to not get along with people, he wasn’t popular back in Nevis, he wasn’t loved in his forest
homes (except the Knox’s), but Jefferson seemed to invite him to speak his mind (only to bring down
all his points, but let him talk, nonetheless).

That was before. Now? Now he barely wanted to have something to do with the man. He put
up with him for two reasons: one, he was his workmate, and he couldn’t convince Washington to fire
him (though the two men didn’t agree on very much, they respected each other and knew how to act
more civilly than he and Jefferson); two… Hamilton didn’t find it within himself to let a single parent
to his own devices with two children. He had spent twelve years seeing the great efforts his mother
did to give James and him and best of lives. He had to see how Mr Stevens had to fight so he could
be under his wing just for being a single dad, he had to hear how people criticised him, before his
mother died, for being raising a child all by himself. He could sense that was where Lucy was
coming from with her brother, especially taking into account that he had two girls.

Though the infuriatingly tall man reminded him more of his father, to be honest: a selfish asshole
uncapable of caring for anyone else but himself. Sometimes, Alexander had felt bad for his
daughters. It was common knowledge that Jefferson had sent Patsy and Polly away once they were
old enough, and he took them back when he couldn’t afford it anymore. Or, as Alexander saw it,
when he remembered he had two daughters to take care of and were in danger of being taken away
from him. It sounded cruel, but maybe Jefferson wanted the girls just because they were the only
ones he had left from the family he’d created. Wasn’t that what his father had done? Leave to never
return except when he heard about how well it was going for him in New York? Contacting him
only when he needed money to keep going with whatever the hell he might be doing back at
wherever he was living now? Just as his brother did?

Yes, saying he felt bad for Patsy and Polly sounded cruel, but Hamilton felt it true. You can’t
choose your parents. And he knew what he was talking about. He hadn’t chosen his biological
father, neither he chose the other foster parents he was sent to without someone asking for his
opinion first. There was the possibility Jefferson loved the girls, but for that being possible, he
needed to know what that word meant. And it wasn’t like Alexander was the best parent out there.
He was a workaholic before than a parent and a husband, though he had been trying to end that
unhealthy habit (unsuccessfully, but had tired), but he overworked himself so his family didn’t have
to go through the same he had to when he was little, so his children didn’t have to suffer hunger or
poverty as he did. He wanted to be able to afford the best education, the best clothes, the best house,
the best everything for his wife and children, and if that meant he had to spend 24 hours inside his office writing non-stop, then, so be it. It was through writing how he ended up where he was today, anyways.

But he would never think of sending his children away from him. He had joked about it when Philip became insufferable, but he never meant one word of it. His children were his children, no one else’s. No one else, except Eliza, had the right to raise them, to educate them, to be their father figure. He would never understand those parents who sent their children away, who let someone else do their job. He didn’t even want to try. And the only reason he never said that to Jefferson was because maybe his daughters hadn’t realised that detail yet, because it could hurt them if such information reached their ears, because it hurt to know your parent would send you away if he had the chance.

Because Jefferson would send them away if he had the chance. Way to love someone.

The only reason he had once given the man the benefit of the doubt was because of Lafayette and Madison. According to his fellow immigrant workmate, Jefferson was very helpful when he went to the law firm he worked at to ask for help when he fought about his heritance and what was his by law once he came out the closet to his traditional family. Jefferson made sure Lafayette was given the best lawyer for his case and helped him to know what he should or should not use to win.

And, as for Madison, it was clear he admired the man, and loved him dearly. Every day he would talk through text with him and made sure to call him once a day. There were moments, while they worked together, when he would excuse himself if the phone rang and the ID read ‘Thomas’. How they met, Alexander didn’t know, but he didn’t need to. No one needed to know how he had met Laurens and yet everyone who had eyes could see the affection they still had for each other, the platonic and brotherly relationship they shared. That was what Madison and Jefferson had, and, uncommon to popular belief, Alexander never intended on separating the two or get in between. You can’t compete with a brother, a platonic soul mate.

Alexander had given Jefferson a second chance (without him even knowing) thanks to Eliza, who saw good in everyone. In fact, if he didn’t leave Jefferson to his own devices when Madison went looking for his help, it was all because of Eliza. As well as it was Eliza’s doing the fact that Washington didn’t know their secretary had some experience in making money disappear. A part of him felt like an idiot for having broken the only written proof he had for throwing Jefferson to the sharks; another one appealed to his more humane side. Maybe the part Eliza had woken up inside of him, the one he put to sleep a lot of time ago.

Still, he didn’t want to know much about the man. He argued with him because it was innate of him, he couldn’t let the stupidity to spread freely where he worked at, but he made sure that he didn’t get much involved into it. He hadn’t learnt to shut up, but he’d learnt to be indifferent and cold towards people who didn’t deserve his interest. And Jefferson truly didn’t.
He wasn’t hurt by the false accusation. For that, Jefferson would’ve had to be a very close friend or someone important to him, and he was the opposite of all that. No, Alexander felt something worse, something that let his mouth with a bitter taste, something he didn’t believe he’d let it in such untrustworthy hands. Jefferson had made him look like a fool in front of himself, he had almost ruined everything he had worked so hard on. After all he did without asking for a salary, after what Jefferson’d done while working with King. That was the worst part. Alexander knew the man was a hypocrite, and yet he lowered the guard.

Well, no more. All bridges burnt. All materials that could been used to build new ones, burnt as well. Eliza would be proud of his act of pyromania. The fishing trip was going to be his well-earned vacation for his stressed emotions, he would barely give Jefferson a minute of his time unless Washington required their presence.

He couldn’t allow a wash-up snake such things as his attention and time. He wouldn’t allow to trip over the same stone twice.

“Hey, Alex” Aaron voice interrupted his furious thoughts. Thankfully.

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“You already did”

“That’s a very old joke” Aaron rolled his eyes. “Look, don’t get offence or get angry, but…”

“What happened now…?” asked Alexander, with tedium.

“No, it’s nothing about that… It’s just that…” Aaron took in a breath. “Well, for the little I know, you’ve been to several foster homes”

“I have, yes” he nodded, sharply.

“Well, I wanted to ask you… How should I act in front of Augustine?”

“What?”

“Well… I’ve only been to my grandparents’ and uncle’s after my parents died” he confessed, and Alexander felt bad for being defensive towards Aaron. If someone could barely understand what he’s been through when his mother died, that would be Aaron. “But they were family and I’m not to Augustine”

“You’re his stepfather” Alexander said, with a gentler tone. “The stepfather who took him out of a boarding school and returned him to his mother”

“And the one who made their parents divorced”

“Trifle…”
“No, it’s not”

“How old is he?”

“Around sixteen”

“Well, he’s old enough. Neither kids or teenagers are as stupid as people claim they are; they always sense who’s on their side. And if they don’t, they will eventually” explained Alexander, parking the car near the airport.

Aaron gave him a slight smile. “Thank you, Alexander”

“Not needed”

And, honestly, they weren’t. It wasn’t thanks to Alexander that Aaron won the case. He shook his head, trying to erase the memory of himself, the air caught in his throat and whole body trembling. He didn’t need to think about that today, he had enough on his plate.

“I meant it” said Alexander, as they walked to where their wives must’ve been waiting for them.

“Yes, I know” nodded Aaron, his eyes scanning the whole room full of people. Alexander could see him getting nervous. Aaron wasn’t a fan of crowded places.

“No, no, I mean… Don’t act as if he were stupid with something” explained Alexander, finally catching sight of what seemed to be Eliza’s raven hair. “He knows you’re fucking his mother”

Aaron’s face flushed immediately. “Alexander!”

“And he’ll have little Theo to remind him every day of it” kept talking Alexander. “So, don’t act as if you’re the purest. You’re the reminder of that his mother is also a woman with necessities”

“I thought you wanted to help me!”

“And I do. Trust me, just try to pretend you didn’t do his mother, even when she was still married to his father, and you’ll lose the battle”

“And here I was, thinking you could be deep and serious…” said Aaron, passing a hand through his face.

“Your mistake” replied Alexander, with a sided smile. “Life’s too short for it to be taken so seriously”

“Incorrigible”

“Dull”

Theodosia interrupted their conversation, launching herself to her husband and trapping him in a hug. Aaron was still for a moment before reciprocating the gesture. Alexander smiled at them, sharing their happiness. Eliza returned him to the real world when she stole him a kiss. Alexander looked at her with a cocked eyebrow, and she stuck her tongue out playfully.
“Theodosia, I need to breathe” joked Aaron, patting her wife on the back.

“And I need to show you how much I love you” she replied, unable to erase her smile from her face. She freed her husband, arms wide open as she walked to Alexander.

“No” he stopped her. “No hugs”

“He doesn’t do good with public displays of affection” explained Eliza, with a smile. “That’s why I always have to steal him kisses when we go out. It’s funny”

“For you…”

“Yep”

“I’ll have to steal you a hug, then” planned Theodosia, rubbing her hands.

“Hey, Theo, there’s a child over there” said Eliza, who had turned her head so Alexander didn’t see her laugh at his cost. “Is that him?”

Theodosia and Aaron moved their heads, following the direction Eliza’s finger pointed at. Eventually, they laid eyes on a teenage boy with mid-fade haircut, wearing a pair of ripped jeans and a grey jacket. He looked around as well, until his eyes met his mother’s. He raised one hand to wave at them. Theodosia returned the gesture, running to him afterwards. As soon as they were close enough, she hugged him with all her might.

“She learnt from Martha” commented Alexander, laughing a bit.

They walked to the reunited mother and son, now being able to hear all the kisses Theodosia gave the embarrassed kid.

“My son, my kid, how much you’ve grown” she said, between kisses.

“Mum, you’re embarrassing me!” complained Augustine, trying to free himself.

“That’s my job” said Theodosia, with a giggle.

“Theo, you’ve gotta let him go eventually if you wanna take him home” said Aaron.

“Alright…” she gave in, finally getting up and separating from her son. “It’s good to have you back, Augustine” she said, giving him another kiss on the head.

“Same” admitted the boy, with a slight blush.

“These are some friends” introduced Theodosia, pointing at the Hamilton marriage. “Eliza and Alexander”
“Good to know you, Augustine!” greeted Eliza, with a genuine and motherly smile.

“And, of course, Aaron” she added, grabbing her husband’s hand. “Your sister is waiting back at the Hamilton’s house, Eliza’s sister, Peggy, is taking care of their children and her”

“Alright…” nodded Augustine, processing all that information.

“Let him breathe, honey, he’s just arrived” said Aaron, with an understanding smile. “It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, Augustine. If you need anything, don’t be afraid to come to me” he promised.

“Okay” said the boy, looking directly into his stepfather’s eyes.

“Let’s go back home, I’m sure Theo must be excited!” said Theodosia, jumping on her spot and sprinting towards the exit.

“Not as much as her” commented Alexander.

“It’s impossible to beat Theo!” agreed Eliza.

“Oh, Augustine, let me help you with the suitcase!” proposed Aaron, still smiling at the boy.

“It’s alright…” he assured, not moving one inch.

“Come on, you must be tired from the trip” insisted Aaron, gently. “And it’s not an inconvenience at all!”

“Hm… Okay…”

Augustine finally gave in, handing his stepfather his suitcase. Just when Aaron was about to grab it, Augustine dropped in, and the huge and heavy suitcase fell on Aaron’s foot. Aaron bit his bottom lip, hunching over himself.

“Oooh, sorry! I dropped it too soon!” apologised Augustine, with the same serious expression as before. Alexander arched one eyebrow in his direction.

“Oh, God, Aaron, are you okay?!” exclaimed Eliza, placing a comforting hand on the man’s back.

“Yes, yes, it’s alright” lied Aaron, his smile now a bit more forced. “It was an accident, nothing more” he said, taking the suitcase and limping to the exit.

“You need support. Here” said Eliza, putting his arm around her shoulders to help him walk.

Alexander threw a last glare to Augustine, managing to see the boy giving the hint of a wicked smile. He walked, hands in his pockets, following Eliza and Aaron, who still assured he was fine though it was clear by the sweat adorning his head that he was trying not to scream just there, as they were in public. Alex sighed.

“Thank goodness I didn’t ask for half of the prize” he commented.
“Now, let me tell you something, you goddamn son of a bitch…”

James and Alexander exhaled slowly. It was about to go down, and that quote was the sign. James drummed his fingers on the kitchen table while Alex kept cooking the dinner for that night. His mother had been teaching him a few recipes and he had picked up the stack without complaints.

“I’ve been paying religiously since my family and I first came here. It’s been over 16 years and this is the first time I…”

The kids never got to hear the end of the sentence, as the water began to boil. Alexander served them all three cups of tea and put them on the table, and went back to focus on the dinner.

The whole house was silent. Alexander was glad the conversation with the landlord was finally over, the last thing his mother needed was to be nervous. The grip he held on the ladle strengthened, and his knuckles turned white when he heard his mother coughing.

She made her way into the kitchen, a tired expression on her pale face. She smiled at her two sons and took a seat at the side of the table, to be able to look at them as they ate and had conversations, as they used to do every night. James threw his mother a sympathetic smile; she caressed his head. Alexander served three dishes of soup, being his the last one, and sat at his brother’s left. An idea flying around his mind, but he didn’t say anything, leaving the talking to his brother for once.

He insisted on washing the dishes, though it was Rachel’s turn. She objected, saying she was fine, but eventually, Alexander’s stubbornness won. Though Rachel stayed in the kitchen with him to keep him company as he did the dishes. Obstinacy at its best, Alexander supposed.

“Mr Stevens was looking for someone to help him in his store” he commented casually, as he was about to finish.

“Oh?” his mother raised her tired glare to him. Then, when she was able to proceed the words in her mind, nodded. “Oui, I saw the sign on his… vitrine [window shop]…”
Alex swallowed. Her mother had been slipping French words lately, and she only used to do that after an exhausting day. He wanted to excuse her with a hard day at work, but she had missed the whole week; Alex’s heart pounded at the thought of her boss getting tired of her ‘excuses’. Rachel wouldn’t be the first one to be fired for testing that man’s patience, which was inexistent at much.

“I was thinking about volunteering” confessed Alexander, drying his brother’s dish.

“Quoi?” Rachel’s eyes woke up a bit after hearing that. Her lips curved, and Alexander was glad he had his back on her as she spoke, sternly. “Alexander, tu as douze ans [you’re twelve]…”

“You’ve missed work for a week” he mumbled, but the quiet in the kitchen was enough for his mother to hear him and be silent. Alex lowered the dish, wetting it again, but he didn’t care. “I know I’m not old enough for working, but James must study and… Well, I wouldn’t be the first underage kid working with a salary…”

For calling it something, he thought, but money was money, nonetheless. Suddenly, two arms wrapped him by the waist, and pulled him closer to the warm (maybe a bit warmer than he’d like it) body of his mother. She rested her chin on his shoulder and lifted her left hand to caress his hair.

“Tu es un bon garçon, Alex… [You’re a good boy, Alex]” she whispered before pressing a proud and gentle kiss on his cheek. “Ne changes pas [Don’t change]”

Rachel gave him a pat on the head and went to bed. The kitchen was left cold after she left.

Alexander kept doing the dishes. And if he let some tears fall meanwhile, nobody needed to know but him.

Friday morning arrived too soon for both Alexander and Thomas’ likings. Thomas had been trying to do as much things as possible to pretend Thursday wasn’t ending and the fatal day was arriving; meanwhile, Alexander, for once, went to bed early to have the batteries completely full for the next three days.

Eliza had made his suitcase. Especially because the only things he was going to take with him were his laptop, his phone and the charger. He was choosing what clothes he wanted to wear while in there when she snapped at him.
“It’s a small vacation, Alex!”

“And I’m going to make full use of it!”

“Working??”

“What else do you want me to do?”

“Relaxing, for example!”

“I relax by working”

“That has no sense, no one relaxes by working!”

“I do”

“You’re going to take some books with you instead of the laptop. And the diary I bought you for your birthday… How come you haven’t used it??”

“I haven’t had time”

“For writing?”

“I’ve been writing other things”

“Well, good opportunity to use it… Gosh, it still smells new”

“Eliza, don’t smell the diary like a sniffer dog”

“Excuse me, you’re the one who snorts the pages of the new books you buy”

“That’s different!”

“Come on, the diary to the suitcase… Why is the laptop in here again?”

“… …”

“I only took my eyes off for one minute!”

“More than enough time”

“Alexander, take this laptop out”

“No”

Eliza did it herself, along with the charger, and put the diary on the free spot.

“I hate you” spat Alexander.

“Love you too, hun” she replied, with an emotionless tone and a thoughtful expression on her face.

“What else? What else…?”

“You’re ruining my vacation” whined Alexander.
“I’m making it better!” Eliza defended herself.

“If I die for underworking, it’ll be your fault”

“That word doesn’t exist”

“Yes, it does”

“No, it doesn’t”

“Yes, it does”

“Gosh, I married a literal toddler”

“No one put a pistol against your head when you said yes”

“No, but you had a pen and were not afraid to use it”

“What bad things could I possibly say about you?”

“June 30th, 2010. That letter you wrote to Laurens”

“… … Those were the pre-wedding jitters talking, not me”

“Sure…”

“Besides, what are you doing reading my things?!”

“You’re welcome for organizing all those papers you’ve got scattered throughout the house”

“They are not scattered, they are ordered by the Alexander’s style!”

“I prefer them being ordered the normal way, thank you… Besides, who writes letters anymore?”

“You told me you fell in love thanks to those letters!”

“No, those letters made me like you a bit more. You have a way with words”

“Yes, I know. I wrote my way out Nevis”

“I didn’t know. I think you haven’t told me enough times. Please, repeat it again, maybe I’ll catch it on the 1000th…”

“… ……”

“You know, because I’m stupid and all that…”

“I wasn’t being serious!”

“And ugly”

“Eliza, it’s not fair, you read that without my consent! Those things are private!”

“Thank the gods it was me who found that and not Angelica”

“Oh, fuck…”
“Don’t worry, I burnt it”

“What”

“You’re welcome, honey”

“WHY DID YOU BURN THE LETTER?!”

“Because if you’re not going to take care of it, anyone can read it. Just look at me”

“LIAR. YOU DID IT BECAUSE YOU FELT OFFENDED!”

“And how do you want me to feel? Less screams, and more gratefulness, hun. I could’ve burnt you in your sleep”

“You pyromaniac!”

“And now that I’m thinking about it… Why did you have a letter you sent to John?”

“Because I always like to keep a copy, just in case”

“You’re so weird…”

“Did you burn something else?”

“Why are you asking? Do you have more letters badmouthing me?”

“Eliza, for fuck’s sake, I wasn’t being honest. I was trying to make John feel better because he was still heartbroken”

“Didn’t you say it was the pre-wedding jitters talking, Mr Considerate?”

“A mix of it all!”

“Now that I think about it… You wrote that six months before the wedding. You surely were nervous, huh?”

“Alright, I admit it. I wrote that the night we went on a date and you thought Greenland was Australia!”

“Well, sorry, I thought I went on a date, not to a Geography test!”

“It’s common knowledge! How could you get those two mixed up?!”

“Less wolves, Little Red Hiding Hood*… Here”

Eliza closed his suitcase and passed it to him. Alex grabbed it with a cocked eyebrow.

“When did you get it ready?”

“Alexander, if I weren’t able to do things while arguing with you, this marriage would’ve gone to hell within the first year of living together” she said, with a smile. She caressed his cheek with affection. “But don’t think I forgave or forgot that letter. My revenge will come”
“No, please, no more Schuyler revenges…” he pleaded, paling at the though.

“Well, have a nice trip!” Eliza tapped him on the shoulder, encouraging and completely ignoring his words.

“I’ll be back on Sunday night. You’ve got food prepared for the next three days on the fridge, if you two need anything, talk to James. I don’t want you to give him more work than necessary, alright?”

Thomas made sure he had everything in his suitcase for the third time before heading downstairs, his daughters following him closely. James was waiting for him by the door, a jacket and a scarf in hand.

“It’s not that cold anymore” said Thomas, patting his suitcase, as if the things he had put there the night before were going to disappear.

“Better having them and not needing them, than needing them and not having them” replied James, tossing the clothes to his chest.

Thomas sighed and grabbed them with his free hand. “If you need anything, call me” he instructed, now pointing at James.

“It’s only three days, we’ll be fine” assured his friend. “You, on the other hand…”

“Stop it”

“Have a nice trip, Daddy” said Polly, pulling his sleeve so he’d bend down. She pressed a peek on his cheek.

“Be nice” he said, petting her head. He looked boringly at the oldest. “I think it’s needless to say I don’t want you to throw a party”

“Hm…” mumbled Patsy.

“I’m here, anyways” said James, cocking an eyebrow.

“Like she doesn’t know how to bring you round to her point of view” commented Thomas, locking eyes with his oldest daughter. “No parties. Behave”

“Sir, yes, sir” said Patsy, mocking a salute.

Polly and James contained a laugh while Thomas rolled his eyes.
“I’m serious, Patsy. I don’t want trouble with Hamilton” he said.

“You already have a problem with him” said the girl, shrugging.

“Patsy, please, he was leaving in a good mood” complained James.

“No, I was not…” admitted Thomas. He patted Patsy on the shoulder. “Seriously, behave. And if something, anything happens, call me”

“Okay” the girls said in unison.

James opened the door for him, waving him goodbye with an encouraging smile and he stepped out. Washington’s car was already there, with Hamilton on the backseat. Both men chatting friendly. He sighed, resigned, and made his way to the car. He stopped in his tracks when his phone buzzed. Whatever that could delay this nightmare, was welcome. He raised an eyebrow when he read ‘Patsy’ in the ID.

He never answered so fast, worry washing over him. He never got the chance to talk, as Patsy said:

“Monste, my father’s gone already. Did you buy the beer?”

Thomas clicked his tongue and turned on his heels, hissing curses under his breath. He didn’t bother to look for his keys, choosing to knock on the door, instead. Patsy opened the door, eyes wide.

“Martha…!” he began, trying not to raise his voice. He didn’t want to be a show for his boss and workmate.

Patsy started to cackle just then. “It was a joke, Dad!” she said, crying from laughter. “Gosh, you should’ve seen your face!”

Thomas blinked shocked. “A joke?” he repeated. “It’s not funny, Martha!”

“You say that because you were the fooled one”

“No more jokes. Call only if it’s an emergency!” he scolded.

“Me…”

“No, you being bored is not an emergency!” he shouted, turning on his heels and hoofing all the way to the car.

Patsy threw him a kiss. “Love ya, Daddy!” she said, mockingly.

“Damned girl…” he muttered in response.
Patsy closed the door, still cackling. She sighed. Polly arched an eyebrow at her.

“It was a real mistake, wasn’t it?” she inquired.

Patsy turned serious all of a sudden. “Best made up story I ever came up with”

Aaron got out the bathroom full dressed and prepared for another day. He didn’t know if someone had gone to the law firm today (with Washington and Alexander gone), but he knew it was enough for him to not go so something important could happen. He wouldn’t risk it.

He stopped midway, as he walked to the kitchen. A nice smell made its way into his nostrils and he inspired. That week, it was his turn to make breakfast and dinner. A wee smile spread across his face. *Seems that Theodosia decided to have a nice detail for the weekend*, he thought, moved.

“I’m so lucky to have her as my wife” he commented.

“Yep, you better no forget” said a female voice from behind.

Aaron turned around, finding his wife in her robe, dishevelled and still with traces of slumber in her face.

“Oh, I thought you were making breakfast?” he asked, confused.

“Yeah, and what else? Flowers and candles?” she mocked. Her mood wasn’t the best in the mornings.

“Then, what’s this smell?”

In that moment, the kitchen door opened, revealing a little Theo, who stopped in her tracks at the sight of her parents.

“Daddy, Mommy, the invader kid told me to look for you” she said.

“Girl, the invader kid is your brother” said Theodosia, frowning, ill-temperedly. “So, insult him as
“Theodosia…” reprehended Aaron. He knelt in front of his daughter. “Augustine is cooking?” he asked, surprised.

Theo nodded. “Pancakes”

“Uh, seems that the boarding school did him good”

Aaron frowned at his wife. “Theodosia, why don’t you go back to sleep until you’re in a better mood?” he suggested, calmly.

“Because no one tells me what to do” she spat, making her way into the kitchen.

Aaron sighed. “All mornings the same show…” He felt a pull on his sleeve. He looked down at her serious daughter. “What’s wrong, honey?”

“I don’t like the new kid” she said, straightforward.

“Honey…”

“I want my room and my things back. All of them. They’re mine and no one else’s”

“Honey, that’s not nice to say” said Aaron, a bit worried for her attitude. “Listen, this will do you good. Growing up with a sibling will teach you to share”

“I don’t want to share. I want my things” she insisted, with a dead serious expression. “And I want them now”

“Theo, don’t be like this, please…”

“Why doesn’t Augustine have his own room?”

“Because there’s only two rooms in this house, honey” he answered, with the patience of a saint.

“Buy a new house with more rooms” concluded the little girl.

“Honey, I can’t do that”

“Why? Are you a loser as grandpa always tells me?”

“… Theodosia, go eat your breakfast” he ordered.

The girl looked up and down at him. “This conversation isn’t over” she declared, before walking in the kitchen.

“Why did she have to be smart?” lamented Aaron. “They’re gonna eat her alive when she goes to school…”

Aaron walked in, seeing the table already with plates for him, Theodosia and their daughter. Augustine was with his back at the door. He turned around and smiled sheepishly at his stepfather.

“Oh, good morning, Aaron” he greeted, walking to the table. He served a couple of pancakes to his
mother.

“Thanks, honey” she said, smiling a bit.

“You didn’t need to cook for us, Augustine” said Aaron, taking a seat.

“It was nothing” assured Augustine. “It’s the least I can do after coming here…”

“No” interrupted Theodosia, rapidly. “You’re not a bother, honey. You’re part of the family. Though, if you want, we can fit you in our housework schedule”

“Yeah, that would do” nodded Augustine. He walked to his stepfather. “Aaron, how many do you want?” he asked, politely.

“Just a couple, I’m in a quite a hurry” he answered.

“Nobody’s going to go to that law firm” said Theodosia.

“Better go and find nobody, than not going and finding out they did something important”

“Like your workmates knew what ‘important’ means…”

Aaron laughed, in agreement, and grabbed his fork to start eating. He stopped when he saw the black pancakes on his dish.

“Sorry, I burnt some a bit” apologised Augustine, with a too friendly tone.

“I… It’s okay” said Aaron, throwing a glare to the Theodosias’ dishes. Their pancakes were perfect.

“Have you changed your mind already?” asked Theo, when she saw her father looking at her food.

Aaron opened his mouth to tell her off again, when Augustine interrupted him.

“Coffee?” he asked, with a kind smile and showing him a mug.

“Yes, please” said Aaron, nodding his head. “Thanks”

“It’s nothing. And you, Mum?” offered Augustine, turning to Theodosia.

“Nah, I’ll have a juice” she replied.

“Theodosia, don’t be lazy. The kid already made breakfast!” commented Aaron.

“Why did I have children, then?” she asked.

Aaron shook his head and took a sip of his coffee. He almost choked trying not to swallow it and spit it back on the mug. He coughed once his mouth was free, but still with that flavour.
“Something’s wrong?” asked Theodosia, as Augustine gave her a glass of orange juice.

“Em… Nothing, it’s just… Um, Augustine?”

“Yes?” replied the kid, smiling at him.

“Em… I think you poured salt in my coffee, instead of sugar” he said, a bit timidly.

“Oh, really?” he asked, his smile growing an unnoticeable bit. “Oh, I’m sorry. I’ll give you another one”

Augustine took the mug from him and came back with another one and the sugar bowl.

“Here, I wouldn’t like to do it wrong” he explained.

“Thank you, Augustine” said Aaron.

Augustine took a seat beside his mother. Both smiled at each other. Aaron took the little bowl and turned it a bit, to pour as many sugar as he liked. The tap fell inside the cup, along with half of the bowl.

“Oh, Aaron!” laughed Theodosia.

“Oh, dang it” cursed Aaron, taking the mug and walking to the sink.

“Pour a bit of coffee in that sugar!” joked his wife.

“Hehehe…” he fake-laughed. “I think I’d go to work” he announced.

“You won’t eat, Daddy?” asked Theo.

“No, I wasn’t that hungry” he lied.

“But you always say breakfast is the most important meal”

“It’s alright, I’ll eat something in the break room” he promised.

“Your life” said the little one, shrugging.

“Try to leave them a milligram of sugar” laughed Theodosia.

“It was just an accident” complained Aaron, with a slight frown.

“You need to be careful, Aaron” advised Augustine, locking eyes with him.
Aaron felt a shiver going down his spine. He kissed his wife goodbye and threw a kiss to his daughter before leaving the house in a hurry.

He hoped the building was opened, at least. He wasn’t feeling up to come back home any time soon.

Alexander never felt so cold and hot at the same time. He curled himself under the sheets, shaking and sweating; his muscles were sore and his vision was blurred and he didn’t remember what was real and what imaginary anymore. 107 degrees of fever since James last checked on him. He spent the whole afternoon out, trying to find someplace where he could buy some medicines for two. He came back almost when night was about to fall and he had taken them, but feeling no result, however.

The body beside him turned and wrapped its arms around him, embracing him and almost making him forget about his poor state. With the little strength he had left, he clung to the sweat soaked shirt as if his life depended on it. Which was starting to feel more real than he wanted to admit. Gosh, why weren’t the medicines doing anything to him? Why was no one coming to help them? Where was James? He looked so terrified when he came back and saw the state mother and son were in. And that just made Alex feel more scared. James didn’t usually care about a lot of things, if this was disrupting his carefree behaviour, it must be serious.

A hand took his dark hair away from his sticky and warm forehead. The fingers were clumsy and shaky, but did the job just fine, so thin and dry lips could press a soft kiss on it. Alexander felt like a spell was on him, then. For an instance, he didn’t feel how much his body hurt when he wanted to move and so he was able to lift his head to lock eyes with his mother’s. Rachel was as pale as a ghost, her hair was loose and all over the pillow, her chest and half of her face. But the shine in her eyes was still there, it was real. Alexander gripped her sweated shirt with renovated yet fleeting strength.

The thick scent of their vomiting didn’t reach Alexander’s nostrils anymore; he didn’t feel warm or cold; he didn’t remember where they were (his mother’s bedroom, upstairs); he didn’t remember what day was today (February 19th. More exactly: February 19th, near 9 pm. Though Alexander didn’t give any of those things any mind right then, the date and hour would scar him for the rest of his days, it would printed in his soul eternally). Alexander would remember all that later, now it was nothing. Now only his mother was there, only she was real. Her expression, her soft and motherly smile, her bright eyes, still with that small drop of hope, even in the middle of their situation, dancing in between the rest of stronger and brighter emotions but the one that called his attention the most.
Everything else could be an illusion, could be a dream or a bad nightmare he would wake up from eventually. Maybe he was in his room, healthy and waiting for the alarm to turn off so he could go to school to learn more; maybe he had drifted away in the living room reading a book; maybe he had fallen asleep in his mother’s embrace after one of his insecurities attacked him in the middle of yet another silent night. Alexander didn’t know. He didn’t know what was real and what was imaginary, what was there with him and what his delusional mind, prisoner of his high fever, was making him see.

But he would never forget his mother’s face, because that was real. She was real. Her touch, her scent, her smile, her endless hope and faith, her optimism, her strength, her fighter spirit, all he’d wanted to be and was not. All that was real, and it was mere inches away from him, smiling down at him, embracing him, making him forget the pain and fear, making him forget the darkness he had sunken into since he began coughing slightly as it happened to his mother a few weeks ago, making him see light at the end of the tunnel.

“Alex...” a soft whisper, a sweet voice. No other sound made his way into his ears. No other sound was more important than Rachel’s voice in that moment. “Mon cher... Je suis désolé [I’m sorry, dear]”

He tightened his grip on her shirt, hands shaking. She was drifting away, he felt her so far away yet she was there, lying next to him. Why was he feeling her so far away?

“Maman...”

Alexander wouldn’t be exaggerating if he said that was the first time in his twelve years of life when he talked so low, when his voice could be described as inaudible, a whisper.

Rachel pulled her son closer to her chest, her smile persistent. Alexander felt the weak beating of her heart, as if it wasn’t against his ear, as if he was kilometres away from there. And he didn’t want that. He wanted to be there, with his mother. He breathed in, filling his nostrils with her scent. One last time.

“Je t’aime... Je vous aime tant [I love you... I love you [two] so much]”

A lump made its way up Alexander’s throat, making him unable to speak. For once in his life he needed his voice and words the most, he could not speak. He could not mutter a single syllable. He could not reciprocate his mother’s feelings by words. He could not tell her how much he loved
her in return.

The scent of their vomits came back, his body felt sore once again, his whole body was trembling, though this time it had nothing to do with the sudden cold he was feeling again. Alexander pressed himself further into his mother’s chest. It was silent. He felt no beat. He shook violently under the grip of his mother’s now limp arms.

Finally, a sound came out his mouth. A sob, then another, and another. Tears fell down his cheeks, as he cried as silently as he could. It didn’t make his mother move. Exhaustion took over his body, and his eyelids started to feel heavy. Some part of him wished he would never see the light of another day, some part of him wanted to follow his mother. Because that was all he wanted his whole life, to live up to her, to follow her advices and steps. No matter at what cost.

With an exhalation, Alexander finally muttered the words he’d wanted to say before, words that were now useless as no one would hear them, especially not the person they were directed to.

“Je t’aime aussi, maman… [I love you too, Mum]”

The next morning James woke up to the silence of his mother’s bedroom. He sprinted to the neighbours’ house, half dress, a mess. He didn’t have time to lose with such trivial things as making himself presentable.

He felt a bit better when he knew his brother was fine. The fever had lowered considerably, and he had his strengths back. Alexander refused to get separated from his mother. James and the neighbour tried as gently as they could at first, until the man began to be annoyed by the kid’s attitude and pulled tighter. Alexander didn’t give up, though. James stopped pushing and bent until his mouth was over his little brother’s ear.

“Elle nous a quittés, Alex… [She’s gone, Alex…]”

That made some effect on the child, as he finally let go of Rachel’s shirt. The wife of the man waited for them in the kitchen, where James walked Alex to. He sat him on a chair and passed him a hot drink in his hands. The kid was shaking like a leaf, though he was still warm on the outside and had a blanket wrapped around his shoulders.

“Drink something” ordered James, as soon as the woman left them in private. “Alex…”
James stopped talking when he saw the lost glare of his brother. A kid who used to have the same life in his eyes as their mother, now was totally subdued. It made his heart ache. He was not the best older brother, but they were still brothers, and he had an obligation towards Alex. Now they were alone, and they needed each other.

“Hey…” he said, with a foreign gentle tone. He caressed his brother’s cheek, as Rachel used to do. It seemed to work, as Alex finally raised his glare to look at him. James did his best to throw the brightest and sincerest smile after the events that were still unresolved. “Everything will be fine, Alexander. You’ll see”

Alexander looked at him, stared straight in his eyes, and nodded. Without saying a single word. James furrowed his brows, concerned. Without thinking, he embraced his brother by the shoulders and brought him closer to him.

“Everything will be fine” he repeated, trying to convince not only Alex, but also himself.

Alex nodded again and James hugged him closer. He would have to look for a job, he would have to start taking his studies more seriously. He would have to do a lot of things, but it would be fine. It had to be fine.

As James planned inside his head what to do next, how to take care of his twelve-years-old brother from now on, Alexander kept silent. He only had one thing in his mind, and it repeated inside his head incessantly.

It was gone. The light in his mother’s eyes was gone. There was nothing when Alexander looked at her before being dragged out of the room. There was no happiness, sadness, impotence, anger, disappointment… There was no hope. It was all gone. The light was gone.

And Alex felt a part of him gone along with it.

The ride was uncomfortably silent. And that was an understatement. Washington had prayed for three years to live as silently while in the company of the two men as now. But he found out he didn’t like it. Because when those two were silent was because something bad happened and his car couldn’t allow so many bad vibes, thank you…
He began to wonder if he had had a good idea by inviting the two. Alexander and Jefferson were the most hardworking in the whole office, and it was thanks to their interest in keeping the company functioning that the whole thing hadn’t gone to hell yet. Washington had invited them both to thank them, though he didn’t say it with those words. Alexander for his endless efforts to help him create the company and hiring qualified people for different sectors; Jefferson for giving them what they needed so King would fulfil his promise and pay for his bad action.

Angelica had dropped the idea first, he’d give her that. And though George knew there was a bit of malice in her proposal, Washington saw there was a bit of worry on her part. She had also seen how the relationship between the two men grew colder. Gosh, the whole building felt it. Even Laurens had said a few concerned comments about it. Lafayette had gone to him once, asking him if he had some kind of plan to get them to get along or talk things out. Washington had thought of it, but he didn’t believe leaving Alexander and Jefferson alone in a meeting room (or accompanied by him) would change anything.

And maybe inviting them both to his family cabin on a fishing trip for three days wasn’t the best idea either, but at least they would have nature to calm their nerves. A cabin by the lake wasn’t the same as an office building, that’s for sure.

Well, in for a penny, in for a pound. If this didn’t work, he could always try something else. He could ask for Eliza’s help, God knew she was one of the only few people who could guide Alexander to the right path through life. And James would do the same to Jefferson, being his self-control and voice of reason when times needed it.

He looked through the rear-view. Alexander had fallen (surprisingly) asleep, while Jefferson was looking through his window, wrapped in his own thoughts, whatever they were. At least he could expect some civil acting from the man. Where Alexander was passionate, Jefferson was collected; as well as where Jefferson was impetuous, Alexander was rational. Two faces of the same coin, if you come to think of it. George came to the conclusion that it would benefit to have the two working together, but they turned every idea thrown in the air in a debate in which they would argue until someone was victorious. It was funny the first weeks, then, it became tedious, especially when the secretary and the CFO turned the fight into something personal.

In all honesty, it wasn’t George’s fault. True, he sometimes was too tired to even put an end to it or would snap very unprofessionally (he was human too), but it wasn’t his decision to bring Jefferson to the law firm in the first place. Nothing against the man, he just didn’t take him into account while deciding what of his previous co-workers would want to work with him, leaving King behind. Alexander was very important during the decision-making.

He didn’t hesitate in choosing Burr or his sister-in-law, Peggy; he agreed with George when
he talked to him about Madison; Alexander talked about how good Laurens was at his job and how seriously he took his studies while in college; he also was glad to know Hercules was Martha’s tailor, and didn’t think twice before let George know he was very good at computers and would do the company good in the informatic field. And after Hercules, it was easy for Alexander to remember his French friend, Lafayette. Alexander talked wonders about the immigrant, and fought with the power of his oratory to explain to George how much good it would do to the law firm to have another bilingual worker. Not that Alex needed to talk to much, Washington had already agreed half-way through his rant, but hearing the boy talking with such life made him happy. Especially when he remembered the things Lucy Knox said about the boy when he first came to her house. It was glad to see Alexander had taken his spark back and was making full use of it.

Then, there was Jefferson. Though he had shown a great patience when it came to King’s tantrums, Washington didn’t give him much thought. He could find any other secretary. But he was surprised when Alexander seemed obstinate about hiring the man. As long as he knew, Madison had talked to Alex about Jefferson, and though George knew those two were pretty close friends, he wondered what Madison could’ve possible said to Alexander to make him that sure about hiring him.

Washington agreed, not giving the younger man too much fight.

The fight came later. Fights, in plural. And Washington never starred in any of them. As much, he was the mediator. The financial plan was the first piece of a domino effect. It was the first disagreement and the beginning of a feud the office found both entertaining and annoying, depending on the day and/or the topic. After that, Washington was sure Alexander would come to him one day to ask for Jefferson’s removal.

But the day never came.

On the contrary, Alexander always made sure the secretary’s salary was kept untouched, made sure Jefferson had a chair in the meetings, had vote to opine on a matter that concerned the company. It was way more than King ever gave the secretary. And thought Washington never compared Alexander with that man, it was very much true that King and Jefferson never fought that much or seemed to hate each other’s guts with such intensity.

“He has, due mislead, strong ideas” Alexander had explained to him one night they stayed overworking. The topic has left Washington’s mouth as it started to burn in the tip of his tongue. “If anything, Heaven forbids, happens to us, to this law firm, I’m sure he would stand his ground; he wouldn’t just run away or let other people take the leads”

And that exactly had happened. So, yes, the trip was a ‘thank you’ to the two men for being what they were and for giving them all to help the law firm. And, maybe, it would also do them good to relax and fix whatever had happened between them.
The car began to make a strange noise. George frowned, Jefferson looked front, alternating his glare between his boss and what he could see of the bonnet. The bonnet from where black smoke was coming from.

“Oh, shit…” cursed Washington, pulling over at the side of the highway.

Alexander moaned under his breath as he woke up slowly. “Are we there yet?” he asked, rubbing one eye.

“Something tells me we’re not gonna get there anytime soon” replied Thomas.

“It’s alright” said Washington, unbuckling his seatbelt. “I’ll take a look. Maybe it’s nothing”

“If it were nothing, there wouldn’t be any black smoke” commented Alexander, when his eyes adjusted to the daylight.

“And what’s going on with you?” asked Thomas, as soon as Washington was out of the car. “I thought you couldn’t sleep” he joked.

“And I thought you didn’t know how to start a conversation” snapped Alexander. “Guess only one of us was in the wrong”

Thomas frowned down at him. “Really, Hamilton, the day God delivered the bad temper, you got in line at least five times…”

“Thought you were an atheist”

“Deist, actually”

“Good for you” dismissed Hamilton, shrugging, before jumping out of the car.

“I should’ve played dead this morning” complained Thomas, following suit.

“Try ‘be dead’ instead of ‘play’, and I’ll gladly help you” retorted Alexander, from the other side of the car, as they walked to their boss. “What’s wrong?” he asked, once by George’s side.

Washington barely looked in their direction. “Um… I think something’s broken”

“We guessed that much” said Alex, cocking an eyebrow.

“Sir, do you know anything about cars?” asked Jefferson.

Washington blushed slightly as he scratched his neck. “Hm… Martha’s the one who always take care of it whenever something happens” he admitted.

“The same goes for me and Eliza…” said Alexander, frowning at the confusing engine parts.

“What about you, Jefferson?” asked Washington, a bit hopeful.

Thomas shook his head. “No. I’ve never fixed a car in my life”

“What a surprise” commented Alexander with sarcasm. “Mr Silver Spoon never did something
himself”

Thomas threw him a dirty look. “Yeah, I had a servant to do it for me, he was called: mind your fucking business”

“Alright, calm down!” said Washington, raising both hands in a conciliatory manner. He threw a warning glare to Alex, who, thankfully, shut up. “I’ll call the tow truck and we’ll wait until it can take us to my cabin” he explained, walking to the car to pick up his phone from his glove box.

“Sir, isn’t that an unnecessary outlay?” asked Jefferson, with a frown.

“No, we’re almost there” said Washington, dialling.

“As much as it pains me to admit it” chimed in Alexander, “I think Jefferson’s right. As Laurens would say, the universe is sending us a sign”

“No sense” Washington shook his head. “I’ll call, we’ll wait and we’ll go the cabin to spend three relaxing days”

“That ‘relaxing’ part is very uncertain” muttered Thomas.


Washington took a step away from the piece of water he almost stained his shoes with. “Thanks, Alex” he said, giving him a grateful smile, as he waited for someone to pick up the phone on the other side of the line. “Hope it doesn’t rain as much while we’re there…” he muttered, to himself.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Boss’ pet” he hissed.

“Jefferson, be careful; you could bite your tongue and die from your own poison, viper” advised Alexander, with fake benevolence.

“Call me when they put you to sleep, chihuahua” retorted Thomas, squinting his eyes.

“You’ll be dead before I let that happen, grandpa”

“I’m not that older than you” said Thomas, quite indignant.

“You’re not? How old were you again, like 80?” teased Alex.

“And how old were you? Five?”

“You’re just proving my point”

“You’re capable of anything in order to win” complained Thomas, rubbing his temples.

“Not anything, that’s more your thing” said Alexander, bitterly.

“How can so much rancour fit in such a small body?”

Alexander squinted his eyes. “Look, let me tell you something, you goddamned son of a bitch…”

George was fast to interrupt. “Can’t I take you anywhere without you making a scene?” he asked, boringly.

“Sorry…” both men apologised, a bit embarrassed.
“Really, I don’t know where you’ve learned that kind of behaviour. After three years working for me, I thought you’d know best…”

Just then, a car passed by them at a considerably fast speed. Alex and Thomas both jumped, a bit startled, while Washington simply looked at it, having seen it coming as he reprimanded his employees. What Washington didn’t take into account was the puddle he managed to skip thanks to Alexander’s warning and that now bathed him from chest to toe as the car drove over it.

Washington stood still for a few seconds, while Thomas and Alexander contained their laughter, shaking in their spots. Soon, their smiles dropped as Washington threw daggers in the car’s direction.

“You imbecile, shitty driver! Did you get your license in your cousin’s butcher or what?! LOOK WHERE YOU’RE FUCKING GOING!”

Alexander and Thomas felt a cold sweat going down their backs as they saw how their boss’ enraged scream made the driver to lose control of the vehicle, and they ended up crashing against the wall. Washington simply looked at the car with a frown and then put the phone against his ear.

“Yes?” he answered, with a calm tone, as if nothing had happened. “Yes, miss, I’m here. Listen, I’d like you to send a tow truck to…”

“Now we know where you took that temper from” commented Thomas, unable to look at anywhere but the crash.

“Mr Jefferson, you look pretty drownable today” responded Alexander, with an innocent tone of voice.

Peter Lytton was the nearest family Rachel had in the island. He shared the same bad reputation of his aunt, but seemed oblivious to it. The death of his wife was the only thing occupying his mind, shadowing his days and prolonging his nights. He spent more time in pubs than at home, but his cousins preferred it that way, in all honesty.

“He’s insane” insisted James Jr.

“He’s depressed” retorted Alexander.
James looked at his brother. He was still working for Mr Stevens (the only good person in that hellhole of an island, if you asked any of the boys) and was now preparing himself for going to work. Not even in their summer vacation, Alexander seemed to know how to take a break. James frowned lips and brow. His brother had always been hardworking and bookish, but since their mother left, he seemed more obsessed with money than any adult James had ever met.

“Depressed, insane… Same thing” argued James, a bit upset. At what? He didn’t know, but he’d been feeling upset and angry at everything and nothing at the same time for the last couple of years.

“No, it’s not” replied Alex, finally turning in his brother’s direction, sharing his bad mood.

“And drunk” added James, inclining in his seat.

“Huh, the kettle calling the pot” the youngest rolled his eyes.

“But I drink in a cool-kinda-way; he’s just…”

“Depressed, grieved, mournful, gloomy?” proposed Alexander, with the phantom of a smile dancing in his lips.

James imitated the gesture, more noticeably. Alexander barely smiled nowadays. Any chance James could grab to make his little brother a bit happy – even if it was just in the surface and for a brief second – he would take it without hesitation.

“Always thinking you’re the smartest in the room!” he complained, jokingly.

“I don’t think so, I know so” was the expected answered James received. Though a bit annoying most of the times, he was happy his brother hadn’t lost his pride. “I’ll be back by night” he said.

“Uh… Let me go with you” said James at last hour, jumping from the couch.

“Are you going to help Mr Stevens?” asked Alexander, a bit surprised.

“Nah, but I was going to get out later and…”

“… And you thought ‘Why not bring the party forwards’?” completed Alex, with a knowing glare.

“You know me too well” joked James, poking his brother’s nose with affection.

“Excessively well” countered Alex, rubbing his nose in annoyance. “When are you going to take things more seriously?”

“When I’m old and need a cane to dance at the disco”

Alex let out a small a laugh, but it sounded like angels’ singing for James’ ears.
“Really, how hasn’t Mr McNobeny fired you yet?”

“Because he hasn’t ‘hired’ me” James finger quoted the verb. “I’m just his apprentice”

“Alright. How are you still Mr McNobeny’s apprentice?” re-asked Alexander, his small smile more evident as the conversation went by.

“Because he’s a cool guy that knows how to have fun, unlike a certain brother I have”

Alexander patted him on the arm and opened the door for him. Both brothers left the house with in-jokes and brief but sincere laughs.

James smiled internally just as much as externally. He felt satisfied.

James wasn’t a negative person. He always thought there was light at the end of the darkest of tunnels. He had inherited that endless hope and optimism from his father, and though criticised by his brother because of it, James always thought Alexander would do well with a bit of positivism in his life.

But when both boys came back home together, found the house in complete darkness (but not locked), went upstairs to ask their cousin what he’d like for dinner and smelt the metallic odour overwhelming their noses, James began to understand why Alexander always seemed to lean towards the bad that could happen to him instead of the good.

The two boys stood what felt like an eternity at the doorframe of their cousin’s room. The dim light of the tight corridor barely let them see the gory horror that welcomed them. Peter Lytton was lying in his bed, soaked in his own blood, his eyes opened and inexpressive. James, later in his life, would know it was for the best that that image couldn’t be completely seen, would thank his cousin had had the decency to finish with his suffering at night and not at plain light of day. Alexander had had enough trauma with sleeping and waking up beside the cold body of their dead mother at the age of 12. He didn’t need more horrific images filling his nightmares.

Alexander was the first one to get out from the shock. His bloodcurdling scream resounded throughout the entire little house. James whipped around, finally coming back to the real world. He found his brother against the wall, hands at each sides of the head, pulling his hair in desperation. James ran to him and enveloped him with his arms. He pressed the fourteen-years-old against his chest, feeling him shaking against him. His brother had stopped screaming as soon as he felt himself
against his older brother, but James still heard the echo of his yell vibrating in his ears and the walls surrounding them.

Suicide. It wasn’t needed to be a genius to know what had ended with Peter Lytton’s life that night of July. The police, though, made the investigation to report the incident to the local jury. Peter’s father, Rachel’s brother-in-law and namesake of her second son, made all his way to St. Croix when he heard the news.

For what James and Alexander heard while in the orphanage, where they were sent until further notice of what was going to happen to them, their uncle tried to have their custody when he knew they were alone once again. But for several ‘legal’ inconveniences, James Lytton couldn’t even see his nephews before passing away as well, heartbroken, almost one month after Peter decided to throw himself out of the ship.

James wanted to believe their uncle was honest about wanting them under their wings, but Alexander, as pessimistic as ever (or, maybe, a bit more than usual) had other thoughts.

“It’s easy to act all worried in front of a jury. The good old uncle that wants his nephews with him… Why didn’t he come to us when we needed him or while Peter was suffering so much?”

James didn’t have an answer for that. He only knew, this time, he couldn’t blame his brother for being so bitter against the world and life. He had started to lose track of the light their father always claimed waited for everybody at the end of the dark tunnel. He was starting to forget how light felt like.

That was until next summer.

“Mr McNobeny wants to take me with him to some college in Los Angeles” he confessed one day at lunch. If you could call the poor ration of food they were served there as ‘lunch’, but it was always more than nothing.

Alexander had stopped clinking the fork against his dish. He met his glare. “Los Angeles?” he repeated.

James cringed at how subdued he sounded. “Yeah. You know, to improve my studies in Design…” he explained, starting to feel uncomfortable. His stomach made knot after knot as his anxiety grew. “Mr McNobeny says I’ve got a future there…”

Alexander was quiet a few moments. Finally, he said. “Sounds like a great opportunity. Congratulations”
James smiled a bit. He tried to ignore how cold and low his brother’s voice was. Had been for their whole stay in the orphanage. He tightened his grip on the fork. James was missing his brother. Not the quieted boy that sat in front of him. His brother, the one who always had a whole speech he called his opinion, the one who could spend hours discussing any topic thrown at him, the one who always cooperated when James tried to start up a conversation. James missed his brother too much.

“When are we leaving?”

“What?”

The anxiety grew. James had hoped Alexander wouldn’t ask that, hoped that intelligence he was always boasting about would make him realise what James was implying by the lack of the pronoun ‘we’ in his speech.

“I’ll be leaving by the middle of August” he answered.

Finally, Alexander seemed to take the hint. “I?” he repeated, frowning weakly at him.

“I’m his apprentice” reminded James, with a faint laugh, trying to lighten the tension that had grown between them.

“I’m your brother” retorted Alexander, his tone turning harsher and louder.

“It’s a way to go to a university to study what I like, Alexander” explained James, softly. “It’s a Design college. You wouldn’t be able to study…”

“But there has to be schools and other universities there” spat the younger. “I could…”

“Alexander, Mr McNobeny is my teacher!” interrupted James, sternly. “He won’t pay your studies!”

“And what about you?” kept insisting Alex.

“I’ll be studying!”

“You can work while studying! That’s what I’ve been doing for two years now!”

“Well, I’m sorry if I’m not a mad boy who wants to waste his youth damaging his health by skipping hours of sleep because I’m too busy working and studying…!”

“What about all the ‘Everything will be fine, I’ll be there for you, Alex’ bullshit?!” rebuked Alexander, his face flushed and screaming. He had gotten up from the chair, throwing it to the floor and calling the attention of the rest of the kids surrounding them in the dining room. He punched the table.

“You’re not being fair!” complained James.
“Just as much as you!” shouted Alexander. “I was the one working when Mom couldn’t anymore! You never showed any hints of intention of doing as much!”

James frowned at the low blow. “Well, sorry for forgetting how you saved the family with the fortune you made” spat James, in a lower tone but with more venom. “Ah, no, it’s true, you did not”

Alex was frozen in spot, then. James realised too late what he had said, what could be understood in his statement. Regret bathed him from head to toe. He turned to look at his little brother completely. His apology drowned when their eyes locked, and James finally saw something shining again in his brother’s violet-blue eyes: fury, rage and hurt. It burnt his soul as Alexander clenched teeth and fists.

“Alexander…” hurried to say James.

“Good luck on your trip and career, James. Maybe now that we don’t have burdens to take care of, we can achieve something in our lives” hissed Alexander, before turning around.

Alexander refused to talk to him after their quarrel. James, leveraging the little pride he had in comparison with his brother in the worst moment, imitated his childish behaviour.

The morning he would leave the island forever, Alexander woke up earlier than he had to go to work with Mr Stevens. James departed without having some proper last words with his little brother.

While leaving the orphanage, suitcase in hand, James realised he hadn’t missed his brother in the last week; he realised he wouldn’t miss his brother when he abandoned the island for never returning. He couldn’t miss his brother, for his brother was no longer there. A cold, heartless and distant boy had taken his place.

Chapter End Notes

*The letter Eliza was talking about was based on the real one Alexander wrote to Laurens, claiming she was not a beauty or a genius, but good-hearted and agreeable to be with. Here: .gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0742#ARHN-01-02-02-0742-fn-0002

*Less wolves, Little Red Hiding Hood (Menos lobos, Caperucita): We used this when someone is clearly exaggerating the details of a story.

*James Jr., Alexander's older brother, actually went to be a carpenter's apprentice (of Thomas McNobeny). They were separated against their own will and never saw each other again.
Sursum corda!
Chapter Summary

A character who swore to come back, comes, indeed, back.
Aaron starts to get suspicious.
A storm happens and does no good to Alex.
More angst.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: Mention of child abuse and death, anxiety attack.
WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Alexander had settled down with the Stevens after his brother left for good. He thought about writing him a letter, something that showed some kind of remorse on his part for how he reacted at the news, but he always dismissed it. He had left. James, his older brother, the only family member he had left, had abandoned him. Well, if James didn’t need him in his life, Alexander didn’t need him either. To his surprise, he felt Edward, Mr Stevens’ son, more like a brother that the boy that shared his blood.

Edward was just as quick-witted, persevering, disciplined, passionate about his beliefs, obsessed with History lessons and books and, to Alexander’s very pleasant surprise, fluent in French as him. While talking with Edward, Alex felt like he was talking with his mother again, it was like if a part of her had come back to keep him company and give him strength during his struggles to find his place in the world. The only time when the boys’ similitudes dispersed was on their studies fields. Where Edward had a fascination by medicine, Alexander still had to find what made him so mesmerized as Edward envisioned himself.

There were moments when Alexander’s internal world seemed to crumble. He was only fifteen, but he hadn’t found a career that called him as Design had called James; as Finances had called Mr Stevens; as Medicine had called Edward. Though good in the two latter, Alexander hadn’t felt that sensation Edward talked to him about.

“It’s like if you knew something was there waiting for you and then one day, bum!, it shows up and
Alexander wished he knew what that felt like. He loved to work, it seemed like the source of life, his distraction, his way to delay dealing with his emotions, each day more pushed to the side and mixed, impossible to define properly. But none of the jobs he had done had ‘called’ him, had ‘ignited’ anything inside, as Edward has explained. He wasn’t seeing a clear path to follow, he was seeing a labyrinth, where paths crossed each other, messily.

There were nights when Alexander would be up until dawn, just doubting. Was there something out there waiting for him? Was there something that was calling him and he couldn’t hear it? Would he ever have a clear path to follow? Most nights, he always came to the same conclusion: he wasn’t hearing anything calling him, he wasn’t feeling appealed to anything because he wasn’t feeling anything at all. He was dead inside. Had been since he woke up next to a deceased Rachel, had been since he saw the pool of blood his cousin was forever-sleeping on, had been since he saw his brother leaving, hidden in the distance. Life was passing him by at full speed and he didn’t care.

Alexander didn’t care about anything anymore.

And the only thing that he was able to feel before that, the only sensation that was able to invade his heart these days was dread.

After waiting two hours for the tow truck to come (Washington called, and he was told a last-minute inconvenience happened), half an hour to the driver and the mechanic that accompanied him to explain what the problem was (and convince Washington it was because the car wasn’t at its best, something the oldest man didn’t want to admit, though Martha had told him off for buying a second-hand car without taking close attention first); another half an hour looking for Washington’s wallet and then picking up all the coins that fell when he tried to open it with more force than necessary (it didn’t matter what he said, Alexander and Thomas knew that face, that face that said ‘I’m about to kill someone, but I’ve got to keep on with the façade, because that’s what professionals and adults to); and an hour and seventeen minutes to arrive to the cabin (the three men began to doubt the veracity of the operator’s tale about a ‘last-minute inconvenience’; those two were highway snails…) the finally saw the cabin in the distance.

“Are you really writing all it took us to arrive down?” asked Jefferson, once he caught a glimpse of the immigrant’s handwriting (and deciphered it).

Alexander shrugged. “I’m bored” was his excuse. “And Eliza didn’t let me take my laptop with
“Good” chimed in George. “This is a vacation, Alex”

Thomas smirked at the sulk expression that took over his workmate’s face. “Do you know what the word means?” he teased.

“Yeah, and sharing my air with people like you spoils the definition”

“Chill” ordered George, making a face of exhaustion. Alright, this plan’s going to be on my top 5 worst decisions of my life…

The tow truck came to a stop when they were in front of the cabin. Modest yet elegant, as the man who owned it, Alexander thought to himself. The three men got out and bid farewell to the men as they drove back. Thomas and Alex looked at them going, envying their luck.

Each of them took their suitcases out the truck and walked up the stairs to the wooden door. Alexander leveraged the time it took George to find his keys (he’d add that to his list of ‘Signs we ignored about this trip being a horrible idea’ later) to watch his surroundings. The entrance of the cabin had a good sight of the nature that encircled them and a relaxing one of the brilliant and clean lake if one decided to take a seat at the chair by their rights. He noticed the round table by it. He thought it would be a good place to write his (already) chaotic thoughts and read something when he needed to evade on a different way because his written complaints about being unable to work became an useless vex.

The door cracked opened, returning him to the real world. Washington picked up his suitcase again and made way for them to get in first. They obliged, seeing it was senseless to try to convince the man anymore. They stopped, seeing the state the inside of the cabin was in: cushions spread throughout the whole living room, a mountain of clothes on the couch, empty bottles of water and cans of beer on the floor, which was stained by a few puddles of… No, neither wanted to know what it was…

Alexander and Thomas looked at the door by the end of the room, surely the kitchen, and then at the staircase. They weren’t very interested on knowing how those would be.

“Huh, I didn’t remember this disorder the last time I came” commented Washington, his embarrassment (and a bit of confusion) clear in his tone of voice. “Sorry, boys, I’ll clean it”

“Let us help” offered Alexander, immediately. He ignored the eye-roll Thomas dedicated him.

“No, no, you’re guesses. I invited you to a holiday” said George, walking to the couch. “I’ll clean in no time, and we can get ready to go fishing. It’s a nice day outside”
The younger men lowered their glares, containing their opinion on the matter. Washington let his suitcase fall on the top of the mountain—clothes. And it was pushed to the floor by a sudden movement below it. A growl sounded as the pile moved. A grey-haired head came out from it.

“You don’t only avoid my calls, but also throw a suitcase at me while I’m sleeping”

“Mom!” exclaimed George, eyes wide.

“We were few, and the grandma gave birth*…” complained Alexander, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“What are you doing in here?” asked Washington.

Mary put herself on a sitting position, her eyes narrowed and slumbery. “Sleep it off, what do you think?”

“Sleep what off?”

“What do you think?”

“Mom, did you have a party??”

“Several”

“Sev… Why?! And with who?!”

“Because I want to and with my friends”

“You don’t have that!”

“Yes, I do”

“You never introduced them to me”

“Huh, that’s because I want to keep them”

She leaned back on the couch, to see the two men witnessing their exchange of words.

“Huhu, you brought your American version of El Dúo Sacapuntas* with you”

“Mom, don’t start”

“You’ve invaded my cabin, I’ll say whatever I want”

“Ma’am, let’s get along” said Alexander, frowning.

“It’s going to be a hard weekend for everyone” added Thomas, fearing a migraine to appear. It would eventually with Hamilton and Mrs Washington under the same roof as he, but he could always delay it.

“Besides, the cabin’s mine…” muttered Washington.
“Fuck, you’re messing my hangover up…” whined the old lady.

“This is surrealist” kept complaining George, under his breath.

“I wanted to sleep until seven, before the next party started”

“No, there are not going to be more parties!” refused Washington. “Mum, my employees and I came to relax”

“Huh, what a nice pair you decided to relax with”

“Thank you” said both men.

“Boys, go to your rooms” commanded Washington, with a stern face.

They obliged, reluctantly, dragging their suitcases and hearing the quarrel between mother and son. Something good they’d have to take from this, right?

“Huh, again treating your employees as if they were your children… You’ve got a problem. Have you tried to see a shrink?” mocked Mary.

“Mum, don’t start. I came here to relax” talked George, conciliatory.

“You’re free to join the party with your adopted children if you want…”

“It’s not about that, Mum! You shouldn’t be here, and less throwing parties!”

“I’ll do whatever I want to do. This is mine”

“What? I bought it with my money! You weren’t even there when I did so!”

“I’m your mother. All your possessions are mine until you die”

“That’s the other way around!”

“No”

“Mum, the children inherit, that’s the way it works!”

“That has no sense. Why do we have children, then?”

“I don’t know. When it comes to you, I promise I don’t know”

“Because your father messed me up and before I knew I’ve spent three months without my period”

“Mum, I don’t need to hear those things!”

“Son, it’s nature”

“I don’t care, just…” A tired sigh. “Just try not to bother too much”

“Alright”
“Thank you”
“I’ll end the party around 3 am”
“No! There’ll be no party!”
“Yes. There. Will. Be”
“Mum…”
“And shut up already. My head hurts…”
“Of course it must be hurting! Look at all these cans! How much did you drink last night?”
“Not enough if your useless existence woke me up…”
“I can’t believe I’m having this conversation with my seventy-nine-years-old mother…”
“Yes, exactly. I’m seventy-nine, and I can do whatever I want with my life. Do I tell you how to live yours?”
“Yes! Constantly! Persistently!”
“That’s because you’re a mess with legs”
“Enough, Mum! I’m going to clean this and you’re going to call your buddies and tell them the party is cancelled!”
“Yes, and then you wake up”

Thomas sighed as he chose to open a random door.

“This can’t get any worse” he muttered.
“It always can” said Alexander, darkly.

Thomas rolled his eyes, starting to feel fed up. “Well, thank goodness we’ve got your bright personality to cheer us up”

Thomas groaned when he saw the state his room was in. Alexander peeked out, smirking, seeing the whole mess, matching the one downstairs.

“Have fun cleaning that” he said, gaining a dirty look from the older man.
“I hope yours is even worse” spat Thomas.

Alexander looked at the door across Jefferson’s room, and, at last minute, decided to choose
the door next to that one. He smiled with superiority when he saw the only thing he’d have to do was to clean some dust and make the bed. Thomas enraged expression hardened.

“Not such luck, as usual” mocked Alex, throwing the suitcase on the bed. “Ah, look, I’ve got my own private restroom” he commented, as he scanned the room.

“But don’t have a lock” pointed out Thomas. “Just saying that if you keep going on, I’d advise you to sleep with one eye opened”

“I don’t sleep at all, so not a problem” retorted Alexander, walking to the bathroom. “Try not to break your back while moping, you’re reaching a certain age” he ridiculed again.

Thomas frowned in his direction. “Yeah, you try not to slip and break your neck in the shower, gremlin”

“A shower sounds nice, actually” nodded Alexander, opening the wardrobe to see if there were any towels there. “That way I could wash your falseness off”

“Alright. I’m going to use disinfectant, just a warn so you don’t poison yourself, resurrected louse”

“How many things did you have to pawn to be able to buy the bottle, new poor?”

“Don’t tempt me. I’ve got a new attic full of books that presumably belonged to you”

“Did Henry let those there??”

“That part of the house hasn’t been touched in ages…”

“Fucking shame… Don’t you dare to touch those until I see what they are”

“Bother me this weekend and I’ll sell them online”

“Do that, and I’ll break the lease in pieces”

“According to you, that’s illegal”

“Oh, don’t send Jay after me, Jefferson, please…” begged Alexander, with a cruel mocking tone. “I’m so, so afraid…”

Thomas snapped without thinking. “For what I know, you are. Of courtrooms at much”

Thomas smirked at Alexander’s sudden enraged expression.

“Let me tell you something, you goddamned son of a bitch…!” he began, raising his voice.

Hamilton shut up when he heard the tank from the closed bathroom. The door at his backs opened, revealing a naked old man walking out the bathroom. He passed the two startled and shocked men by, smiling politely at them.
“Good morning, sirs” he greeted, making his way down the hall and stairs.

“… And just like that, I turned completely straight” declared Alexander.

“Mum, who’s this?!” they heard George exclaiming, and it was easy to imagine him with their same astonished expression.

“George, have I talked to you about my new sex buddy?”

“MUM!”

“Gosh, it’s gonna be a hellishly long weekend” muttered Alexander, closing the door of his room quietly.

For the first time, Thomas had to agree with him. Not that he was going to admit it.

Alexander refused to go back to the orphanage a long time ago. Without his brother there, he was alone. Not that he wasn’t feeling alone before James left, but physically alone now. And it made him feel emptier than before.

Of course, he was still fifteen. Though his mind was older, legally he couldn’t decide for himself. He had to have a legal tutor, a guardian, someone who wanted to take care of him.

“But I want to take care of him!”

Edward heard his father screamed from the entrance of his local, on the level below them. He and Alexander were trying to focus their attention on the TV, but the fight between the two adults downstairs seemed more interesting.

“Mr Stevens, please, be reasonable…”

Alexander cringed at the voice. That woman, the orphanage owner, had come several times, trying to make Alexander come to his senses and go back to the orphanage, where he would be assigned a good family. Or that’s what she tries to make me think, he always told Edward, bitterly. If that woman really wanted Alexander to live with a good family until he reached legal age, why
didn’t she let him live with the Stevens, who had been the only ones who accepted him, even before the whole family tragedy started?

“Just tell me what I’ve got to fill so he can come live with me” Mr Stevens tried once again.

“Mr Stevens, please… You’re already lucky that nobody has called whom you and I know by now for raising a child on your own” replied the lady, with a condescending tone.

Edward clenched his fists. “That stupid…” he muttered, prepared to get up.

“Let it be” advised Alexander.

“But…!” wanted to argue Edward.

“It’s not worth it”

“Leave my son out of this!” almost hollered Mr Stevens, startling the boys. “He’s a healthy and good child, just as Alexander! They get along just well, and Alexander came here by own will! Aren’t you supposed to look for good homes for children?! Well, I think Alex made the choice for you already!”

Edward smiled proudly at his father’s words. Alexander looked with sober expression in the direction the voices were coming from, waiting for the lady’s answer.

“Alexander is underage, Mr Stevens” There it was. “He can’t choose for himself”

Mr Stevens hummed. “That kid is cleverer than any of you would ever admit. Cleverer than any of us, of you, intolerant hustlers”

The silence that followed felt heavy. Alexander couldn’t breathe properly until he heard the lady speaking again.

“You’ll hear from me very soon, sir” she stated, venom in her voice.

Mr Stevens slammed the door shut, and Edward turned on the volume of the TV again, pretending they hadn’t heard anything. The boy threw a sideways glare to Alex. They had known each other since kids, but it wasn’t until now when they felt so attached to one another. Edward was starting to feel him like the brother he didn’t have. He knew Alex felt the same way though he didn’t show his affection openly. Edward knew when people pestered them about being true brothers for how they looked alike and Alex never said anything about it.

Though right now, it was as if Alexander didn’t like to say a word about anything. He had
not only locked up his heart, he had sealed his lips as well. And that was worrisome. Edward still remembered all those times Alex got in trouble for speaking too much, for retorting to teachers and adults. He missed that fire, that strength Alex always carried with him in anything he did, in anything he said. Edward never lost hope to see that burning passion again in his dear friend.

“Everything will be fine, Alexander. You’ll see” promised Edward eventually, with an honest smile on his lips and a soft glare.

The teenager flinched at his words. Edward didn’t know why. Alexander locked eyes with him, and Edward could see a nervous beam shining in his eyes. Alexander frowned and got up, not giving anything more as a response.

The law firm was closed when Aaron arrived. He couldn’t say he was surprised, but very pissed off. He didn’t want to go back home. So, he spent the whole morning trying to do everything he could to delay his return.

He went to a café to have a proper breakfast and work a little bit; he went to a library where he spent most part of the morning and read around six books, under the curious look of the librarian he managed to ignore; he went to buy whatever groceries they needed back at home when he realised it was getting late and didn’t want to arouse suspicions. Theodosia had a very strong sixth sense, and Aaron, a great despise for confrontations.

While driving back, he started to think about how ridiculous he was being. Augustine was only sixteen, he was living a new life and he needed time to adjust. Aaron was sure everything that had happened that morning were just coincidences. With a new and more positive attitude, he parked inside the garage of his house and made his way into the house by its door.

“I’m home!” he announced, walking in the kitchen to put the bags on the table.

Theo appeared at the doorframe. “Daddy”

“Hi, sweetie”

“The invader’s in your workroom”

“What did we tell you about… Wait, what?” he asked, freezing in spot.

“The kid’s in your workroom” repeated the girl, walking in, pulling a chair out and jumping on it. “Have you bought cookies?” she asked, innocently.
Aaron never responded her, as he sprinted out the kitchen, dropping the fruit he had been putting inside the fridge. He felt his heart beating against his ribcage as he ran to the opened door of his workroom. A shiver going down his spine and anxiety taking over his body.

He hated when somebody touched his things. He didn’t want to know what the kid must be doing there.

He stopped at the doorframe, panting and with a panicked expression.

The room seemed to be fine. The only thing was that the window was open, but the rest looked as he had left it the night prior. Aaron found his stepson cleaning his bookshelf, with a focused expression. The kid turned around, startled by his presence.

“Ah, Aaron, good afternoon” he greeted.

“What are you doing?” asked Aaron, directly.

“I was cleaning the house. Your workroom was the last room” explained the teenager. “Though, it was also the easier. You’re very organised” he complimented.

That didn’t make the event better for Aaron, who moved uncomfortably in his spot. “Yeah, thanks… That’s… That’s because I clean it” he began to explain, with as much tact as he could. “I don’t like people touching my things”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t know!” apologised the teenager, sounding honest.

“Well, it’s alright… Just… Don’t do it again”

“I’ll remember” he promised.

“Good… Now, if you may…” Aaron made a vague gesture with his hand to let him know he could get out. As soon as possible, please.

“Shall I let you these to you?” asked Augustine, showing him some papers he’d let on one part of the shelf.

“Yes, yes, just…” tried to say Aaron, his hands trembling a bit for nervousness.

And then, a draft came through the window, making said papers fly out the workroom. Aaron felt his heart in his throat as he hissed under his breath and ran to the window, seeing his paperwork flying away.
“Oh, what a bad luck” lamented Augustine, not changing his tone of voice one bit. “Sorry”

Was that a smug smile what Aaron was hearing in his voice? No, no, it couldn’t be… Aaron felt a tick in his right eyebrow.

“It’s alright” he lied.

“Well, I’ll leave you to do your things in peace”

“Okay, see you at dinnertime”

Aaron heard his footsteps growing distant. He kept looking at the horizon, though there was no trace of his work anymore. Aaron sighed and let his head drop, in defeat. He heard another series of footsteps, stopping by his side. He saw, with the corner of his eye, his daughter, looking at the same direction he’d been for a good minute, eating a packet of cookies.

“So, when will you kick him out?” she deadpanned.

That time, Aaron really considered it.

They had finished cleaning up the house after another couple of hours. And, well, let’s say they saw some things they wanted to forget.

Washington cursed his mother’s name, while the old lady took a long nap upstairs, in one of the rooms by the end of the hallway. Thomas and Alexander were glad to have chosen the first ones they saw. Washington dismissed them to do whatever they wanted as he prepared everything for them to go fishing for the dinner.

Both men locked up in their rooms without sharing a word.

Alexander spent the time they had to wait for their boss to call them writing. Well, Eliza wouldn’t complain about him not using his diary anymore. The list of signs of why this trip was a horrible idea grew at the minutes passed by. Alexander only stopped when he heard one of the doors
being opened and closed, followed by footsteps.

“Seems like Grannynator woke up” he whispered.

The nickname made him remember his phone. He opened the suitcase (still by the feet of the bed, why move it when nobody else was going to use that room?) and unlocked his phone. He smiled at the messages waiting for him to be read. A warm sensation grow inside his chest. Since he came to America, he had learned what friendship was like. One of the reasons why he never thought about his island or coming back no matter what. One of the most important ones, actually, followed by the family he’d created there and the work he had.

He frowned at that.

The work he used to have.

Jefferson’s comment came back and he did a great effort for not getting up and give the secretary a big piece of his mind.

He decided to answer to his friends, and if he had time, get it back at him.

He talked with Eliza about their children for a bit; the conversation only being interrupted by a call. He answered immediately.

“Aaron, what’s wrong?” he asked, automatically.

“Hi, Alex. Do you have a moment?” said his friend. For anyone else, he’d sound normal, but Alexander sensed the slight annoyance in his tone.

“Of course, what happened?” he asked, again.

“Don’t get offended, but…”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “What did Augustine do, now?”

“How do you know?”

“Aaron, you only say that ‘not take offense’ shit when you want to talk about something personal with someone”

“… … I hate you”
“Sure. So, what is it?”

“First of all, wipe that grin off your face”

“I was not smiling” lied the immigrant.

“And second of all… Have you ever acted nice with someone so you could mess their lives up?”

“Funny you ask me this, because I did something similar to you when I knew you”

“Alexander, I’m being serious right now”

“So am I. Don’t you remember that time, at the first law firm I worked at, when our boss did that thing of giving us present-baskets?”

“Yeah?”

“And you were given the one with those strange-looking chocolates and rotten apples?”

“Gosh, yes. There were a couple of loafs of bread with mildew” remembered Aaron, disgusted.

Alexander smirked through the phone. “That was all me”

“What?”

“Yeah. I was angry because you won more cases than me that month”

“Alexander, what the hell?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a problem with my competitive attitude…” he admitted.

“How could you do that?” inquired Aaron, now curious.

“Let’s say I changed the things in that basket when I knew which one would be yours”

“…”

“By the way, Betsey and I enjoyed those strawberries. Thanks”

“Thanks?” echoed Aaron, dumbfounded. “Alexander, how in hell did you do all that?”

The immigrant shrugged. “The power of my ire?” he guessed.

“Sweet Jesus…”

“The case was that, do you remember how I came to you, saying I was sorry?”

“Yes, it was one of the few times back then when I thought you were a decent person”

“Well, you’ve got your answer”

“Fuck…”

“There was that time, as well, when I was in the orphanage, and the Principal was a bitch, and I changed his Aquarium for vodka, on the same night she had to do a speech”

“My God…”
“Best Christmas party ever in that orphanage, I swear”

“Where did you get vodka at that age???”

Hamilton shrugged again. “Back there, the only law we followed was the Law of the Street”

“You’re such a thug” he commented, the eye-roll clear in his eyes. “So, this kind of behaviour is normal among…?” Aaron struggled to find the right word.

“Kids forgotten by society? Yeah, sorta. I was one of the calmest ones when it came to mischiefs”

“I didn’t want to call them that, but alright” frowned Aaron. “And when did you stop being a naughty?”

“Aaron, I’ve just told you I gave you rotten fruit and mildewed bread for winning more cases than me at one point. What do you think?”

“Shoot…”

“Yeah, you’re in some deep shit back there”

“And do you think I should tell Theodosia?”

“Yes, if you want her to divorce you and to never see your daughter again, you surely should do that crappy idea”

“Alexander, you’re not helping”

“Call another person, what do you want from me now?”

“A good advice! That’s your duty as my friend!”

“My duty as a friend is standing your complaints until you feel better. If you want good advices, you go to a therapist”

“I don’t even know why I called…” Aaron’s voice sounded muffled, for sure as he buried his face in his hands.

“True. Really, you just made two choices in your whole life, and both are shit”

“Alexander!”

“I won’t apologise for what it’s true!” Alexander defended himself.

“What have I done to deserve this?” lamented Aaron.

“ Fucking a married woman with a child”

“She was unhappy?”

“Hey, buddy, I’m not judging…”

“Thank God!” spat Aaron, sarcastic.

“…there was a time when I also got in between a couple”

“Really?”
“Yeah”

“Did you ever get caught?”

“Yes. But the boyfriend didn’t do anything to me, because we caught the girl with another boy. Turned out she was cheating on both of us.”

“God…”

“Come to think of it, all my partners have cheated on me”

“Eliza as well?”

“No, she hasn’t… yet”

“Be more optimist. She’s a nice woman”

“Yes, but… there’s a reason why I spend so many nights working at the office more than at home, apart from my workaholism”

“Jesus, Alex!”

“I’m just saying that after Laurens, who was the first serious partner I ever had, cheated on me, I expect anything”

“You should talk it out with someone. That’s something you’ve got stuck in your head”

“Yes, I know, but I don’t want to waste my time talking about my life with someone who would pretend to care… And pay them for it”

“Yes, but… Wait, why are we talking about your insecurities? I was the one with the problem!”

“I don’t have insecurities”

“The hell you don’t!”

“And this is what conversations are about. If you had them more often, you wouldn’t be this confused”

“You know what? I made a mistake by calling you…”

“Yep”

“Do you at least have my cases on your laptop?”

“Yes, why?”

“Could you send them back to me? I’ve gotta refill all that again”

“I don’t have my laptop, Eliza didn’t let me take it”

“Fuck”

“But you can ask her for that. She won’t mind”

“Okay, thanks”
“And you can take a look at what she’s doing. I don’t want another incident like last time”

“Are you ever going to fix that wall?”

“Nah. And why do you want those papers? I thought you finished them yesterday”

“Yeah, but… But Augustine was cleaning and he opened the window and they flew away”

He burst out laughing. “Hahahaha, he’s got a new fan”

“Alexander!”

Knock, knock.

“Come in!” called Alexander.

Washington’s head stuck out his door. “Son, get ready, we’re going”

“Home?”

“Fishing” responded George, stubbornly.

Alex sighed with resignation. “Alright… And don’t call me son”

George ignored him. “See you downstairs” he closed the door.

“Aaron, I’ve gotta hang up. But feel free to text me all your stepson’s ideas”

“Yes, yes, I’m gonna send you a very nice text now. Bye”

“Bye”

As soon as Alex hung up the phone, he saw a notification of new message from Aaron. He opened it, seeing a series of middle finger emojis.

“This man has no sense of humour…”

They went down a path the back of the cabin had, and that directed them to a little pier where an old white and red boat waited for them. The smell of water filled their nostrils and the natural quietness gave the three men a moment of peace before reaching the boat. Alexander ended with his calm when he looked up and saw a series of clouds gathering in the distance. He shivered and looked away, focusing his attention on Washington, who was frowning at the only boat, floating
expectantly.

“Is something the matter, sir?” asked Alex.

“I’m sure there were two boats in here” said George, confused. “This one is the old one, I bought a motor boat last summer…”

They heard the sound of a motor in the distance. The three men half-closed his eyes when they saw Mary in the distance, on a bigger and brighter boat of colour blue. She waved at them.

“I decided to join you!” shouted the old lady, with a smirk on her face.

“Good, Mum…” responded Washington, trying his best to smile at her. He faced the old boat and sighed. “What can we do… We’ll have to use this one”

“I did it to take revenge of you fucking my parties up, so you know!” shouted Mary.

“Yes, Mum, I know!” George screamed back, now with an angry frown.

“Good” replied the lady, smiling more widely.

“Still thinking this was a good idea?” asked Alexander.

“We still have time to go back before the sun goes down” insisted Thomas.

“No, no. It’s not that much of a trouble!” said Washington, as stubborn as ever. “We’re going to fish and to have a great time! It doesn’t matter if the boat has no motor, we’re young and eager”

“Not that much” complained the two workers.

Washington rowed, huffing and puffing, red in the face, and complaining under his breath.

“The universe thinks he can fuck my plans up… Well, take that”

Thomas and Alexander exchanged a look of worry and made sure to sit as close to the sides of the boat as possible, in case they had to jump and swim back.

“Here” declared George, stopping at one point. He panted a few times. “Alright, now…” he stopped mid-sentence, looking at one empty spot of the boat.

“Sir?” asked Alexander, a bit uneasy.

“I forgot the boxes back at the pier” said George, with a tiny unsettling smile on his face.
Washington made all the way back to the pier, his face becoming redder and his whisper more difficult to understand. There, they found the two boxes (one full of decoys, some tools and spares; the other one being a first-aid kit). They put them inside the boat and Washington rowed all the way back.

“Now” he said, panting more heavily than before. “Now, the only thing we gotta do is put on caps and vests”

George turned around as he explained. The other two men saw him turning rigid suddenly. They waited a moment, before seeing their boss wasn’t moving.

“Sir, is everything alright?” asked Thomas, this time.

“It’s empty…” whispered Washington.

“What?” asked the secretary.

“I put those to clean while you were preparing!” shouted Mary, in the distance, already fishing though looking at them with the corner of her eye.

George had a tic in his right eye. “Thank you, Mum” he replied, not sounding sincere at all.

Washington rowed all the way back to the pier, jumped out the boat, ran to the cabin and returned with the clothes they needed, throwing them inside the still open box. He rowed to the same spot. Alex and Thomas frowned in concern at how much he was panting now.

“Alright, now, now” he nodded, taking in a deep breath. “Now, put these on” he ordered, passing the two men their respective vests. “And now, we take the decoy and put it on…” Washington began to look everywhere. Without erasing his serene smile, he asked. “Where are the rods?”

“Wasn’t that Hamilton’s thing?” asked Thomas, throwing a sideways look to his workmate.

“No” replied Alex, automatically. “Nobody told me anything”

“You were the last one to get out, and the rods were by the door”

“And if you saw them, why didn’t you bring them?”

“Because I thought the last one would do it”
“What kind of idiocy is that? If you see something you know you’ll need, you grab it!”

“Sir!” they said at the same time, as two little children who wanted to know who was in the right by their parent. They were shocked to see Washington still frozen with that serene smile, looking at the empty spot where he had wanted to find the rods. “Sir?” they repeated, a bit fearfully.

… … … … …

George’s head dropped, and he trembled a bit while he sobbed silently, complaining with an inaudible voice.

He rowed back to the pier, this time a bit slower and serious. He went back to the cabin, almost dragging his feet on the way back to the boat. He sighed. Now, now, everything’s in place, he encouraged himself.

“Alright, let’s go, boys” he said, sounding cheerful once again.

“Sir?” said Alex, raising his hand.

“Yes, son?”

“Can I go to the bathroom, please?”

“… …”

“In all honesty, I want to go to” said Thomas.

“… … Didn’t I tell you to go before leaving the house?” asked George, tightening the grip on the rods.

“Yes, but with so many coming and going…” excused Alexander.

“And whose fucking fault was that…?” muttered Washington, feeling a bit enraged. “Alright, go” he conceded, eventually. He grabbed the two men by the arm and whispered, darkly. “I want you back in five, or else” he threatened.

His employees swallowed and nodded. Washington let them go.

They came back three minutes later.

Washington rowed back to the same spot.
With a sigh, he started to put the decoy on the hook as his employees did as much and fished in silence.

By the time dinnertime arrived, the three men had caught a total of four fishes. Thomas kept to himself that they could’ve done it better if it hadn’t been for Mary, who decided to turn on the motor of her boat whenever some of them seemed to have caught something or passed them by at full speed, grabbing the fighting fish from the hook and add it to her pile (which consisted in eight fishes she claimed she would eat on her own). He felt his boss knew this as well but decided not to fight the old lady and simply let her keep looking at them, not pretending to be fishing.

Thomas found curious how silent Hamilton had been during the whole endeavour. Washington also threw a few glares in his direction, expecting a comment, a witticism, a childish complaint, anything. Thomas then felt the oldest man’s eyes on him and pretended not noticing. He also ignored the knot in his gut as his sentence of before persisted in coming back to his mind. Whatever was happening to Hamilton was not his fault; it wasn’t like the immigrant were any more tactful than he was while arguing. Hamilton had thick skin.

As Thomas tried to convince himself, Washington finally noted how Alexander was throwing nervous glares to the clouds gathering and getting closer to where they were. He remembered the youngest man’s phobia and frowned, in concern.

“Alright, I think we’ve done enough for the day” he said, sounding casual. “I bet we’re all hungry?” He received a slight nod from each man. “Then, let’s get going”

The sound of the motor sounded again. George rolled his eyes, remembering all those times his mother had claimed to have been losing her hearing, but decided to ignore it. It had been a quite peaceful evening, and he wanted to end the day on a good…

The three men were suddenly bathed by a wave Mary had made, by passing them by at full speed to reach the pier. They stood there, soaked to the bone and in shock. Mary’s cackling woke them up, and they turned their heads to her, seeing her collecting her stolen fishes.

“I’m going to make my dinner first” she declared.

None of them dared to contradict her. A shower would do them good in the meantime,
August 31st would be another date that would burn in Alexander’s soul, would be another tattoo on his wall of disgraces.

The day August 31st everyone awoke to the news of a strong storm coming to the island. They recommended staying at home and not going out unless strictly necessary. Schools and some shops closed their doors to the public.

The red alarm changed its speech, and in the afternoon ordered no one could leave under any circumstances.

Alexander spent the day with growing anxiety in his guts. His mother taught him to follow his intuition, and that was exactly what he was doing.

“This is not a storm” he muttered, his eyes locked on the grey and yellow clouds that grew at each passing second.

“It doesn’t look as a snowfall” joked Edward.

Alex frowned in his direction. “I’m serious, Neddy. Those clouds are not good”

A loud thump made the boys jump. Alexander paid attention at the wind that hit and mistreated the exterior of the house. He trembled in his spot and embraced himself, frowning his lips now as well.

“It’ll be okay, boys” Mr Stevens said, walking into the living room. “The weatherman said it would be a one night thing”

“One night is enough” commented Alexander, darkly.

“Jesus, Alex, do you get paid for being the pessimistic cousin of Oscar the Grouch?” complained Edward.

Mr Stevens smacked his son slightly on the head. “I pay you both a monthly wage for helping me with the housework”
“You had to set the table today” reminded Alexander, with a wee smile.

“This is abuse of power…” muttered Edward, walking to the kitchen.

Mr Stevens’ smile fell when he saw Alexander’s worried expression as he looked out the window. He smiled softly as he walked to him. He put a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“Come on, son, let’s go have dinner” he said, gently. “It’ll be a bit of rain, TV always exaggerates everything and we all know it” Alexander moved uncomfortably in his spot. “Everything will be fine, Alexander. You’ll see. Tomorrow everything will be as if nothing happened” promised Mr Stevens.

Alex flinched at the well-known sentence and wrinkled the sleeves of his thin t-shirt as he kept embracing himself. “Alright” he gave in. “But I’m not your son”

Mr Stevens laughed at his stubbornness. “Alright, sorry” He clapped his back, encouragingly. “Come on, before Edward eats it all”

“I heard that!” the boy said from the kitchen, offended.

Mr Stevens laughed and Alexander allowed himself to smile, despite the growing foreboding he felt spreading all over his chest.

Alexander embraced himself, cursing himself as he felt his body shaking without need to feel any cold. Those clouds were now above them, making the night darker than it already was, hiding the moon and the stars. Alex swallowed. This is not Nevis, he repeated, as a mantra. This is not Nevis, if something dangerous were about to happen, we’d be informed.

“If you stay close to the window with your hair wet, you’d fall sick” said Mary, as she scarfed down the fish she had made all for herself.

Alexander looked at her, finally focusing on something else. “Thank you, ma’am” he muttered, turning around, the nervousness following him.

“I need you with strengths, so your fights entertain me” kept saying the lady.

“… We’re not the circus, ma’am” complained Alex, walking directly into the kitchen.

“Huh, ask your workmates, to see what they think”
Alexander didn’t respond this time, his throat constricting and feeling lightheaded. He ignored Thomas, trying to cook the fish he hadn’t cleaned yet, and made his way directly to the windows. He made sure they were properly locked several times, trying to control his breathing and act as normally as he could until he was alone in his room until tomorrow.

This is not Nevis, he thought again, taking in a deep breath. Here hurricanes don’t happen just like that… Washington wouldn’t have brought us here if he’d known a dangerous storm was coming… But what if he didn’t know? What if he hadn’t watched the news? What if…?

He grabbed the sink below the window, feeling his legs failing him. He straightened himself as well as he could, hoping Jefferson hadn’t seen him, of all people. A series of muttered curses told him the older man had other things on mind right then.

“We’d want to have dinner tonight, if possible” he commented, trying to keep his mind busy with something that weren’t the dark clouds outside. This isn’t Nevis, it’ll be a faint rain.

“Leave me alone…” Thomas complained, not dignifying Hamilton’s remark with a look in his direction.

Alexander arched an eyebrow when he saw the secretary moving the knife from one part of the fish to the other, a nauseous expression on his face and a lost shine in his eyes. Cursing under his breath once again, Thomas let the knife aside and hesitated in touching the fish or not. Alexander couldn’t help the eye-roll, but maintained his mouth shut.

That was until he saw the man grabbing the fish’s head and moving its mouth, almost gagging. He threw a few glares to his phone – which Alexander had missed seeing when he entered the room – and Thomas grabbed the knife again. He moved it from head to fishtail. Again, Thomas moved the fish’s mouth, opening just one bit and then taking his glare away from it.

“Are you going to clean it or to ask it for a blowjob?” snapped Alexander, finally.

Thomas’ face reddened at that and he whipped around. “Why do you always have to talk like that?”

“It’s something that happens to me when someone gets on my nerves”

“Go to another room, then. You’re disturbing in here”

“Did you have another servant taking care of the food when you live in your personal bubble?” he asked, half-mocking, half-serious.

“Yes, and that one was called ‘Get out of my kitchen before I stab you’”

“Not your kitchen”
“Listen, if you’re so smart, do it yourself” proposed Thomas, passing him the knife.

“And then I’m the one who’s five? That trick of annoying people so they do your dirty job is ridiculous when you already need a cane to walk”

“That happened only two weeks, and because I sprained my ankle with that stupid step” explained Thomas, offended.

“Should’ve bought yourself a crutch… Always getting yourself noticed”

“Look who talked, the personification of discretion” He passed the knife to him. “There. You’ve always been better at this”

Alexander narrowed his eyes. “And what’s ‘this’ for you, exactly?”

Thomas held up his hands in surrender. “The only thing I’m saying is that you’ve always been awkwardly comfortable when it comes to…” He pointed his head towards the fish. “Well, with killing”

“Excuse me?!” exclaimed Alexander, raising the knife dangerously in his direction.

“See?” said Thomas, taking a step backwards. “And this’s not the only time. Don’t you remember what happened with that rat?”

Adams had been complaining about strange noises the week he came to work (everyone suspected he had decided to come all days just to bother them with the issue). One day, Hercules joined him, with the support of Lafayette, who also claimed to have heard something from the ceiling.

Maria was sent to see what the matter was. She stepped on Adams’ desk, ignoring the complaining of the man about how she was staining his workplace.

“You can’t call workplace to a place you’ve only filled half of a document in the whole year, Adams”

“You’ll clean that”

“Yeah, bullocks”

She flipped the bird at him and the lawyer stormed out the office, red with rage.
Maria’s shrill scream was heard throughout the whole building, making everyone to run upstairs, alarmed. Adams stayed in the breakroom, eating a snack.

“Huh, screw her”

Aaron heard him say. He was the last one to arrive and see the receptionist in Peggy’s arms, being comforted as she trembled, her eyes squeezed shut.

“Maria, are you alright?” asked Aaron, concerned.

“There’s a rat!” she shouted, completely disgusted.

Peggy pushed her suddenly, making her hit the closed door at her backs. “What?! Why didn’t you say so?!” she said, screaming as she looked everywhere.

“Peggy, calm down…”

Angelica’s advice was ignored as her sister ran away, pushing everyone in her way. The vice president sighed.

“Thomas, take care of this” she ordered.

Thomas made a face of repugnance. “Why me?”

“I’m not going to do it!” hurried to say Maria. “I hate rats!”

“I hate them as well” argued the secretary.

“But you’re the man”

“Huh, equality how?” he complained.

“Thomas, don’t be a demagogue” admonished Angelica. “Take the shovel and get rid of it”

Lafayette went to fetch the shovel and passed it to his friend, who nodded as a ‘thank you’ but kept the grimace. Swallowing, he opened the door slowly. He spotted the too-big-for-his-liking ball of dark fur in one corner. Thomas felt his stomach turning in nausea as he stepped in, shovel in trembling hands. He looked over his shoulder, seeing the whole staff there.

“If you were going to be there, why don’t any other do it?” he asked, annoyed.

“No” they said in unison, shaking their heads.
Madison proposed to go with him, but stopped advancing when he reached the doorframe. Thomas took a shaky breath in.

“Alright… Come here…” he cooed calmly.

“Do you want some cheese?” asked Laurens.

“Don’t feed it, it’d come back!” reprehended Angelica.

“Gross, take it out already!” hurried Adams, with repulse.

His loud voice made the rat to turn around and ran to the other side of the room. The whole staff screamed, sickened.

“Kill it, kill it!” shouted Hercules.

“Nooo! Take it out!” screamed Lafayette.

“Take it with the shovel and take it out” proposed Laurens.

“No, no, it’ll come back! It knows the address already!” shouted Maria, terrified.

“Thomas, do something!” hurried Madison.

“Hit it, hit it!” shouted Adams, upset. “Move, you idiot!”

“I can’t, it’s looking at me!” snapped Thomas, when he heard the insult.

In between the whole racket, Alexander appeared in the staircase.

“What’s all this noise?!” he asked, arms in akimbo.

“Alex, there’s a rat” explained Laurens.

“So?”

“We can’t take it out” proceeded Hercules.

Alexander looked inside the office, seeing Thomas in one corner and the rat in the other. He huffed and get in the room, pushing Madison to the side.
“Bothering me while I was working for a fucking rat” he complained, striding to where Thomas was standing. “Give me that!” he commanded, taking the shovel away from his hands. “When you see a rat, first thing you gotta do is smashing it” he explained, as he did so. The rat shrieked in pain, as Alex hit it as one’d hit a ball with their bat. “So, you daze it… Wait”

He hit it again, harder, when he saw it trying to escape. The staff looked at the scene with their jaws dropped to the floor and a frown of discomfort. Thomas began to pale as he saw it all first in line.

“And then, you cut its head off” kept saying Alexander, raising and dropping the shovel as if it were a guillotine.

Maria had started crying, her eyes squeezed shut as she pressed her face against Aaron’s chest. The lawyer barely took her any mind as he support himself with the wall at his backs. Even Angelica was starting to wobble on shaking legs. Madison put the hand he had his handkerchief upon his mouth, gagging. Thomas shook in his spot, keeping his balance by putting one hand on Adams’ desk.

“There” concluded Alexander, when he’d finished the work.

He tossed the shovel in Thomas’ direction. The man grabbed it again, hesitant.

“And now” Alexander kept explaining, as if it were nothing. “you throw this way, alright?”

Thomas nodded weakly.

“Good… Oh, but not the head. Let it out, so any other rat that dares to come here gets the message”

He clapped his hand as he made his way back to the door, where everybody was looking at him, terrified. He looked at both his wrists and exhaled in annoyance.

“What time’s it?”

“Almost 5.30” answered Madison, with tiny voice.

“What?” asked Hamilton, raising his voice and frowning deeper.
“Almost 5.30” repeated the accountant, as loud as he could, shaking like a leaf.

“Talk louder, god damnit” reproached Hamilton, enraged.

“Please, don’t hurt me…” muttered Madison, pressing himself against the doorframe.

“Fuck, I agreed on going to an animal shelter with Eliza in ten” he complained, trotting downstairs. “Fucking preppies, always afraid of getting their hands dirty” they heard him say, under his breath, derogatorily.

Everybody looked at him go. Thomas stood where he was, pale as a ghost and trying not to look at the corner where the corpse of the rat was. Maria’s sobs the only sound they could hear. Laurens seemed the only one unmoved by what’d happened.

“Is it normal that he turned me on right now?” he asked, confused and worried.

“But did we ever see any more rats around or what?” spat Alexander, indignant. “Always trying to make me look bad”

“You don’t need me for that”

“I don’t need you for anything, actually”

Thomas frowned offended at that. “Good, in that case you’ll be able to cook this without my company”

Alex tried not to let Thomas see how the idea of being left alone again with his paranoia made him feel. The last person he wanted to know how uneasy he was feeling was Jefferson. Shit, he wouldn’t like the man knowing even if they were the only two survivors in the whole planet during a storm.

“No. If you teach a man to fish, he will eat his whole life” he lectured, trying to talk with his usual condescendence.

“I’d rather not to that in my life ever again” admitted Thomas.

“It’s easy” insisted Alex, now more focus on the task at hand. “You just have to remove the scales first and then, use the spoon or your fingers to take out its innards…”

Thomas made a gagging sound before storming out the kitchen. Alexander looked at the door
with eyes half-closed.

“Why do I always end up with wimps?” he moaned.

It happened in a blink of an eye. Literally.

Alexander didn’t have time to do much when he was woken up abruptly, Edward screaming at him to get ready, that they needed to leave. Mr Stevens had collected as many things as he could as the house filled of water.

Alexander’s memories were blurred from there on.

The first level got flooded.

The windows shook at the rhythm of the celestial drums.

The chorus of heartrending screams.

The flying objects getting lost into the unforgiven eye that looked down at them, judging.

The bodies floating motionless or being dragged by the raging water.

Edward pulling him to the last level of the house to escape through the skylight of the attic.

The house trembling around them.

The wind roaring.
The merciless water.

He trapped under the now fallen pieces of the ceiling.

The unconsciousness taking over him.

The lesson of how equalitarian death was.

The welcoming feeling Alexander had towards it.

But Alexander Hamilton couldn’t seem to die.

He woke up a few days later, in an unknown white room.

“You’re awake” a gentle voice said from his left side.

Alexander turned his head slowly, his vision blurred, his breathing quivering. Between heavy eyelids and the annoying bright sunlight, he got to see a woman all dressed in white, with little but lively eyes and brunette hair tied in a low bun. She was smiling gently at him.

“How are you feeling?” she asked sweetly. Alex felt her warm hand on his cold one.

“Where am I?” he said, his words slurred as his voice felt cotton-like.

“You’re in the hospital, sweetheart” responded the nurse.

“The hospital?” he repeated, in a low tone.

Everything came back in a flash. His eyes widened, panic spread on his chest and squeezed his heart. Edward. Mr Stevens. Where...?
“Please, lie down!” the nurse begged, putting a soft hand on his chest and pushing him back slowly. “Mr Stevens and Edward are stable. In fact, the boy has been asking for you for the past days” she explained, trying to calm him down.

Alex blinked. Did he say their names out loud? His brain-mouth filter was failing again. “But… But where…” he tried to ask, being interrupted by a coughing fit.

The nurse was rapid enough to pass him the glass of water that had been resting on the table beside the bed.

“Here, drink something” she said, rubbing his back affectionately. “There you go… Calm down, you had a concussion and a few broken ribs and sprained your ankle” she explained.

Well, that explain the horrible pain he was starting to feel.

“What... How many...? Who...?” he didn’t finish formulating a question when another one popped up in his head.

The nurse smiled softly once again, and Alexander knew that was the only thing keeping him sane before his current situation.

“I'm Mrs Nightingale*” she introduced herself first. “The ceiling of your house fell while you were trying to escape, as your friend Edward told me. When they managed to get you out, they rushed you to the hospital” she began to explain, the images slowly coming back to Alexander and making his anxiety grow. She grabbed his free hand once again and squeezed it reassuringly. “You are a very lucky boy, Alex”

Alexander squeezed the hand back, though in a furious manner. “I wouldn’t say ‘lucky’” he spat.

Nightingale blinked, confused. “You didn’t drown. You survived almost a whole day under a ceiling. You've been asleep, unable to eat or drink for five days, and you've still got enough strengths to pick up a fight” She added the last part jokingly. Alexander smiled slightly and she counted it as a victory. “You are lucky to be alive, Alexander” she stated.

And there was so much gentleness and kindness in her tone of voice that Alexander almost believed her words.
Why Alexander never listened to his guts when he could be the one affected? Then, some dared to call him selfish…

“Wish I fucking were” he complained, tossing his sheets aside and walking out his room.

He could hear the raindrops hitting the windows and the wooden house shaking for the lashing of the wind. He advanced through the dark hallway, a hand supporting him on the wall by his right and then gripping the handrail, his knuckles turning white.

*The corpses.*

*People drowning.*

*People he knew.*

*People he hadn’t had the chance to know.*

*Good people.*

*Bad people.*

*Death doesn’t discriminate.*

“Stop…” he ordered to his rebellious mind, squeezing his grip and his eyes shut, the air trapped in his throat. He took in a deep, shaky breath. “*Un, deux, trois…*” He breathed out, his legs trembling beneath him. “*Quatre, cinq, six…* Come on, Alexander, put it together…”

He went downstairs, finding the living/dining room in complete darkness. The door shook violently and Alexander swallowed. He walked to it, trembling uncontrollably as he embraced himself.
The first floor flooded.

He grabbed the knob and turned it, trying to push the door open with no avail. It was locked.

Nedly screaming for him to wake up.

How did he fall asleep when his sixth sense told him something was wrong?

Alexander exhaled through his nostrils, a fleeting calmness invading him. He turned on his heels and went directly to each window the room had, making sure on more than one occasion that the windows were properly locked. He used his entire strength to try and make them cede, but failing.

He could’ve saved them. He could’ve avoided ending up in a hospital, he could’ve avoided Nedy the suffering of seeing his father in a hospital bed, needing help to breathe for days; he could’ve avoided Nedy to overwork himself.

He could’ve avoided the Stevens suffering by listening to his guts, by making sure the front door and windows were properly locked.

Alexander strode to the kitchen, his vision more blurred as he advanced. He had started gasping without noticing.

It’d been his fault.

Alexander cursed when his hands couldn’t grip the handle of the kitchen window. He didn’t want to admit they had started shaking along with his whole body.

He could’ve prevented it all. But, no, he’d had to go to sleep, without checking one single way where the water could’ve leaked into the house.

Had he made that whimper?
It’d been his fault and he paid for it.

Alexander let his (suddenly heavy) arms fall. He grabbed the sink as if his life depended on it. His legs trembling beneath him and black dots filling his vision. He dropped his head and opened his mouth, desperate to remember how to breathe.

The whip of a belt against his back, tearing his skin apart.

His scalp hurting for so much yanking.

Blood spurting out the half-moons nails had dug into his arms.

The sharp pain he felt every time he blinked that shiner.

The internal fight that had become for him to breathe with those broken ribs.

Alexander hunched over himself, grabbing his aching stomach, his eyes squeeze shut. He didn’t hear the rain anymore, he didn’t know where he was anymore. He just knew he wanted it all to stop.

He felt something gripping his shoulder. Not matter how gentle it felt, Alexander flinched away, finally exhaling the air that had been trapped in his throat. He stumbled backwards, he felt himself falling, and waited to hit the floor.

He was pushed.

His hair pulled.

His head fell again against the cold, hard floor.

He had tried to get up but a foot pushed him down.
He felt the form of the sole tattooing itself in his bare skin.

The hit never came. Someone grabbed him by the arm. He gasped…

...as he felt the nails digging into his thin arms.

“Alexander”

He flinched at the stern of the deep voice that called his name. He kept his gaze down, his neck felt too stiff for him to move it.

“Look at me when I’m talking to you, scum”

“Son?”

The voice turned softer, more familiar (in the good sense of the word). He turned his clouded vision to the man in front of him. He managed to see the frown on his face, the concern in his eyes. With the other hand, the man made him stand up straighter, his grip firm yet tender.

“Son” the voice called him again.

Alexander came back to the real world at the affection which the nickname was said with. He heard his unsteady breathing, felt himself shaking under the grip of Washington, who kept looking at him, desperate to see a reaction from him.

“You’re making a fool of yourself, you annoying piece of trash”

“Why can’t you be like a normal kid?”

“Why do you always bring problems with you?”

“Someone should’ve taught a lesson a long time ago…”
“Son” his boss said again. George sighed relieved when Alexander finally looked at him. “What’s wrong?”

Alexander didn’t think before answering, he turned to automatic responses at the familiar question. “Nothing. I…”

“I just tripped and fell”

“I just fell downstairs”

“I wasn’t seeing where I was going and bumped against the wall”

“I just got the wrong people angry while making a point”

Well, that last one had been sometimes true… But not in the sense his friends had thought.

Alexander shook his head. Washington didn’t deserve to be lied. He would notice, anyways, and he didn’t want to upset the man any further.

“...I was checking the windows…”

George seemed shocked to hear the answer. He turned his head towards the window. Alexander did the same. He saw his blurred, imperfect, fogged reflection on the crying glass.

He cringed at how realistic that image of himself was to how he was feeling and who he was being right now. He looked away, unable to keep looking at a man he didn’t know anymore.

“I’ll make you some warm milk” declared George, finally letting go of his arms. (Had he been holding him all that time? Alexander barely noticed…). “I was going to make myself some as well” he kept talking, as he got all he’d need to make it out the cabinets. “It’s just a bit of rain, but very loud and annoying”

Alexander nodded, numbly. George threw him a look. It was brief, too ephemeral, but with so much concern that it made Alexander sick to his stomach.
“You know milk doesn’t help you sleep, right?” he commented, on the quiet.

George stopped abruptly, almost surprised to hear him talking and, especially, about such a trivial topic. A faint yet pleased smile made its way onto his lips. It was then when Alex realised the lights were on. *Focus, Alexander.*

“It doesn’t?” he asked, clearly welcoming the man to talk. Damn, he could ramble for five hours straight about milk solely for all George cared. He was so happy to hear Alexander being Alexander again.

“It’s more of a psychological thing than true effects of the tryptophan” explained Alex. “So, if you were raised with the tale that a glass of warm milk would help you sleep at night, you’d fall asleep on auto-pilot”

George hummed in response. “The brain is such a powerful tool, isn’t it?”

“Too powerful, sometimes” muttered Alex, frowning bitterly.

That time, George didn’t have the heart to open a debate about the issue, no matter how much he wanted to hear his friend’s voice.

Truth or myth, both men drank his milk in relative silence in the living room. It was starting to clear up, and Washington thanked the Heavens for that. Maybe not as much as Alexander, who refused to look up at him. George pressed his lips and took the last gulp of milk he had left.

“I should’ve looked up at the weather before coming” he talked, startling the younger man. “I’m sorry”

Alex frowned again. “It’s nothing”

Washington shook his head. “There’s nothing wrong in asking for help, Alex”

They sat there, in the darkness, in silence. The tension flew freely between the two friends, refusing to be broken. Washington also ended up looking down, fragments of the several things Lu and Henry had talked to him about when Alexander became their responsibility dancing in his mind. He looked at the man again, sitting across him, lost in thought.
That man had survived a hurricane. That man had endured several abuses, physical and psychological since he was of sound mind. That man had written his way out from all the hells he was forced to live in. Had been able to study in one of the best universities, had been able to work at one of the best law firms, had been able to be one of the best lawyers in New York, had been able to keep his fighting spirit intact despite all the blows life had thrown his way mercilessly.

Alexander Hamilton, a childish man, a mature child. The child who had his childhood taken away from him; the adult who had lost all he had fought for achieving for never learning how or when to stop; the child that learned how to walk through life without a companion; the adult that still needed a guide by his side for not getting lost. Alexander, the only one who knew how to be a child and a man at the same time; the only one intelligent enough to have made his way to the top at such a young age and, at the same time, obtuse enough to think asking for help was a weakness he had to conceal from the world; the only one to have dedicated his youth to help others while hurting himself; the only one to see harm on the littlest details of other’s behaviours, but ignoring the huge destruction that hovered over him as a shadow.

Alexander, whom everybody expected so much from, including himself. Who left a mark in every soul he met, who gained hatred and love in equal parts, but never indifference.

His most trusted employee and friend, age difference be damned. He was 31, but his mind was older (and his soul was younger). A man he loved and cared of as a son, despite how much that bothered Alexander thought he felt it as well and, sometimes, seemed to need it. Like tonight.

Washington got up, finally feeling Alexander’s eyes on him. He walked to him and put a hand on his shoulder, threw him a friendly and reassuring smile.

“I’m here if you need me, son” he promised.

“Not your son” muttered the man, with an eye-roll.

Washington let out a satisfied laugh and made his way into the kitchen. He missed Alexander’s sincere smile.

No, Washington was not that man. That man didn’t hold a candle up to George Washington.
Alexander ended his milk, wash his glass and made his way back to his room. His nerves were under control, he breathed automatically and his body felt as light as it should. The silence of the night reminded him that the rain was gone. He had survived, nothing had happened. Good.

He let himself drop on the bed, feeling exhausted yet not sleepy enough. The screen on his phone illuminated a fraction of the ceiling suddenly, and Alexander thanked the distraction. He smiled softly when he read John’s name on the ID.

“Knew you’d be up”

“Goodnight to you too, Jackie” laughed Alexander, making himself comfortable on the bed. “So, what’s the matter?”

“Can’t I call my best friend just for the sake of it?”

“Not at two in the morning”

“Well, if my best friend were normal, no. I agree”

“Ditto”

“If you’re that interested, I just came back from a date”

Alexander cocked one eyebrow. “Oh? And who are you dating now? An ex-serial killer or someone from the mafia?”

“You’re so funny I sometimes forget to laugh…”

“It’s part of my charm”

“I met him at the park, smart-ass”

“Ah, a dealer, then. That was going to be my third suggestion”

“No, you beast!” reprehended Laurens, though he was cackling. “He was reading on a bench and Godfred ran to him”

“Uh, a dog is a best matchmaker than Peggy… Better don’t tell her that”

“I already did”

“Jackie!”

“Hey, she almost made me get killed!”

“Okay, okay, fair enough… Does he treat you well?” he asked, slight concern hanging from his words.

“Yeah, he seems nice enough”

Alexander smiled softly. “Good. I’m happy for you, Jackie”

“What about you? Have you killed Jefferson yet?”
“Not yet”

“Miracle! Miracle!” proclaimed John, making Alexander laugh sincerely.

Washington nodded with satisfaction when he heard Alexander’s laugh. He put his phone down and went back to sleep.

And if the last message he had sent was to Laurens, talking about some good friend in need of support, Alexander didn’t need to know.

“The doctors said he has a chance to survive”

Mr Stevens had spent the same amount of time under the fallen ceiling as Alexander, but hadn’t woken up yet. His son came every day, barely left the hospital until he was forced to. That day, he was walking with Alexander outside the hospital building. He’d felt very restless lately and Nightingale decided the best was to let him breathe some fresh air. Always accompanied, of course. And Edward was the best (and only) companion Alexander could hope for.

He felt a strange sensation in the pit of his stomach. He had survived, he was there, walking (limping, damn ankle) with Edward while Mr Stevens was still sleeping on a hospital bed, with the need of a machine to breathe. Wish it would’ve been me, he thought, swallowing with difficulty.

“Hey”

Alexander stopped in his tracks. He looked at Edward, who returned the glare with a seriousness Alex had never seen in his friend before. He didn’t have time to react before the boy embraced him. Alex felt himself turning rigid under the touch of his closest and only friend.

“I’m so glad you’re alright, Alex” he whispered.
“Thank you”

It was cold, it was a response proper of an asshole, but what else could he say? He wasn’t thankful at all. He didn’t know why Edward was. It should’ve been me, his brain repeated again and again.

Edward ended the hug and grabbed his hand.

“Everything will be fine, Alexander”

And he flinched. He felt his blood boiling. His body turned cold. He shook with contained rage. He took his hand away from Edward’s, more brusquely than he intended to.

“Stop” he hissed.

“What?” asked the boy, shocked by his reaction.

“Stop saying that. Stop lying to me” he spat, finally raising his voice.

“I’m not…” tried to justify Edward, confused.

“I’m sick of people lying to me” stated Alexander.

Edward took a step back. None of the boys said anything else for a couple of minutes, just looking into each other’s eyes. Edward then saw something igniting in Alexander’s eyes. He felt both scared and relieved. The fire seemed to be coming back, the burning passion that always characterised his friend.

He could only hope Alexander knew how to control it to not end up burnt.

The whole island was silent at night.

Alexander didn’t like the quiet. It made him think, made him remember.
He pushed his blankets aside and got up from bed. He hissed a bit at the pain in his ankle and walked out the room. Everything was pitch black.

“Couldn’t sleep?”

Alexander jumped afraid. Turning to the right, he saw Nightingale, with her gentle smile. She was holding a small lamp in her hand.

“Checking everyone is okay” she answered his unspoken question. “So, are you okay?”

“Couldn’t sleep”

“I see”

“Too many… images” he defended himself.

“I understand”

No, she didn’t. Nobody did. Nobody but his mother ever did. Alexander wanted to see his mother, no matter how childish he was sounding even for himself. He wanted and needed his mother. Why didn’t I die? He wondered, once again.

“Come with me” said Nightingale, suddenly, offering her free hand. “I’ve got a place I think a kid like you would appreciate”

Alexander cocked one eyebrow, but accepted her hand, nonetheless.

“I escape here sometimes at night” she confessed, after having guided Alexander through the dark hallways. “At night it’s so peaceful and magical… It helps me forget about anything bad and I can let my mind at ease”

Alexander waited in sceptic silence. Nightingale let go of his hand and opened the door that was now in front of them. They were both welcomed by the smell of books, of wooden furniture, of nightly breeze, of ink.
“I didn’t know there was a library in here” said Alexander, after overcoming the shock.

Nightingale giggled innocently. “We have it for kids, elders or people that must stay here for a long time. Sometimes, we’ve made some puppets shows”

She walked into the room. Alexander followed, feeling his heart beating fast. Nightingale stopped in front of one of the tables, secluded from the rest, beside a large window that let the natural and dim light of the moon illuminate it. A stack of papers and a pen laid there...

Alexander felt a pang in his chest.

They laid there waiting for him.

<<It’s like if you knew something was there waiting for you and then one day, bum!, it shows up and you know exactly what path is the correct one>>.

Alexander remembered Edward’s words. They came back to him, flooded his senses, left him defenceless before the simple yet so appealing objects he couldn’t get his glare off of.

“How are you feeling?” asked Nightingale, waking him up from his daydreaming. “Your face seems to have gotten its colour back” she kinda joked.

“I don’t know” admitted Alexander.

He was feeling excited. Scared for what was going to happen from now on, yet so willing to keep going on. Nervous. Sad. Furious. He was… He was feeling. His heart was beating, he felt it beating again.

“Maybe the pen knows” said Nightingale, grabbing the object and passing it to him.

Alexander looked at it, admired it.

Memories came to him, knocked him down, made him fall apart.
Yes, those afternoons waiting for his mother to finish working. Those afternoons he would spend writing as if he were running out of time, writing about everything and nothing, writing about yesterday, today and tomorrow, writing about what he dreamt about, what he desired to achieve.

He wrote. That was what he did.

He talked, he wrote, he opined, he stood up.

Alexander took the pen and made his way to the chair, where he sat, under the attentive glare of Nightingale.

“You know?” she said, in a hushed tone. “I once read somewhere that writers are the ones who try to write fiction but end up writing their truth”

She looked at him, scrutinized him. She smiled when she saw the boy too focus on the blank paper in front of him, not meeting her glare. She let the lamp on the table and made her way back to the door.

“Thank you”

She turned around, locked eyes with the boy who was now looking at her. It might have been the light of the lamp, the reflect of the moon, but his eyes were shining. That peculiar violet-blue eyes were shining with one hundred emotions at a time. It overwhelmed her, made her breathless.

Her lips curved into a sincere smile.

“Good night, Alex” she said, leaving.

One second after, Alexander began to write.

*<<I take up my pen just to give you an imperfect account of the most dreadful hurricane that memory or any records whatever can trace, which happened here on the 31st ultimo at night>>.
To whom, he didn’t know. But he needed to write.

<< Good God! what horror and destruction—it’s impossible for me to describe—or you to form any idea of it.>>

The corpses, the screaming, the destruction, the silence the island was sunk into.

<< how deplorable—how gloomy the prospect—death comes rushing on in triumph veiled in a mantle of ten-fold darkness.

[...]

...ruin and confusion on every side...

...Oh Lord help—Jesus be merciful!...>>.

In the eye of the hurricane there is quiet. But for just a moment.

For just a moment. Alexander could hear it ending, could hear the uncertainty, the fear, the hurt, the broken hearts, the last whispers of the deadly victims, the whimpers of the survivors.

<< Art thou so selfish as to exult because thy lot is happy in a season of universal woe?

Hast thou no feelings for the miseries of thy fellow-creatures, and art thou incapable of the soft pangs of sympathetic sorrow?>>

He didn’t hear the help coming, the worry of his island’s neighbours. A storm, they said. Had God forgotten this place, his home, the land that saw him growing up, at such levels that He hadn’t given them the necessary means to alert them that a dangerous hurricane was about to hit?

<<Nor did my emotions proceed either from the suggestion of too much natural fear, or a conscience overburdened with crimes of an uncommon cast.

I thank God this was not the case. The scenes of horror exhibited around us, naturally awakened such ideas in every thinking breast, and aggravated the deformity of every failing of our lives.

It were a lamentable insensibility indeed, not to have had such feelings, and I think inconsistent with human nature.>>.

Or was this island so full of vile people that the ones in upper positions decided to let that lethal danger pass, saving their selfish beings? Was because of such human cruelty, the one he had
grown up with, the one he had witnessed since he had a bit of conscience, that God decided to turn a blind eye to his island? Was the hurricane an ethereal punishment?

<< Our distressed helpless condition taught us humility and a contempt of ourselves>>.

His pride was hit a week ago, he was reminded how vulnerable he was as a human, how ephemeral life was, how you had no voice or vote on how or when it would end.

But his pride hadn’t been broken or torn apart. He’d dare to say it had been renovated. He’d dare to say that the nearness of death, the sick and dark game of mouse and cat It seemed to like to play with him reminded him he was alive, made him realise there was a world waiting for him to discover it, to leave his mark on it.

<<Look around thee and shudder at the view.
See desolation and ruin wherever thou turnest thine eye. See thy fellow-creatures pale and lifeless; their bodies mangled their souls snatched into eternity
Unexpected, alas! perhaps unprepared!>>.

Alexander was proudful, but observant as well. He got the little details, the ones that passed unnoticed by everyone but him, the ones that made stories a whole interesting thing, the ones that made you say, ‘this has a je ne sais quoi, and I like it because of it’. There where there was hunger, you’d find food waiting to be shared; there where there was poverty, you’d find goods waiting to be given. On the contrary and against all odds, there where there was abundance, nothing waited to be shared, to be handed in exchange of nothing.

What if now he decided to turn the world upside down? What if he was realising all this now, what if he was left alive to realise all of this because he had the power to turn the whole world upside down?

<< Oh ye, who revel in affluence, see the afflictions of humanity, and bestow your superfluity to ease them.
Say not, we have suffered also, and with-hold your compassion.
What are your sufferings compared to these? Ye have still more than enough left.
Act wisely. Succour the miserable and lay up a treasure in Heaven>>.

His father taught James and he to dream, to hope for the light at the end the dark tunnel Life sometimes turned into. His mother taught them to listen to their internal voice, to act as the heart told them to, to walk in the direction it told them to go. His father was the dreamer. His mother was the practical. To Alexander’s luck, he had inherited both traits. And he was going to make full use of
them. He had the dreams (that now he’d call plans) and he had the will to see what was waiting for him out of the island. This little island. This forgotten island.

Alexander wasn’t little. Alexander wasn’t going to be forgotten.

He tightened his grip on the pen that never stopped moving.

Alexander was going to write his way out.

He had the voice, he had his words. He could move crowds if he used them wisely, he could change the game and have the upper hand if he played his cards well enough.

He had the strength to climb up. He had the brain to not fall into impossible dreams that would be left into oblivion once he became a bored and unsatisfied adult in some petty job. He had the pen, the ink, the rhetoric, the stories, the words. He had a voice, a loud voice he had almost lost forever.

He would make sure to never lose it again. To never forget he was blessed with the loudest voice.

Alexander looked at the long letter he had written. To nobody. To everybody. To anyone who would want to hear him. To the whole world that was about to hear him.

Death, misery, solitude would always be on his heels, but he didn’t mind anymore. He had practice on avoiding them, he was used to them, he was indifferent towards them. Alone he miraculously survived, alone he studied, alone he wrote, alone he went through the unimaginable.

He shivered at the memory of all the corpses he had the disgrace to see throughout his whole short life. He remembered the coldness of his mother, he remembered the ferrous odour of his cousin, he remembered the inexpressive faces of the floating people, the desperation of the ones who drowned. He had witnessed it all, he had almost shared their fate.

But he didn’t.
He couldn’t seem to die.

He remembered. He shivered as he remembered more and more. Everyone had left. The ones he had loved, the ones he had hated, the ones he hadn’t had the time to know. Everyone ended up leaving. Edward and his father would be the next ones… If he wasn’t fast enough to leave first.

He didn’t know how he would do it. He was just fifteen. He didn’t have a legal tutor per se. But Alexander knew he would.

He didn’t know in which form. Teacher? Historian? Writer? Journalist? Critic? Politician? It didn’t matter. He had a voice and was going to use it, the way wasn’t as important as making sure he was heard.

History will have its eyes on me.

With no attachments, with no feelings involved, with no friendships, with no families. He needed nobody to go where he wanted to be, where he deserved to be. The top.

A voice inside his head pronounced the words that would turn his heart into stone, as he signed the letter with his name. A name he’d make sure the whole world would remember.

Alex, you’ve gotta fend for yourself.

Two days left. That was all what Thomas needed to put up with before he’d be able to go back home. He comforted himself with that thought as the water from the sprinkler helped his muscles to relax.

Two days left. That was all he needed to endure. He had survived thirty years to his mother’s tyranny. Two days were nothing to him in comparison…

Thomas heard the door being opened and closed unceremoniously. He frowned, thinking he maybe heard things and kept showering. He sneezed.
“Bless you”

“Thanks…”

He tensed at the too familiar-for-his-likings voice. *It can’t be*, he thought, as he moved the curtain a tiny bit to see what was on the other side. He felt a tic in his right eye when he saw his boss’ mother sat on the toilet, looking absent-mindedly at the tiles in front of her. *Of course it can be*, complained Thomas, trembling with impotence and anger.

“Ma’am, didn’t you see the bathroom was occupied?” he said, trying to sound polite and failing miserably.

“Keep whacking it off, a woman my age has seen it all already” she responded, not looking in his direction.

Thomas felt his cheeks burning, then.

“It’s not about that!” he shouted, as the lady flushed and went to brush her teeth. “And why do y’all have to be such beasts when you talk?!”

Mary ignored him as she scanned the washbasin. “Uh… Make sure to buy some toothpaste later”

“I’m not your personal servant!”

“A loser is what you are”

“Look, I’ll buy whatever it’s needed once I’m finished” he promised, unwillingly. “But, please, leave!”

“And why don’t we take the rest of the shower together?” she offered, waggling her eyebrows.

“Mr Washington!!!!” he called, flushing from rage and embarrassment.

“Tattletale” insulted Mary, narrowing her eyes.

“Mum, don’t you think you’re old enough for acting in such a manner?” Washington admonished as the three of them waited for Alexander to serve them breakfast.

Mary folded her arms upon her chest, kind of childishly. “Huh, it was only a joke”
“It didn’t sound like one, ma’am” accused Thomas, sat as far from the lady as possible.

“This shitty generation has no sense of humour, it’s full of pussies” she lamented.

Alexander came from the kitchen with half of the breakfast. He served toasts, coffee and butter to Washington, who nodded thankful, and fish and water to Mary.

“Mum, are you going to have that as breakfast?” asked George, astonished.

“They cost me tears and sweat to catch” replied Mary.

“Ma’am, you stole them from us” said Thomas, wrinkling his nose in annoyance.

Alexander came back, now with two dishes. He put one in front of the vacant chair that was going to be his and another one before Thomas, who stopped in shock when he saw the burnt toasts he was given.

“Hamilton, what’s this?”

“Toasts, it’s something we commoners eat for breakfast instead of caviar” answered the immigrant, with a cocky smile plastered on his face.

Thomas clenched his fists and tried to drown the urge to punch him. “I meant why they’re like this”

“Some got a bit burnt”

“A bit?” echoed the secretary, unconvinced. “And what about yours or Washington’s?”

“That’s why I said ‘some’”

“Don’t get smart with me, Hamilton. Yours are perfect golden cafeteria-like!”

“Look, you’re not a child anymore, Jefferson. If you don’t like them overcooked…”

“Overcooked? This is scorched!” complained Thomas, at the same time.

“…you only have to grab the knife” He passed the item to him. “and scratch a bit” he instructed, before turning on his heels and re-entering the kitchen.

“Yes, yes, look how much I scratch” said Thomas, doing the action exaggeratedly and just as immaturely as his workmate.

Washington rolled his eyes as he took a sip of his coffee. “Boys, grow up a bit…” he said, tiredly.

“If we put hidden cameras throughout the whole cabin, we’d be more famous than Big Brother” planned Mary.

“Mum, don’t!”
Thomas groaned. Two days felt like too much suddenly.

Mr Stevens woke up a few days after Alexander could leave the hospital. He needed more resting days than the kid, for his old body wasn’t as strong as the one of a young boy’s. Especially when that young boy was Alexander Hamilton.

Doctors, nurses and neighbours always looked in awe when the kid passed by their sides. The surviving kids back at the orphanage stopped bothering him and the Principal also cease with her annoying comments about his rudeness and inability to shut up or stay out of trouble.

Thinking about all the people who drowned and that that lady is still alive… Alexander thought always bitterly.

As Mr Stevens couldn’t leave the hospital until further notice, Alex was sent back to the orphanage, with a ‘loving family’, as the Principal had called it, waiting for him. A couple with love to share, but uncapable of having children on their own. Or so they alleged. And the Principal, desperate to get him out of her sight, accepted their offer and fill their papers so Alexander could start living with them.

He lasted a week.

The Principal apologised to the couple, bowing and all, as she threw hateful glares in his direction. Alexander only looked away, arms crossed and coldness in his expression.

Everybody ignored the marks of fingers around his arms.

He had tried to hide them with jackets, but he didn’t have so many clothes, and it was hot as hell in that island. Besides, he didn’t care too much about it.

The Principal was fast to find him another foster home.
“Behave” she’d hissed in his ear, before pushing him out the door, so he could go with the man that had come to look for him.

He lasted four days and a half.

Again, the Principal apologised to the couple.

Again, everybody ignored the black eye and broken lip he had come back with.

The Principal was even faster than before to find another family for him.

Again, he lasted less than a week.

Again, he came back with marks. This time easier to conceal, as they were only a few bruises on his back.

The Principal looked for a fourth foster home for him. She found one that seemed acceptable. Or, well, anything was acceptable for her, as long as she could lose Alexander from her sight.

Two days later, the woman came back, dragging Alexander by his reddened wrist, screaming something along the lines of ‘this kid is impossible to live with!’, and left, without hearing the Principal’s apologies.

Nobody said anything about the marks, the way sometimes Alexander cringed when moving too fast.

It had become a tradition. The kids began making bets about how much time Alexander would stay at his next foster home. He had even heard some sweepstakes about where he’d receive the next blow.

To be fair – and Alexander was very fair, honestly, more than average in that island – not all
his marks had something to do with his foster homes. Some he had earned it by being a motormouth with no filter that always ended up messing with the wrong people. He wasn’t a little kid anymore, neither were the idiots he had grown up with. When he came back home with clear signs of fight, he would receive a few more from his foster parents for being a mess.

Not that Alexander cared too much. He was starting to not feel the blows anymore. He didn’t know if that was a good or a bad sign, but it was useful. As long as he could grab a pen and write, he didn’t mind about anything else.

He had been to eleven foster homes in the spare of a month. He had broken a record. (And when did he not?)

The Principal was everything but happy with him and his attitude.

She had found another couple who wanted to give him a chance. Alexander was told to prepare his things. He did without much of a fight. It was starting to become a habit not being able to be under the same roof for more than a week straight. The Principal watched him with predator’s eyes.

“Stop being an ungrateful brat” spat the Principal, as he took his suitcase – he hadn’t undone it when he came back, and he didn’t have so many things, anyways. “Those people want you to be part of their family, show a bit of gratitude and behave”

“I didn’t choose them” retorted Alexander. He didn’t bite his tongue anymore. What for?

The Principal wrinkled her features, disgusted. “I hope they can teach you manners this time” she said, her eyes fixated on his healing eye.

This couple had already four children, but alleged they wanted to make the family grow a bit more. They were excited to receive another child to love and care for. Or so they said. Alexander wasn’t the most caring person in the world, but he thought that giving the adopted child the leftovers of their biological children as his dinner - the only time they feed him - and forbid him to sit on the table with them as they eat, didn’t sound that ‘love’ and ‘care’, especially.

As well as a bruise wasn’t a mark of true love.

But Alexander was coping. He would be given back to the orphanage in no time. The father hated his ‘nonsense’, and when he saw he wouldn’t shut Alex up by punches, threats or days without eating, he would give him back.
The other foster homes had been like that.

“Are they treating you well?” asked Mr Stevens, during one of his visits.

Alexander was sat on the chair by his bed. He’d brought the man a book Edward always forgot to before going to visit. Alexander, for once, couldn’t blame the guy’s poor memory; he’d been very busy taking care of his father’s business and helping people fix the few things that were still destroyed after the hurricane to gain a few coins.

Alexander felt Mr Stevens’ glare dancing around his emaciated body. He moved uncomfortably in his seat and wrinkled his short pants, containing his tone of voice. That man had a lot already on his plate, as well as his son. Neither of them needed to hear his problems. Besides, he had everything under control. In a couple of days he’d be out of that hell and into another different one. In a couple of days.

“Yes” he deadpanned.

Mr Stevens took his time to talk, to say anything. Alexander let his hair loose, taking it out of behind his ear, when he felt the man was staring straight at the scar he had under his right eye. A piece of dish that crashed against the wall (though the wall wasn’t the place his foster father was aiming to).

“Neddy is doing a great job for your business” commented Alex, wanting to put the spotlight on anything else that wasn’t him, for once.

Mr Stevens nodded, still with that serious expression that unsettled the kid. “Yes. He’s told me the times he’s come here”

“He’s been helping some people who need repairing their houses, public places… He was very helpful while cleaning the park, soon the kids will be able to play there as well” rambled Alexander, fidgeting.

“A simple storm” said Mr Stevens, with a bitter tone. “I knew this place wasn’t an ideal paradise, but I never thought the amorality could reach this level” He locked eyes with Alexander. “I’ve read the letter you wrote about it”

“Everybody has”

Miss Nightingale had read the letter when he found him asleep on the table she had left him the prior night. Alexander woke up to her sobbing. She looked him in the eyes, sparkling with tears and… What had it been? Admirations? Pity? Awe? Alexander couldn’t name it correctly.
Next thing he knew, the letter was published on the newspaper, and Alexander became to be noticed for more people than the ones who had seen him grow up. For the good (more people started to smile at him, to greet him, some had stopped him to tell him he had a gift and should never stop using it) and for the bad (his bullies didn’t think what he had written was ‘manly’, some spread rumours that he had copied it from some book he’d read, some affirmed he’d badmouthed them all by his writings).

“Did you write it all by yourself?” asked Mr Stevens.

“Yes”

He smiled. “I always knew you had something special within”

“If only more people out there would know”

Mr Stevens stared straight at him again, his smile slowly disappearing. Alexander stood there, still, feeling the tension grow.

“It’s good to know the people are going back to normal after such an event” commented Stevens, eventually, serene.

Alexander nodded, opened his mouth to talk, inclined forwards, the words burning in the tip of his tongue. He never had the chance to speak his mind, though, as Stevens interrupted him, with the same low and tranquil voice.

“I wish the same happens to you soon, Alex…”

He flinched. His knuckles turned white as he gripped the clothe of his pants, in contained discomfort. His lips frowned. He stabbed his glare into Mr Stevens’ eyes and raised his chin, defiant.

“I’m already over it, Thomas”

“No, you’re not, Alexander” contradicted the man, shaking his head slowly.

“I’ve been since it was over” argued Alexander, squinting his eyes in anger. “I survived, I didn’t drown, I’m fine”

“No, you’re not” repeated Stevens, his tone not changing one bit, while Alexander’s kept turning harsher. “The hurricane left the island, but stayed inside of you, son”
“I’m not your son” spat the teenager, turning his glare away.

“We’re rebuilding our houses, going back to our business, honouring the ones who passed as a past tragedy, but it’s current. It’s still happening inside of you” kept talking Stevens, not minding the boy’s growing annoyance, or how he was trembling in his seat from fury. “And you don’t even realise it”

“The hurricane is over, and I’m okay, nothing’s wrong with me” insisted Alexander, throwing daggers in the man’s direction.

Stevens didn’t move one bit. “You’ve been working non-stop”

It wasn’t a question, it was an affirmation, but Alexander nodded automatically. Of course he had been working unceasingly. He needed to do so, he needed to do something with his life, with this life he hadn’t lost for a reason, he had to find out what that reason was, he had to make full use of this second chance to do something of value.

Mr Stevens smiled. It didn’t reach his eyes. It was the saddest and most compassionate smile the teenager had seen him make in their whole acquaintance.

“You work, you write, you talk, you fight as if you were running out of time, as if it were going out of style, as if you needed it to survive… Life’s passing you by”

Alexander frowned. “No. I’m making full use of it” he defended his actions.

“But, my boy, a day will come in which you’ll see all the destruction your inner hurricane is making. You’ll see how many broken things live inside you”

This time, Alexander’s voice turned into a whisper, raspy and helpless. “There’s nothing broken inside me”

“Yes, there is” assured Mr Stevens, seriously. “You’re not feeling it now, you’re choosing not to feel or see it, but there will be day when you will. And that day, you will see just how much destruction you’ve been bearing within”

Alexander looked down, pressed his lips, felt his eyes watery. He blinked away the tears that were demanding to fall. I’ve got no time for that, he thought, stubbornly.

“I’m fine” he repeated, not as secure as before.

And if he was trying to convince Mr Stevens or himself, neither knew.

Chapter End Notes
*I've based what Alexander is going through on my own experience. There was a time when I couldn't feel anything, like I felt numb inside. Sometimes, it still happens and I'm still not over it completely (and it doesn't help that I was already cold for starters). I hope I managed to write that properly, it's very difficult to put into words.

*"We were few, and the grandma gave birth (Éramos pocos, y parió la abuela)": we say this on two occasions. One: when there's a lot of people someplace and more come. Two (the most famous used, I guess): when something bad is happening, and something happens that makes the situation worse.

*El Dúo Sacapuntas: it was a Spanish humoristic duo, in which one of them was taller than the other. I couldn't resist the urge to put it XD

*The nurse is Florence Nightingale. She's known as the Mother of Modern Nursing. She used to comfort wounded soldiers at night, so she was also called "The lady with the Lamp". (In case you're wondering, the lamp I'm referring to in the story, it's one that looks like and oil one, but works by batteries)

*Those are parts of the actual letter Alexander wrote. I was thinking about modernizing the vocabulary, but didn't find in myself to do it.

*What Thomas Stevens is telling Alexander is basically that his PTSD, not only for the hurricane, but for everything that's been happening to him in such a short period of time is taking its toll on him. Later, we'll see how right he was. (I based it on a scene from the pilot episode of 'Violet Evergarden', btw)

Virtual cookie for the ones who guessed where I took that rat scene from.

Also, thanks for the support and the views. And special thanks to a_mind_at_work (Madame_Marauder) and solacier; your comments cheered me up on a week I was feeling very down.

Sursum corda!
The fishing trip (P 3)/In New York, you can be a new man

Chapter Summary

Thomas and Alexander learn from each other.
George needs his time of solitude.
Augustine scheming.
Angst and violence against a child. Yes. Shit gets real in this one.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: Child abuse, homophobia, biphobia.
WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

This has been the most difficult part to write...
Btw, I hope the homophobia and biphobia were well-portrayed. As I don't understand this level of disgust some people feel for other people's sexual orientation, I think I write it very sugar-coated? I don't know. Maybe because of the black humour some doesn't see it, but for me this kind of things are very normalized. That's why I don't find a taboo while writing about them or reading or learning about them. Maybe it's needless to clarify this, but just in case. (Besides, I'm a Christian, so also no offense to any religion. We all are free to believe in whatever we want, but not to use it as an excuse to make others' lives miserable. God is love)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A collection.

The news surprised him as much as Edward had intended.

It wasn't very difficult to conceal the whole thing for him, Alexander supposed, taking into account all the time he dedicated only to writing, reading and working.

Since his letter to no one and everyone became public, the whole island got around. Alexander had heard some of their words, how he was wasting his gift there, how he was destined to something bigger, something St. Croix could not offer him (he completely agreed with those). He had even heard some claiming that ‘this kid is insane!’, though Alexander was never sure if they
were calling him crazy for having such big ambitions (which he never left unspoken, not anymore) or a genius. Alexander thought he was a bit of both…

He had been given back to the orphanage (and really, ‘given back’? What was he? A bag, some oversized clothes, an ugly vase? He hated every time the kids or the Principal referred to the action as such, and made sure to never be contaminated by such deplorable use of English vocabulary) a couple of days before Edward told him the news. Alexander suspected that family had taken him back because they didn’t want to be bounded to him if he really was leaving. Their fun is over, he thought, horrifyingly cold.

Edward explained everything to him when he went to pay his daily visit to Mr Stevens (he could finally get out, but it was pretty late… Hey, work wasn’t going to do itself, right? They understood… They had to, because Alexander wasn’t going to back down now…).

Alexander found father and son chatting so lively, so happily, he almost felt like an intruder. And wasn’t he? He had invaded their home, their family, he had broken their little family more than it already was to the public eye. Alexander didn’t understand why they put up with him anymore. He knew why he kept going back to them, despite his promise of not depending on anybody: he hated the thought of being alone. Edward and Mr Stevens were a distraction from the work he had to get done, but also the only ones keeping his sanity (what was left of it) intact. It was a dangerous tug of war, but Alexander was very used to live dangerously by then.

He was passed the plate where the money was in. Alexander kept looking at it, as some kind of miracle sent from up above (and wasn’t it, really?) as Edward explained how some people had come to the idea of sending him to the mainland, to help him be somebody, how they convinced others to help to the cause. (Alexander snorted at his own thought of how those people who hated his guts decided to help not as an act of redemption, but to get rid of him. Maybe they were fantasizing of him being poor and starving under a bridge. Only God knew how many times Alexander had dreamt about them all in the same position for a very long time now).

Alexander felt his insides turning. He had the opportunity he’d been waiting for in the palm of his hand. Literally. He was holding it. He had earned all that money. He had made the island to gather, to pass a plate around, total strangers who only knew him for that letter he could’ve written better had given him enough money to book a passage to the next ship that was New York bound.

He had written his way out. He was going to start anew in the States. He was going to get his name written down in History. He was going to be the important man he knew he was destined to be, deserved to be.

Edward put a gentle hand on his own and Alexander finally raised his glare, meeting the joy in his friend’s eyes.
“Je suis si heureux pour toi, Alex [I’m so happy for you, Alex]” Edward told him, before tugging him into a hug that took Alexander by surprise. “Tu le mérites bien [You deserve it]!” he assured in a whisper.

Alexander looked over the kid’s shoulder, seeing the tender smile on Mr Stevens’ face. A slight beam of concern in his tired eyes, though.

<<You’ll see how many broken things live inside you>>.

Alex pressed his lips, coming back to reality. He was fine, there was nothing broken inside him, he was fine, he was going to fulfil his dreams, make his name known. He was fine.

He returned the gesture to Edward.

It was colder, but Alex had hugged him back, and Edward thought it was enough. He still missed the kid he had grown up with as a brother, who would embrace him and smile more, but Edward knew he couldn’t ask much for his friend, he was doing a big effort, he had been through so much, and he was going to live the life he deserved at the States! Surely he was still processing the news, not believing his luck, his reality.

He felt Alexander wanting to end the hug, but he just pressed their bodies closer. Edward was going to cherish this moment, this hug. They had turned seldom and he knew this was going to be the last time he would have a chance to embrace Alexander, his friend, his brother. (Let the Principal and the rest of the world think whatever the fuck they wanted. They had gotten away with not allowing his father to adopt Alex, but he was part of the family, he felt him as his brother and as such he was going to refer him from then on).

When Alexander left, half an hour later and because Edward forced him to, alleging he’d need to sleep to be able to wake up tomorrow (the only reason Alexander never had trouble with waking up early was because he didn’t go to sleep at all, and Edward was going to make sure he had his proper hours of sleep in his last night in the island), Edward and his father shared a look.

The family was permissive with sharing ideas, no matter how different from their own, but knew also when to shut up and let the eyes speak on their souls’ behalf.

That night, as Edward closed the hospital room door and locked eyes with his father, Stevens
and son shared the same thought: they were hoping for Alexander to realise his shattered pieces before he broke completely.

The next morning, Alexander rose before the sun. He had his suitcase prepared (not that he had a lot of things to pack, to begin with…) and made sure he had sneaked enough books from the orphanage tiny library (screw them, they owed him that and a lot more, not that anyone there but him adored and needed books as much as he).

He went downstairs after one of the workers knocked on his door, saying it was breakfast time for his two roommates and time to go for him.

Alexander grabbed his suitcase (making sure he had the money inside twice) and went downstairs, under the attentive glares of the other kids. Some whispered, others just stared. Alexander ignored them all. He had his whole attention on the door. He didn’t look back, he didn’t need to, didn’t want to. He was never coming back.

“Alexander”

The teenager made a face at the stern of voice the Principal. He turned his head around, enough to have a decent look of her by his peripherical. She stood there, as serious and bitter as he had known her (and he’d always remember her, no matter how hard he’d try to forget about her).

“Have a good trip” she said, after a long pause full of tension.

“Thank you” he replied, instantly, not concealing the disgust in his voice. He opened the door, smelled the fresh air, the freedom. He was never coming back.

He had missed the Principal wrinkling her nose. “Hope they can teach you some manners in the States” she commented, with her same venom.

“Thank you” repeated the kid, smiling innocently at her. “I hope you catch an idiot who’s capable of standing your bullshit and give you a good shag, poorly-fucked*”

Alexander slam the door shut after a last glare to the flushed and furious face of the Principal. He heard muffled laughter that was silenced right after. Alexander couldn’t help the smirk on his face.

Checkmate, witch.
The harbour was full of people. After the hurricane incident, anyone who could afford it wanted to get out of there and the ones who couldn’t, overworked themselves in order to be able to. Alexander made his way as fast as he could. He had done that, he was going to leave and he would never come back.

“Alex!”

He stopped in his tracks, following the source of the cheerful voice. He found Edward waving at him among the crowd. His friend ran to him.

“Neddy” said Alex, clearly surprised. “I thought you told me you wouldn’t be able to say goodbye today”

The kid stopped in front of him, panting. “Yeah, yeah, but I had a bit of time and…”

“Did you leave the shop alone?” inquired Alexander.

Edward pouted. “Come on, get loose a bit, even if it’s just in your last day here”

“Sorry, sorry”

“Besides…”

“Huh?”

Alexander found himself wrapped in another hug.

“That hug of last night? It wasn’t enough” laughed Edward.

Alex found himself laughing as well, and returned the gesture a bit hesitant. “You’re never satisfied when it comes to physical affection”

“But this time’s justified”

“Okay, okay…”

Alex felt himself being pulled closer after a short silence.

“Je t’aime [I love you]” he whispered, fighting back the tears.
Alexander stiffened, sudden flashes of that terrible February night coming back to him. He swallowed the lump that formed in his throat and gripped Edward’s shirt more tightly.

“Je le sais [I know]” he responded, eventually, his mouth dry and his voice almost shaking.

Edward, on his part, ignored the ache in his heart, but didn’t say anything.

Alexander was healing, he needed time. He couldn’t push him. He didn’t have the right.

Edward ended the hug, and Alexander sighed relieved (cursing himself mentally because of it). He felt even worse when he saw Edward’s glittery eyes.

“Well” said the kid, pretending he was not at the verge of tears. “Have the very best of lucks, Alex” Alex smiled softly. He took Edward’s hand (it was the least he could do after his previous slip-up). “Thanks, Neddy. I’ll miss you” Edward returned the tender smile. “Everything will…” he tried to say, wanting to reassure his closest friend, but stopped talking when he felt Alexander squeezing his hand. He changed the sentence abruptly, but not the honesty in his voice. “In New York you can be a new man, Alex, you’ll see!”

Alex threw a confident (and grateful) smile in his direction. “Just you wait” he promised.

Edward had to leave in a hurry, tapping him on the arm. Alexander watched him go, feeling a warm sensation in his chest. He could lean to that when he started anew (and alone, especially alone) in the States. He made his way to the ship when he saw a gap.

“Huh, thought vermin weren’t allowed” a male voice mocked from his left side.

Alexander turned his head, being now face to face with an elderly man. He might’ve been the same age as Mr Stevens, but his wrinkled and bitter expression made him seem older. Alexander felt a shiver going down his spine when he looked him in the eyes and recognised the man who was in front of him. He didn’t know him personally, and his actions didn’t make Alex want to have anything to do with him; but he had seen him in old photos his mother got lost in sometimes, being more sentimental than her iron façade made the rest of the world think.
Alex imitated the man’s sour expression. “Mr Lavien”

The first husband of his mother, the father of her oldest son and their half-brother, whom neither he or James knew, the reason why those rumours spread around the island about Rachel, the reason behind all their suffering, all their poverty, all the pain Rachel had to endure. All the disgrace Alexander had to face since he was a little child, incarnated right in front of him, looking him straight in the eye.

That man who had stolen Rachel’s properties (that stupid judge was in the wrong, Alex knew since he was little), who had left Rachel’s other two sons without a dime to their names after she passed, who had only come back to their lives after Rachel died to let know they weren’t worthy of inheriting anything from the dead woman, that her only son was that Peter Lavien, whom Rachel hadn’t seen since she decided to escape her abusive husband.

That man had made his and James’ (and especially, his mother’s) lives a living hell. And was now seeing him getting on a ship to New York, to the States, because he had earned it with his hard work, because he had fought unceasingly, against the world, despite all that man’s efforts to bring him and his whole family down. Alexander could feel himself smirking up at him, a feeling of superiority overwhelming him.

Johann Michael Lavien was seeing Alexander Hamilton, the ‘whoreson’, taking his first steps to the staircase that’d lead him to the top.

“I think they still aren’t, so I’ll advise you to stay where you are. You’re lucky they let you get this close to humans” he spat, without thinking.

He saw the man frowning deeply. The darkness in his eyes made Alexander remember all those times people advised him to shut his mouth, because sometimes it was better to not speak one’s mind. But the dread he felt was not enough to silence him. He had spent his whole fucking childhood unable to get back at that despicable being. He had the chance to do it, once and for all, before he left for not returning. Of course he wasn’t going to throw away any of his shots. Not a single one.

Alexander flinched when Lavien grabbed him by the arm, fingers pressing down his skin and cutting off the circulation. The man pulled him closer and bent down, his hot breath hitting his face. Alex made a face of repugnance and turned his head, still looking back at him with the corner of his eye, with the same amount of hatred the adult was throwing in his direction.

“You’ve fooled everyone in here into thinking you’re worth something” spat Lavien, tightening his grip on the teenager’s arm. “You’ve fooled even yourself”
“Let go of me” hissed Alexander, trying to wriggle out.

“But you know deep down what I knew since you polluted the world with your existence”

“I said let go of me!” Alex demanded, more desperate than before.

“You’re a bastard and a whoreson. You can’t escape it, it’s your shadow and your legacy. And there’s nothing you can do to get rid of it. You can’t change where you come from or what you are”

“Let go of me!” ended up screaming Alexander, pulling.

He felt his arm free, soaring from the tight grip. He bumped into someone who was walking at his backs, the only reason why he didn’t feel on his butt.

“Be careful, kid!” the man complained, not stopping one second.

Alexander didn’t bother with an apology, either. He looked around. Lavien was gone, lost in the crowd. He rubbed his arm and walked to the ship.

You can’t change where you come from.
It’s your shadow, your legacy.

Alex tightened his grip on his suitcase handle, gritted his teeth with rage.

“I’ll show him” he muttered to himself, as he turned around, looking a place where he could sit down until they reached New York. “I’ll show them all” he kept swearing as he made his way into the hold, apart from everybody.

He didn’t need anyone, he wanted to be alone. Needed to be alone. He dropped the suitcase and himself beside it. His whole body was shaking, his arm still hurt a bit, the fingers of that scoundrel burning in his skin, but not as much as his words did in his brain. He clenched his fists and dried his tears away before they had a small chance to fall down his cheeks.

“I’ll write my own legacy” he swore to himself.
Aaron was glad to have woken up to a silent and free-of-smells house. Everybody seemed to be asleep, and Aaron liked it that way. He knew the law firm would be closed today as well (unless Alexander had discovered it and harassed his sister-in-law, rambling about responsibility and seriousness until Angelica would’ve gotten tired and did as he said), but he wanted to spend another quiet time reading and working somewhere that wasn’t his house. It was Saturday, what meant the TV would be turned on with whatever series or movies Theodosia decided to watch that day and the radio at high volume. Not the best place to work as peacefully as he liked it.

So, he kissed Theodosia goodbye and prepared himself. He had milk and cereal for breakfast as he read some news on his phone, washed his dishes and then left the house through the garage door.

He was startled when he bumped into his stepson.

“Oh, good morning, Aaron” greeted Augustine, smiling up at him. Aaron was starting to be annoyed by that smile. Ironically.

“Augustine, what’re you doing up?” he inquired.

“I was cleaning your car” replied the kid, pointing at his backs. “Mom told me you didn’t have a problem with that?”

“No, not as much, but still…”

“Don’t worry, I didn’t touch anything. Just the outside”

“… Why?”

Augustine changed his weight from one foot to another, scratching the back of his head. “I know we started on the wrong foot, and I wanted to make it up for you”

Aaron felt horrible at that unexpected answer. “Augustine, it’s alright, I know you didn’t mean any harm”

“But…”

“No” he interrupted, uncharacteristically firm. “Augustine, you’re not a bother, you’re part of the family. I know what happened were all accidents, don’t worry over it”

“Are you sure?” asked the teenager, with a frown of uncertainty.

“Absolutely” Aaron nodded. “Besides, I’m not one to talk about accidents. When I’m back, I’ll tell you a few anecdotes… But don’t tell your mother or she’ll want to tell even the most embarrassing ones…”

They both laughed in agreement at that.
“Go back to sleep, it’s still too early” said Aaron, patting the kid on the arm.

“Have a good day, Aaron” said Augustine, walking back into the house.

Aaron smiled softly at him. He got in the car and drove out the garage, in the direction of the library he spent the day of yesterday. He was feeling a bit better and also a bit guilty for having doubted Augustine’s true intentions. He was still a teenager, he was starting to live with a proper family after months of being in a foreign boarding school. He needed time, and Aaron was very good at being patient. Perfect combination. Maybe this would work out in the end.

The phone rang through the speakers and he answered.

“Just checking if you were still alive”

Aaron rolled his eyes. “Good morning to you too, Alex”

“Are you going to work?”

“… Yes”

“Pause. You lied”

“No, no, it’s just that… I wasn’t sure if someone was going to cross the street or not”

“Stuttering, you’re still lying”

“Well, cut it out, Your Honour!”

“The law firm is deserted, right?” kept asking Alexander, now with a bored tone.

“Yeah, it’s what happens when the workaholic’s on vacation”

“You think you’re offending me, but you’re just flattering me”

“Don’t tell me that, flattering someone with your ego is a crime”

“A bigger crime is to ignore my many, many virtues”

“Really, Alex, where did you get that self-esteem? I’d like to buy one for myself”

“It came from the factory***”

“Pity”

“What about Augustine?”

And Aaron smiled at the faint worry that could be heard behind Alexander’s indifferent tone.
“Actually, better than I expected”

“Really?”

“Yes, he was cleaning my car this morning and we chatted a bit before I left”

“Well, that’s progress”

“Yes. You were right, he only needed a bit of time”

“I usually am”

“And you broke the moment again”

“I wouldn’t be me if I didn’t”

“I agree”

Aaron saw the light turning red in the distance and began to press the pedal. The car didn’t stop. He pressed a bit more, frowning, still with no avail. A cold sweat went down his spine.

“Oh, my God…” he said, stopping Alexander mid-ramble.

“What?” asked the immigrant.

“Oh, my God, the brakes don’t work!” he said, panicked.

“What?” asked Alexander again, clearly confused.

“Oh, Jesus Christ! That kid wants me dead, I told you!”

“Aaron…”

“What do I do? Do I jump or turn around??”

“Aaron”

“There’s an old lady with her dog on the zebra crossing”

“Aaron, hold on”

“I can’t hold on, literally!”

“Aaron!”

“Fuck, I’d never see my daughter getting into Primary School, or her graduation, or the dress she’d wear to prom, or the boyfriend that would never be enough for her but I’ll let her marry him because she’s happy and that’d be enough for me…”

“What the fuck are you talking about now?” asked Alexander, annoyed and confused.

“Gosh, I’m having flashes of my life right now”
“Aaron, please, listen”

“My uncle was right, I’m a fucking loser, and now I’m going to die as the man who killed an adorable old lady and her dog”

“AARON” Alexander ended up screaming.

“What?!” spat the lawyer. “Let me have my final crisis in peace!”

“Aaron, are you sure you’re stepping on the brakes and not on the gas, as it happened the other day, when you took me home because I almost stayed all night working?”

Aaron frowned, enraged. “Yes, Alexander, because your friend’s an idiot who got his driver’s license online and can’t fucking… Oh, wait…”

The car stopped just in the beginning of the zebra crossing. The old lady waved at him, happily, and kept walking. Aaron returned the gesture, his cheeks blushed.

“You were right” he admitted.

“I usually am, told you so”

“Now, only because of that, I’m going to turn on the radio, with that retro music you love so much”

“I save his, an old woman and her dog’s lives and this is the thank you I receive…” whined Alexander.

“Oh” complained Aaron.

“What now?”

Aaron looked down, seeing the buckle full of a white liquid that had dried. He felt a tic in his right eye.

“Augustine put glue inside the buckle” he explained.

Alexander’s loud laughter didn’t help to the cause.

“I’m bored”
Thomas looked up from the cookbook he’d found in one of the cupboards while cleaning (this weekend was becoming eternal and his nerves couldn’t cope by doing nothing) and saw Alexander at his back, at the other side of the kitchen island, looking at him expectantly. Thomas cocked an eyebrow. Now Hamilton wanted to talk to him? Now he could go to hell.

Thomas shrugged, returning his glare to the cookbook. “Get yourself a piano and learn how to play it. I think it takes a few years”

“Nah, I’d rather annoy you” answered Alexander, walking to be by his side.

“How mature on your part” He threw him a glare. “And now I exist for you again?”

Hamilton shrugged. “Beggars can’t be choosers”

“Huh, and I bet you know a lot about begging” commented Thomas, under his breath, as he kept leafing through the pages.

Alexander narrowed his eyes, infuriated. “You’re more disagreeable than the inventory of an undertaker’s…”

“If that’s the case, go somewhere else. Wouldn’t want to pester you with my displeasing personality”

“You’re a bit late for doing so; I’m almost used to it”

“Don’t you remember I’m the one in charge of the food today?” reminded Thomas, with a threatening tone.

“Are you sure killing your landlord is a good idea?”

“It’s worth a shot”

“What’re you cooking, anyways?”

“I don’t know yet. Why?”

“Because if it’s some of that pasta shit you like, I’d gladly make your wish come true”

“Alright, then. I think I saw some recipe of spaghetti Bolognese” said Thomas, passing the pages rapidly.

Alexander whined. “What if I relieve you and cook on your behalf?” he proposed.

“No”

“I’m giving you the chance to relive your care-free life”

Thomas frowned as he kept looking for the recipe. “Hamilton, have you tried going to a specialist to treat that obsession you have over the rich?”

“I don’t believe in them”

Thomas hummed. “You haven’t denied that you’ve got said obsession. Interesting”
“Go write your nonsense assumptions while I cook” insisted the immigrant once again.

“No, I want to evade my mind a bit”

“And I want to entertain my mind”

“I recall Washington told us there was a library at the end of the hallway, upstairs. Go stuck your nose in some book. If it can be until Sunday night, the better”

“Yeah, who am I now? The kid from ‘The Neverending Story’?”

“Your talking is truly neverending” complained Thomas, rubbing his temples.

“Besides, I don’t feel up to reading now”

“Well, I don’t feel up to standing your complaints proper of a spoiled toddler, but here we are”

“But if you’ve been trying to kick me out since I arrived”

“And yet, you’re still here…” Thomas sighed, in defeat. “If you’re going to be here, at least help me”

“Okay, I’ll leave. No need to be this cruel…” said Alexander, turning around with hands held up in a surrender manner.

“No, now you stay!” said Thomas, losing his patience, as he grabbed his workmate by the shoulder and turned him around. “Come on. Pass me the saucepan” he instructed.

“The what?” asked Alex, sounding clearly confused.

“The saucepan…” Thomas opened the drawers himself until he found it. “This, you uncultured heathen” he spat, dropping the item with more force than necessary.

“That’s a pot” corrected Alexander, folding his arms upon his chest in offense.

“I’ve called it saucepan my whole life” retorted Thomas, opening the cupboards in frustration.

“Sorry I’m the one telling you you’ve called it wrong your entire life”

“Do you have to pick up a fight even for how we should name the kitchen utensils?” asked Thomas, in annoyance.

“I might write a long essay” threatened Alexander, with a smirk.

Thomas closed the cupboards with a thump. “There’s nothing in here…”

“See? The Universe is sending you a sign that you should cook another thing” commented Alexander, with superiority.

“You’ve spent too much time with Laurens” complained Thomas, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Of course, he’s my closest friend” responded Alex, shrugging.

“Birds of a feather…” Thomas sighed, clearly tired. “I need bacon, olive oil, onions…”

“Go buy”

Thomas frowned down at him. “Why don’t you go?”
Alex snorted. “Yeah, what am I now? Your maid?”

“The annoying little piece of shit who was pestering about being bored”

“Just because your nonagenarian soul thinks go grocery-shopping is funny, means I’ve gotta think the same”

“Look, you’re starting to make me mad” warned Thomas.

“Go out, breathe some fresh air, and when you’re calmed, come back”

“I…” He inspired through his nostrils. “You know what? Alright. I think I need to get out of here” he said, more to himself than to his co-worker. He walked to the entrance, put on his coat and opened the front door. “Maybe, with a bit of luck, I’m part of some car accident” he hoped, under his breath.

Surprisingly, Alexander heard him. “I’ll pray”

---

Thomas came back half an hour later, finding the whole cabin smelling of meat and baked potatoes. He put all he had bought back at the store, containing his anger, in the cupboards. He noted Hamilton’s glares thrown his way and the cocky smile plastered on his face.

Thomas’ gained a new level of patience and mental strength for not punching him in the face right then.

---

*Alexander didn’t bother to conceal the bitterness he felt when he was sent to a foster care system. Another orphanage. Same hell with different name. He barely talked with anyone there, unless if it was to contradict or correct someone who he thought was in the wrong. He admitted that he’d earned his bad reputation and the other kids’ and workers’ hatred on his own.*

*As anything else, honestly.*

*That didn’t make him stop or contain his tongue. The more he talked, argued, wrote and worked, the faster time seemed to pass. And Alexander, for once, wanted time to go as fast as it could, until he was on legal age to do whatever he wanted, to leave that place and be on his own, to get a job, to pay his own studies, to…*
“Alexander?” the voice of one of the carer said, as she stuck her head out the door.

The kid lifted up his glare from the notebook where he’d been writing all his schemes, anxieties and hopes for the future for the last… Alex threw a glare at the clock by his bedtable. Three hours and a half? Way to make time go faster inside that hellhole, surely.

“There’s a couple who wants to meet you, sweetheart” explained the woman, Vera*, with a tender smile.

She was the only one he trusted in there. She was the only one who received him with open arms, who tried to treat all kids equally, who always took a bit of her time to make sure everyone was alright and things were going as well as possible for each of them. Who never acted or talked to him as he were stupid. She was the first person Alexander liked since he came to America.

“Come with me, they’re waiting” she kept talking, at the lack of response.

“Yes” Alex finally said, and Vera seemed to relax by hearing his voice.

He didn’t bother in taking anything with him. A couple? Well, he’d have to wait to see them to know how much they’d be able to put up with him before returning him as some kind of defective machine. The average back in Nevis were around two or three weeks. He didn’t expect any better from the Americans.

He felt the sideways glares of Vera, but decided to ignore them. She always tried to read his expression, to break the walls he had built up around himself. He liked and trusted her a bit, that didn’t mean he had to throw the bricks he had made for protecting himself with away for her own desire. For anybody’s desire, actually.

“Ah, there he is” he heard the head of the institution said, with that automatic polite tone he used whenever they had parents interested on adopting or fostering children. “Alexander, come here. Meet the Fultons”

Alex stopped in his tracks when he looked at the couple standing in the lobby. At first glance, nothing felt odd, but Alex’s guts differed. He felt a sudden weight falling on his shoulders and his stomach ached. He resisted the urge to put a hand on it, as he was being watched by four adults. Alexander saw Vera clenching her fists so much that her knuckles turned white; he was sure she was digging her nails in her palms, drawing blood. Lifting a bit up his glare, he saw the young woman
with her eyes fixated on nothing, lips pressed and pale and chin down.

Okay, if his sixth sense wasn’t being clear enough, Vera’s strange behaviour surely gave his suspicions new veracity.

“Alexander?” the man called again.

His politeness quivered a bit. He was never a patient man when it came to children. Why did he work with them, then? Well, Alexander once heard him complaining about how ‘this was the only well-paid shit he could do, and he fucking put up with it’. By the moment, America didn’t seem better than Nevis, in Alex’s honest opinion.

“He’s a bit shy” lied the boss, with a fake laugh. “Come here, boy, they’re not going to bite you” Alex arched one eyebrow, seeing the smiles plastered on the marriage face. He wanted to ask ‘Are you sure of that?’ but, miraculously, contained himself. Vera, on her behalf, was having a hard time concealing how much her body was shaking.

He finally walked towards the other three adults, leaving the carer behind. The more Alexander got closer to those persons, the more he wanted to turn on his heels and locked himself up in his bedroom. (Or, well, the room where he was living on loan, because they owned anything in there. And be grateful for the scarce privacy they gave you…).

The woman seemed good enough. She didn’t give him the same secure and warm sensation Vera did when they first met, but she was acceptable, to say the least. Extremely thin and petite, she had her arm looped with her husband’s, almost as if she needed him to support her and walk. Alexander feared that might be the case. Her cracked and discoloured lips (her lipstick couldn’t conceal so much damage, less from an observant kid like Alexander. He guessed she was a smoker) curved into a smile that tried to be reassuring, but made the contrary effect on Alexander, who cringed a bit when he saw her teeth, turning slowly yellow for her smoking. And especially when he noticed the lack of shine and honesty in her eyes.

His eyes fell on the man, standing in juxtaposition of his wife with his well-built and tall body. Clean-shaven, tidy short hair and with a smile one would only see on magazines, he stood with grace and confidence. Maybe too much for Alexander’s liking, but that might be his big pride and ego talking, honestly… He stretched one hand towards him, and his golden watch came into view, as well as his manicured hands. If Alexander had to guess again, he’d say he was a businessman, successful, of course, and with enough money to adopt three more children besides him.
The perfect couple to be given a child without too many tests or questions. They were ideal, the ones you saw on TV. The impeccable and caring housewife and the hardworking and austere husband. So much falseness was making Alexander dizzy. He blinked a few times, realising he was still being watched, the hand still waiting for him to shake it.

He did not. He didn’t want to touch that man, didn’t want to talk to him or his creepy wife, didn’t want to keep looking at them or being there.

“Glad to meet you, Alexander” the man said, and his dark voice pierced in his ears. He finally dropped his hand, and his eyes narrowed for a brief, unnoticeable second. “Mr. Jackson has told us so much about you”

“Oh” he finally managed to let out.

The man smiled as widely as he could. “Ah, you’ve got a voice. Good to know” he failed to joke.

“Leverage it while it lasts” commented Jackson, more bitter than jokingly. “Go gather your things, Alexander. You’ll leave with them as soon as they’re finished with the paperwork”

“Do you want me to go help you?” proposed the woman, with tiny voice.

“No, thank you” he responded right away, turning around.

Gosh, he was only hoping they would be one of the fastest foster homes he’d ever been to. Those two were weird as hell.

“And what about me?” asked Vera, when he passed her by. She smiled brightly at him, but the small drops of sweat in her forehead gave away the nervousness she’d been trying to conceal since she’d taken him there. “One last time, sweetheart?”

“Sure” he said, shrugging.

If he was going to miss something, it’d be Vera’s smile and cheerful tone. The woman helped him prepare the suitcase (which wasn’t more full than when he left Nevis, apart from a few books he had sneaked from the library).

“It’ll be our little secret” said Vera, giggling. “I think you deserve that at last...” she muttered, under her breath.

“Huh?”

“Nothing” she dismissed rapidly. She looked at him as he zipped the old suitcase. “Alex, do you like
“I…” He cleared his throat. “I don’t think any child likes any parent at first” he said, with a faint laugh trying to lighten the mood.

He swallowed when he saw Vera’s expression didn’t change one bit. She’d only knitted her brows. Alexander looked down, pretending the zip was the most fantastic and entertaining thing in the world.

The carer lifted his chin slowly and their eyes locked. Vera scrutinized his face, making him a bit uncomfortable. She was also one of the few (only) person he allowed to touch him. Finally, the woman smiled. Not a bright and happy smile, the ones she had made everyone around there used to. A sad and resigned one, an unsettling one. She tucked a rebel lock behind his ear, caressing his cheek with a motherly affection he hadn’t felt for quite a while.

“Alexander, you’re so strong” she commented, out of the blue. “Never forget that”

He arched one eyebrow. She kissed him on the forehead before standing up. She dusted her skirt and threw a last saddened smile in his direction.

“And do not forget that trust is a quality proper of strong-willed people” she commented.

“I don’t agree” he responded, prepared to argue, his thoughts going a mile per second.

Vera laughed. “That’s the Alexander I like! Now, come, Mr Jackson would never let me hear the end of it if we’re late”

Alexander didn’t know what all that was about. He didn’t know why he decided to grab Vera’s hand as they made their way down the hallway. He didn’t know why she squeezed it. He didn’t understand why he felt the need to run back to his room when the only thing he’d wanted since he was sent there was to leave as soon as possible. He didn’t understand why he was feeling so nervous, as if he hadn’t been to any foster homes in his entire life.
“Well, that’s bad luck”
“Tell me about it”
“And how’s Washington taking it?”
“Take a guess…”

Thomas moved the curtain of his bedroom just the necessary bit to see the lonely boat Washington was on, in the middle of the lake, just looking into the nothingness.

“He hasn’t even taken a rod with him, for the sake of pretending” muttered the secretary, feeling a shiver going down his spine.

“What?”
“Nothing… How are the girls?”

“Fine, I was making them dinn… Fuck”
“What did you burn now?”

“Nothing…”

“Why didn’t you use the money I gave you on takeout?”

“Because there’s no need. I can do this” responded James, stubbornly.

“Well, at least clean whatever you messed up with”

“Thank you for your support…”

Thomas heard someone talking in the background.

“Is that Patsy?”
James muttered something before responding him. “Yes, yes”

“What does she want?” asked Thomas, already narrowing his eyes in suspicion.

“Nothing, she was asking when the dinner will be”

“Why?”

“… Maybe she’s hungry, I don’t know”

“James, I told you I didn’t want her to get out after nine”

“Look, I can’t pay attention to you and cleaning the oil at the same time” complained James. Thomas could almost imagine his flushed face from overwhelm.

“Oil?” he echoed. “Did you spill oil in my kitchen?”

“Our kitchen, yes” corrected the younger man.

Thomas heard a series of curses and then a thump, as his friend presumably threw the phone on the counter to be able to clean more easily with his two hands. Thomas was starting to feel the beginning of a migraine just by imagining the mess his friend had created.

“Fuck, James, when did you learn to cook?” he complained, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“James, I’ve gotta go in half an hour” he heard Patsy hurrying.

“Go where?” inquired Thomas, starting to feel enraged.

“I know, Patsy, darling! If you’re in such a hurry, help me!” said James, raising his voice considerably.

“No, I’ve just changed, I don’t want to get dirty!”

“Patsy” Thomas called, sternly. “Patsy, can you hear me? Pick the phone”

“Then, sit down and shut up!” ordered James, losing his patience. “Look at your sister, waiting patiently!”

“Because she’s got no social life!”

“Hey!” Polly complained in the distance.

“Gal, don’t talk that way to your sister!” reprimanded Thomas.

There was muffling sounds from the other side. Thomas identified the groans of her oldest daughter, the younger saying something to her, the older snapping at the little, and, eventually, the clear voice of James again.
“Behave!”

“James” tried to talk Thomas, tapping his foot impatiently. He heard the distant voice of his oldest daughter in the background.

“I don’t care who started it, I’m finishing it!” shouted James, angrily. He sighed, to calm his nerves. “Thomas, sorry, I’ve gotta…”

“Pass me to my daughter” demanded Thomas, immediately.

“I’ve already…”

“Pass me to my daughter” he repeated, more serious than before.

“… Alright, kill each other, I don’t fucking care anymore” snapped James.

Thomas ignored his friend’s strides accompanied by insults to his behalf.

“Your father wants to talk to you” explained James, followed by the sound of him tossing the phone in her direction.

“What” said the girl, boringly.

“Martha, what did I tell you before leaving?”

“You’ve said so many things, I can’t remember all’

“Don’t go smart with me, young lady. I told you you couldn’t get out the house after nine”

“I know”

“You know? Then why are you pestering James about dinner?”

‘Cause I agreed on meeting at 8.50 with my friends”

 “… Martha, are you…?”

“I’m not leaving the house after nine” the girl defended herself, with a clear smirk in her tone of voice.

“But you’ll be out by nine if you go out at that hour!” exploded Thomas. “Or are you going to chat for five minutes and then go back home?!”

“Nope”

“So?!”

“But I’m not leaving the house after nine”

“Martha…!”

“You told me I couldn’t leave after nine; you never said something about at what hour I’d have to go back if I got out before nine” she explained, with a condescending tone.
“… I’m sick of your head games, gal”

“I inherited it from you, so…” she let the sentence hanging in the air.

“From me?” repeated Thomas. “From your aunt, at much”

Martha clicked her tongue in annoyance. “Yeah, and both from grandma” she snapped back.

“Look, yes, you really have her same venom” said Thomas, bitterly.

“I don’t have venom, I was here, quiet, and then you…”

“Quiet? Demanding James to make you dinner faster so you could get away with your stupid idea is being quiet?” asked Thomas, frowning in exasperation.

“I was not demanding…”

“No, of course you weren’t, that’s why I’m in such a bad mood right now” conceded Thomas sarcastically.

“You’ve been with that bad mood since before I was born” spat Patsy.

“And you made it worse” Thomas spat back.

“Well, if you can’t stand me, why did you want to talk to me?” she asked.

“To tell you you are going nowhere”

“We’ll see”

“No. Patsy, you won’t…”

“I already agreed on meeting” insisted the teenager.

“I don’t fucking care, Patsy, you agreed on not going out after nine and that meant you’re supposed to be home after nine, your stupid and silly ideas of smooth talkers be damned, got it?!?” exploded Thomas, raising his voice.

“And then you complain about us screaming” the girl threw in his face.

“I can scream all the times I want”

“How fair!”

“And especially if my daughter disrespects me and laughs in my face”

“Hehe, in your ear as much” she joked.

“You wanna keep going?”

Patsy sighed, tired. “Ah, Dad, I’m not going to listen to you, really…”

“Excuse me?” said Thomas, perplexed. “But do you think those are ways to talk to your father?!”

“Dad…”

“Don’t ‘Dad’ me, gal! You’re unbelievable! What nerve!”
“Bbff…”

“You’re not going out”

“Yeah, yeah”

“Don’t say ‘yeah, yeah’ and then go out”

“And what’re you gonna do? Come back running?” she mocked.

“I’ll drive all the way back there, this job be damned” swore Thomas, heat-headedly.

“Sure thing, Dad”

“Why do you always have to act this way?” asked Thomas, now sounding a bit worried. “Really, you’ve got a problem and an obsession. Think about it”

“I don’t…” denied Patsy, with tiny voice.

“You don’t? Going out all nights, when you’re only sixteen…”

Patsy interrupted him. “Yeah, exactly. I’m sixteen. I can’t be locked up in my house all day”

“I’m not asking you to be locked up, darling. I’m just saying that you’ve gotta slow down a bit. You’re only sixteen, you’ve got plenty of time for…”

“So annoying with my fucking age…” he heard her mutter.

Thomas inhaled through his nostrils. “Yes, I’m annoying with your fucking age because it’s the age you are, gal!”

“Alriiiight…” she complained.

“And you’re underage, my responsibility”

“Yeah, now I am…”

“Don’t start again!” warned Thomas, feeling his cheeks blushing from anger.

“You can tell everybody whatever you want, but I can’t?” retorted Patsy, defiant. “You did what you did”

“Just like you. Don’t challenge me into digging up for shit, because you could be surprised”

“Yeah, at how little you know about me, your underage daughter” she said, bitterly.

“Look…” Thomas passed a hand through his face, lost at words. “If you truly think you can soften me with that, you’re very wrong, young lady”

“Mmh…”

“Because, like it or not, you’re my daughter. Now and since you were born”

“Yeah, sure” she replied, clearly not agreeing.

Thomas ignored her. “And I decide whether you go out or not. Or if you can do this or that”
She groaned, interrupting his explanation.

“Listen, when you’re twenty-one, do whatever you want with your life” continued Thomas, a bit gentler and understanding.

“Absolutely!”

“For all I care, you can leave the house and go elsewhere!”

“No, not that, I like to live well”

“… … … … …”

A honk was heard in the distance.

“Patsy…” began to say Thomas, knowingly. He frowned at the silence of the other side. “Martha Jefferson, don’t you dare!”

The front door was heard being slam shut. Thomas stood there, in shock. He heard someone picking up the phone after some moment.

“Daddy?” Polly’s voice asked.

“Did your sister leave?” asked Thomas, taking a seat on the bed and already knowing the answer.

“Yep. Randy came to pick her up” she explained.

“Randy?” Thomas repeated the name with disgust. “That guy again?”

“Yeah, they see and text every night”

Thomas sighed deeply, in defeat.

“Daddy, can I call the pizzeria and pay with your money?” asked the little girl.

“Wasn’t James making dinner?” he asked, arching one eyebrow.

“He turned the fires off and locked up inside his bedroom after giving Patsy the phone” she explained.

Thomas sighed. “Alright, dear. But tell James to open and pay, alright?”
“Okay”

“Don’t open the door alone, go get him, okay?” he insisted.

“Yes, Daddy. Bye”

“Goodnight, princess”

Thomas threw the phone aside and lay half of his body on the bed, massaging his temples. The door opened just a tiny bit, and he turned his head at the creaking sound it made. Mary stuck her head out.

“Not even your daughters respect you, you loser father” she spat, out of the blue.

Thomas took his time to react. “Ma’am, where did that come from now?”

“You woke me up from my nap” she complained.

“Well, ma’am, sorry, but there are more people living in here and…” tried to argue Thomas, changing into a sitting position.

“Human garbage, good-for-nothing, greatest misfortune the world has ever known. You should’ve been born dead, you waste of air” she insulted, without a pause to breathe.

Thomas blinked, dumbfounded. “Ma’am, what the heck is your problem??” he managed to ask.

“Go to hell!” she spat, slamming his door shut.

Thomas sat there, looking at the door without comprehending what had just happened. A few seconds later, loud music rock started to make the whole house tremble. Thomas felt his migraine getting worse. He put his hands at both sides of his head and got up, infuriated.

“Damn cabin full of spoiled lunatics” he cursed, getting out his bedroom.

He frowned at the loud music coming from downstairs and cocked an eyebrow at the faint sound of something softer and calmer playing in the background. Thomas turned around and advanced to the end of the hallway, where a single door stood, now ajar. In all honestly, Thomas hadn’t wanted to explore the cabin any further, feeling uninterested and a bit noisy by thinking about doing so.

Well, it wasn’t the same if the door was already opened by a crack, right?
He pushed it, finally receiving the whole notes played on the piano that stood gracefully on the large room. Or well, library, judging by the huge bookshelf full of books of different colours and sizes. As much of a books’ lover as Thomas, he found himself more amazed by the fact that the velvety harmony was being played by Hamilton, who didn’t stop playing even when he lifted his glare and fixated eyes on him.

“Look, I found the piano you told me to get” he commented, jocosely.

Thomas woke up from his daze. “I wasn’t expecting you to know how to play it”

Thomas closed the door, muffling the strident music downstairs, thankfully, as Alexander let out a humourless laugh.

“I’m a box full of surprises” he said, in lieu of the proper and witty comeback Thomas was expecting from him.

“What song is it?” asked Thomas conversationally, walking closer after sensing the ambient was lacking their usual tension. “It rings me some bells”

“Knowing Laf, he sure made you watch that French movie with him as well” answered Alexander, with the phantom of a warm smile on his lips.

Something clicked inside Thomas’ brain then. “Ah, yes. The one with the girl that wanted to be a singer. We watched it the other night” he recalled.

“Aha”

“And you learned it on the piano?” He couldn’t erase the surprise in his voice, no matter how hard he tried.

“Betsey did, and then she taught me” he explained, after a shrug of foreign humility.

“Didn’t know she played the piano either” commented Thomas.

“It’s normal, we’re not friends and our musical tastes have never been the main subject of one of our quarrels” said Alexander, a faintness of their usual bite making its way in his words.

Thomas didn’t know why it bothered him that much. “True” he conceded.

“Where’s Washington?” he asked, curious, as the song reached its ending.

“Out on the boat, in the middle of the lake” answered Thomas, trying not to remember that unsettling image.

Hamilton exhaled through his nostrils slowly. “Fishing alone again?”

“More like glaring into the nothingness”

“Hope this doesn’t end like when Lee left us in his stupid cabin” said Alexander, ending the song and getting up. “There, all for yourself” he said, heading towards the door.
Thomas ignored the pang in his chest at the sudden coldness. “I’m more of the violin” he admitted.

That caught Hamilton’s attention, who stopped right at the doorframe, knob in hand. “You play the violin?” he asked, a bit sceptic.

“Used to” clarified Thomas, concealing the melancholy of his voice.

“Grew too bored of it?” guessed Hamilton, with his usual mocking tone.

“I broke my wrist and had to stop”

He didn’t know what he was trusting Hamilton with such information, but the explanation left his mouth without any permission. He turned his glare to the books by his right, entertaining his mind, so it couldn’t go back in time and remind him the disappointment in his mother’s eyes when she was told how and why he broke his right wrist.

The younger man tilted his head in the meantime, scrutinizing him.

“Pity” he finally said. “I’d have loved to hear you play, so I could criticise every bit of it”

Thomas imitated his sided smile. “I was very good, for your information”

“Guess I’ll never know for sure” was the last thing Hamilton said, before closing the door at his backs.

Thomas felt his chest less constricted after the exchange of words. At last, some of their past feud and banter seemed to be back.

The classroom erupted into tumult as all teenagers got up at once, disjointedly. There was only one kid who didn’t move from his seat, ordering his things as the room became emptier. It had become a habit of his, and nobody interrogated him about the issue anymore. Not even the teacher. Though Alexander still felt his sideways glares towards his desk.

“The classroom erupted into tumult as all teenagers got up at once, disjointedly. There was only one kid who didn’t move from his seat, ordering his things as the room became emptier. It had become a habit of his, and nobody interrogated him about the issue anymore. Not even the teacher. Though Alexander still felt his sideways glares towards his desk.

“See you tomorrow, sir” he bid farewell to the adult, getting up slowly from the plastic chair. That blow he received on the hip a few days ago was still bothering him…

The teacher’s eyes scrutinized his whole body, from head to toe. Alexander didn’t mind too
much. He had gotten used to wear hoodies, long-sleeves and long pants. The problem was when summer came and he still refused to show his skin. Thankfully, there were still a few months left before he had to worry over that as well.

The teacher’s lips remained sealed as he kept looking at him, studying him. Eventually, he lowered his glare and focused again on some tests he’d been marking for the last fifteen minutes of class.

“See you tomorrow, Hamilton”

The kid nodded and made his way to the door, pretending he didn’t want to flinch at each step he took. His muscles were stiffed and his stomach was starting to bother him for its emptiness. He could conceal his lack of eating to the rest of the world but himself. Some days, Alexander wished he could be included in that obliviousness.

“Hamilton” a deep voice called him.

Alex was startled at first. He relaxed considerably when he saw who was in front of him. Hercules Mulligan was the biggest and most stocky of his class, living up to his given name. Still, he never gave Alexander a bad vibe, he’d never seen the guy bullying anyone (as some others who didn’t share his physical complexion but lacked Mulligan’s goodness); on the contrary, Alexander had seen Mulligan stopping a few fights more than once, and he only made use of his appearance when the bully overstepped their limits.

In summary: Mulligan was one of the few people Alexander had liked since he came to America. He wouldn’t consider him a friend, not even a close one or someone to spend time with, but he was nice to be around.

“Sorry, I didn’t intend to scare you” he apologised, sending a regretful smile to his direction.

“You didn’t” lied Alexander. He felt horrible at how good he was starting to be in that art. “Did you need anything?”

“Yes, I wanted to talk to you about the History project we have to do together”

“Ah… Just tell me the subject and I’ll do the rest”

Mulligan was taken aback by that. “But it’s a group project, Hamilton”

“Yes, but… My parents don’t like people coming over”
And for once, his excuse wasn’t a lie. The Fulton seemed to have a problem over Alexander socializing that the kid didn’t understand.

“It’s alright, we can meet at my place” offered the boy, kindly.

“It would be difficult to reach an agreement about the hour”

Again, another truth.

Mulligan tilted his head to the side. “They’re the protective kind, huh?”

Alexander got rigid, ignoring the pain that went through his whole fragile and thin body.

“Yes, kind of”

And that lie hurt more than the rest he’d been saying since he arrived at that high school.

“Well, then… We can meet in the library at lunch breaks” kept proposing Mulligan, understanding.

“And I can give you my e-mail, so we can send each other our parts and then one of us put it together”

Alexander didn’t stop him for writing his e-mail down. He barely used the computer. He barely smelled it. He was the only kid in his class who did all his essays and homework by hand and by looking for information in books, instead of the Internet. But he couldn’t keep making excuses. Studying and school were the only things that succeeded in getting him out of bed, that gave him a reason to keep going on. He didn’t want to fail or get a poor mark on anything. And less to make another person pass through that.

Less Mulligan. If Alexander didn’t admire the kid’s personality before, he surely was doing it now.

“Here” said his classmate, passing him a piece of paper.

It might’ve been because he was distracted thinking about possible ways of avoiding the e-
mail sending issue, or because he just got distracted in general and that was prohibited for him (bad things turned worse each time he got distracted), because Alexander missed the action, missed the paper in Mulligan’s hand, seeing just the closed fist.

And he flinched. And pain again invaded his whole body, making his vision blurred. He stumbled on his feet, jumped back when he saw the distorted hands trying to catch him, bumped against the wall and let out a pathetic whimper when his already hurt back hit firm surface.

“Jesus, Hamilton, are you alright?” he heard Mulligan asking, sounding a bit concerned, but Alexander dismissed that idea immediately. Why would he care?

“I’m alright” he responded, quite sharply. Finally, his eyes adjusted and he was able to see the piece of paper his classmate was still holding. He took it more brusquely than he intended. “Thank you” he said, turning on his heels.

“Hamilton…” tried to call Mulligan, a bit of gravity accompanying now his troubled tone.

“I’ve gotta go” And Alexander wasn’t lying. “We’ll talk tomorrow” he promised, before sprinting down the hall.

His body would lament this decision later, but his anxiety would be eternally grateful.

Hercules Mulligan didn’t need to know. Nobody needed to know.

Alexander came back home panting, achy and with sweat bathing him completely. What he wouldn’t give to take a shower. A hot shower, if possible…

<<Yes, because you’re not paying the bills, right, you fucking moocher?>>

He gritted his teeth, containing his rage. Just one year, he encouraged himself, as he turned the key inside the keyhole, opening the front door of the place he lived in. Just one year, I’ll go to college and I’ll be able to do whatever I want…

“He’s home” he heard the female voice of his foster mother whispering.
“Alexander” his foster father bellowed from the living room.

The teenager exhaled through his nostrils and closed the front door. We started soon, he complained, as he dragged himself down the hallway. He walked in the living room, where the marriage was waiting for him. His foster mother was sat on the armrest, arms folded on her chest and eyes fixated on him. His foster father was sat on the armchair, straightened and with a sombre expression.

Alexander moved his eyes to the clock on the wall. He had come back late for three minutes. He curved his lips in annoyance and clenched his fists. Fucking imperfect perfectionist.

“I’m sorry for being late. I was working on a project with a classmate”

If those two assholes taught Alexander anything of value, was that lies were more believable and easier to tell when there was a bit of truth in them.

A thump made him jump in spot (and he cursed himself for doing so after having lived there for almost a year), and he heard his foster father getting up his seat and striding to him. Alexander’s chin was grabbed forcefully, fingers pounding in his skin. He started to plan how to conceal that for tomorrow as his foster father raised his head so he was staring at him.

“Did I give you permission to talk?” asked the man, frowning enraged.

“No”

“No?”

“No, you did not, Mr Fulton”

Alexander swallowed the bitter taste the taught words left in his mouth. Fulton looked at him, narrowing his eyes even more if that was even possible, before letting go of his chin. Alexander stumbled backwards and steadied himself before he could be reprimanded for another misbehave.

“Where were you?”

Alex clenched his fists. “I was working on a project with a classmate” he repeated, unwillingly.

“What classmate?”

“Hercules Mulligan. He’s been in my class since last year” he kept answering, automatically,
wishing for them to get tired, so he could be left alone.

Fulton eyed him, his inquisitive glare hardening as the seconds passed by. Alexander averted his eyes, looking directly at his foster mother, who was still in the same position, enjoying the show, as usual, but not taking part into it.

Eventually, Mr Fulton turned around.

Alexander contained a sigh of relief. One more day, he congratulated himself. He missed the woman giving something to her husband.

“Is this guy the classmate you’re talking about?” asked his foster father, who had walked back to him with a phone shining in his hand.

Alexander looked at the bright screen. His eyes took a moment to see properly. So many nights reading in that dark pantry were costing him dearly.

He felt his blood turning cold when he managed to see the image almost clearly. The screen showed him with a guy he had gone out with for a couple of nights, for relieving stress in some other way that wasn’t overworking, for feeling human warm again, kissing in a corner of the schoolyard. Fucking stupid noisy children with no life, he thought bitterly.

Alexander had done that back in the island several times, it wasn’t a new technique the land of the free had taught him, as well as he already knew about his sexual orientation. But when he arrived at the Fulton’s, he knew he had to keep it a secret. Their several sermons about how sinful sex was while out of the sacrament of marriage let Alexander know their position about body freedom and experimentation, as well as their homophobic slangs.

He never had a problem with accompanying them to church. Though not a believer of such institution, Alexander still believed there was something out there, he prayed every night. But religion and beliefs were other fields in which he disagreed with his foster family.

Eventually, Alexander remembered he hadn’t answered. And that wasn’t making any good with Fulton’s enraged glare.

“No, that’s not Mulligan” he informed, maintaining his cool.
“He’s found a new one already” commented the woman, her stone-face turning into horror as she pressed a hand over her mouth. “These fags are never satisfied”

Alexander frowned in her direction. “I’m not homosexual” he clarified.

The boldness cost him a slap that turned his head to the side. He felt the stinging pain in his right cheek, but ignored it. He was too used to this. This was nothing.

“Don’t dare to lie to us, queer”

Fulton pressed the screen against his face again, and Alexander narrowed his hurting eyes at the brightness.

“How do you explain this, then?! ”

“That floozy you’ve been seeing lately wasn’t our ideal daughter-in-law” commented his foster mother, wrinkling her features in disgust. “But at least she was a woman”

“She was not…”

Another slap, this time on the other cheek.

“Don’t interrupt your mother” hollered Fulton, red in the face.

“She had finished…”

Fulton silenced him by grabbing his hair and yanking him forwards.

“What did I just say?!” he whispered, darkly.

“Is this some kind of rebel phase?” questioned Mrs Fulton.

“This is his whore genes” the husband responded on Alexander’s behalf.

“I don’t…”

His complaint was shut down by a kick in the guts that made him hunch over, out of breath.
“Shut up, scum!” demanded Fulton, pulling tighter from his hair. “This is the last straw, Alexander. We gave you a home and this is how you thank us?!” he wondered, offended. “Shaming us with this behaviour?!”

“I’m not homosexual!” screamed Alexander, once he could breathe almost properly again. “I’m bisexual!”

“What?” asked the man, wrinkling his nose with disgust.

“He’s making up words again” accused the woman, with a hand on the forehead. “God, what have we done to deserve this?” she wondered, sounding desperate.

“I haven’t made anything up” Alex defended himself, managing to glare up at the woman and the man though his head was being pinned down by the hold Fulton still had on his hair. “It means I’m both attracted to girls and boys”

Alex couldn’t stop the whimper on time when Fulton pushed him closer to him, brusquely.

“I told you to not interrupt your mother, scum! And less if it’s for speaking lies!” he scolded.

Alexander trembled in his spot, impotence filling his whole being.

“She’s NOT MY FUCKING MOTHER!” he screamed, at the top of his lungs.

There was a pregnant silence the woman broke with a clearly fake weeping. Meanwhile, Alexander contained his real tears and tried to swallow the lump in his throat. Meanwhile, Fulton growled.

Alexander knew what was coming now.

He was pushed to the ground, his head hitting the hard, cold floor. He stayed on the ground, suffering from a fit of shaking. Impotence, fear, he didn’t know what caused it, but it was starting to become as normal as breathing.

Then, he felt the first kick of the several that were about to come.

He stayed there, on a fetal position and covering his head uselessly with his arms. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to ignore the pain, to think about something that gave him the strength
to endure this. One more year, one more year, one more…

“Fucking pervert. You couldn’t choose one and you have to fulfil your whore wishes fucking the two, right?!” shouted Fulton.

His mother. Rachel’s face always made its way in Alexander’s brain when something like this happened, that meant he saw her image every day. Some days even more than twice. Her sweet smile, her gentle touch, her encouraging words… Gosh, he missed her so much… Alexander couldn’t wait to see her again.

“Didn’t you hear me, scum?!” Fulton shouted again. “I told you to strip!”

Alexander took in a shaky breath. God, not the pantry… Not that again… Alexander had good health, but he didn’t know how many cold nights he could handle sleeping on nothing but a shirt and shorts inside a furniture-less, tiny and dirty room.

He was changed into a face up position by a kick.

“Strip!” the man ordered again.

Alexander obeyed. His muscles hurting, no matter how slow he moved; his throat was constricting and the tears were welling up in the corner of his eyes. It was becoming harder not to shed them right there.

Once his hoodie was off and only a shirt remained, he was yanked by the hair again. Alexander bit his bottom lip until he drew blood. It was better than moan. He’d made that mistake too many times within the first weeks living there.

He was pushed to the cold and hard ground again. He tried to get up, but didn’t find enough strengths to do so. Everything was hurting so much. And not only physically. He tried again, until he was able to raise half of his body, just to be pushed again, this time by a shoe on his backs. Alexander bit his bottom lip with more force than before when he felt the sole tattooing itself in the part of bare skin his lifted shirt let out.

When the shoe lifted, Alexander exhaled and inhaled laboriously. He was raised from the floor by a hand, burying its nails into his bruised skin. Alexander left himself being dragged, blindly
from pain, through the hallway he’d known so well for the past months. They stopped at the front of
the white door of the empty pantry the marriage hadn’t used since he arrived. It swung open, and he
was thrown there, unceremoniously.

“You won’t have dinner tonight either”

Wasn’t counting on it…

“Oh, and don’t even bother to look for those books you somehow sneaked in here” commented the
man, the door half closed.

Alexander flinched at that. The books. The books he had brought from his island. The books
he had been given by his mother during those afternoons he waited for her word day to finish. The
only thing he had from his mother.

He raised his head a bit, shaking from powerlessness and failing at looking at the smirking
man with all the hatred he was feeling.

“We threw them all away” he admitted, enjoying his painful expression.

That seemed to renovate Alexander’s strength, because he found himself jumping, his aching body
not bothering him one bit.

“You son of a bitch!” he screamed.

Fulton closed the door with a thump, and Alex launched at it. He punched it a couple of
times until his body reminded him how hurt he was and his mind, how this would make everything
even worse.

Alexander slid down the door, sobs escaping from the lump in his throat. He knelt on the
floor, head down, face covered by shaking hands.

He couldn’t cry, tears refused to fall for some reason, but his rage made him sob silently in
the darkness.
Until his pride grew stronger than his ire.

One more year, my ass, he swore, throwing daggers at the door in front of him, gritting his teeth.

“I’m leaving tonight”

“You’re a resentful brat”

“The kettle calling the pot”

“Wasn’t it saucepan?”

“You’re so quick-witted”

“And I haven’t even slept the recommended eight hours”

“Have you ever?”

Hamilton moved uncomfortably in his seat, lowering his glare to the wooden table behind Thomas. The older man kept cooking the spaghetti Bolognese (if Hamilton really thought he had gone shopping for not using the ingredients that same day, he was more fool than Thomas had thought). He stirred the vegetables and then added the mince, cleaning his hands on a clothe nearby in the end.

“The fact that you’re alive is a miracle” he commented, before the uncomfortable silence.

Hamilton huffed, as if he’d been insulted. “Well, Mr Secretary, I didn’t know you cared so much”

“I don’t” assured Thomas, still not meeting his glare. “But you’re one of the few who I can talk to without feeling my neurons dying in the meantime” he conceded.

The praise caught Hamilton off guard, because he took his time to answer.

“Likewise, I guess”
“Instead, you raise my blood pressure”

“Likewise” repeated the younger man, this time a bit sharper.

Dinner was as peaceful as it could be expected it to be. Thomas assigned it to Mary, who did sleep the recommended eight hours that day (plus six) and was as awake as ingenious, and Washington, who, in contrast, only slept a total of four hours, wanting to go fishing in peace, without childish employees or annoying mothers and so having waken up before the sun even rose. And, well, a sleep-deprived Washington was an irritable Washington. So mother and son didn’t mix well during dinner.

At least, Hamilton knew the wiser option was to shut his mouth and simply ate without giving too much of a fight. Thomas thanked Heavens for little miracles.

He texted James after what he thought was enough time for his friend to calm down, was glad to read Patsy came home relatively early (though he was resolute in having a chat with his daughter when he was back), wished him good night and tried to go to sleep. Just one more day, he tried to comfort himself.

Aaron came back to a house smelling of different types of food. He swallowed, afraid of what kind of show of horrors might be waiting for him at the other side of the door. He inhaled and exhaled, gathering enough courage as he unlocked the door and stepped in. The smells became stronger. A faint smoke came from the door at the end of the hallway. A faint singing came from the room, as well. Aaron closed the door at his backs and advanced.

He threw a rapid glare to the living room on his way, glad to see the two kids in the living room, watching something on the TV. Well, Augustine is not cooking, good.

Or so he thought before seeing the state the kitchen was in.

There were Tupperwares everywhere, different ingredients spread all over the table and counter (and not of all them were inside their respective bottles, mind you…), little stains of what
Aaron thought it was ketchup, moustache and mayo accompanied them, used knifes on different parts of the place and paper towels on the top of a few spilled liquids. That along the fact that Theodosia had the radio with the volume all the way up. Aaron could only hope the neighbours would never guess it came from their house.

He walked to the item and turned it off, finally calling the attention of his wife. Who wasn’t any cleaner than her surroundings. She smiled brightly at him and raised the wooden spoon she was holding.

“Hi, Aaron!” she greeted, as loud as if the music were still playing in the background. “Got a bit stuck with work?” she asked.

“No, I…” He shook his head. “Theodosia, what’s all this?”

His wife smiled even wider, if that was possible. “Guess what!”

“What?”

“We’re going on a picnic tomorrow!” she explained, enthuastically.

“A picnic?” he repeated.

“Yes!” she shrieked. “You’ve got Sundays free, right?”

“Yeah, right, but…”

“Perfect! We eat and spend some time outdoors, we were needing it!”

“But…”

“It was all Augustine’s idea!”

Something clicked inside Aaron’s brain, then, and he got rigid.

“I think he’s starting to settle in” kept commenting Theodosia, taking the meatballs out the pan and putting them on a plate.

“Hm… Theodosia…”

“Yes, honey?”

Aaron felt his voice abandoning him when he saw the spark in his wife’s eyes. He clenched and unclenched his fists, trying to manage enough courage to tell her what he was sensing lately about his stepson, like how he had to redo a lot of paperwork because the one he’d done ‘accidentally’ flew out the window or how he spent four hours trapped in the car until he finally managed to reach the glovebox and find some scissors hidden deep inside that Theo had forgotten
one day after day care.

But he didn’t. He couldn’t.

Though a bit annoying and totally unjustifiable, the kid’s behaviour towards him was nothing in comparison of the happiness he brought Theodosia. He was willing to wait for him to calm down, to finally know him for real and, maybe, became close. Not friends, not even sharing a father/son bound, but close enough to tolerate each other.

“Don’t you think it would be a lot of food?” said Aaron, smiling a bit and keeping his worries in the back of his head.

Theodosia waved one hand. “Nah, nah, nah, it’s never too much”

“Just remember we must be able to get in the car right after calling it a day” he joked.

She laughed loudly. “We will, I promise! Just a few more things and I’ll join you in the living room!”

“Movie night?” he guessed.

“Yep”

“Mulan?”

“Mulan” she nodded. “Augustine and Theo already took the popcorn and chips to the living”

“Alright”

Aaron nodded and walked out. He went to put his things in his workroom, changed into more comfortable clothes in his shared bedroom and then made his way to the living room, where his two children were waiting patiently, with the DVD menu on the screen.

“Hi, Daddy” greeted Theo, moving a bit so he could seat by her side.

“Hi, dear”

He kissed her on the head, sitting by the right armrest, being the little girl in the middle of her stepbrother and father. Aaron thanked Theo and her strong sixth sense. A crunch sound made them turn their heads to the left. Aaron saw, with saddened eyes, that Augustine was eating his favourite chips.

“Those are Dad’s chips” Theo told him off, with a frown.
“It’s okay, dear” hurried to say Aaron. “Not a big deal” he promised, looking in Augustine’s direction.

“But he should ask for permission first!” insisted Theo.

“Sorry” said Augustine, with a monotone voice, not looking in their direction at all as he kept eating. “I didn’t know you should ask for permission to take something that didn’t belong to you”

“Well, it’s basic knowledge” retorted the girl.

“Theo, please…” insisted her father, through clenched teeth.

Augustine did turn around that time, looking only at Aaron. “I’ve never thought taking something from someone else could be such a disrespect” he commented, casually, eyes locked with his paling stepfather’s. “It never crossed my mind that taking something one likes from someone could bother this much”

Aaron swallowed. “It’s alright, Augustine, I wasn’t that hungry” he assured.

“But, Daddy…”

“It’s alright” he interrupted his daughter, harsher than he intended.

“No, no, the little girl is right, Aaron” nodded the teenager. “One shouldn’t take someone else’s things so thoughtlessly. One day, you could make the wrong people angry”

And Augustine put another chip in his mouth, biting it noisily. Theo looked at the two males, frowning in confusion.

“I’m here!” declared Theodosia, making her way into the living room, her face already cleaned. “Let’s get down to business!” she joked, taking the remote and sitting beside Augustine.

Finally, Aaron was able to turn his head. He tried to focus his attention on the screen, playing the opening scene of the movie. Theo inclined towards him, muttering in his ear.

“Tell me when you change your mind. Remember I’m still on an age where my puppy eyes are infallible”

Aaron felt kind of bad for considering his daughter’s offer.
Alexander felt the air stinging in his lungs, each inhalation sent a horrible pain through his whole upper body. His legs stumbled as he ran as fast as he could, his arms barely moving as they were supposed to to help him go faster, too numb from the pain that emerged from his bruises.

He didn’t know where he was running to, he only knew he had to leave that house and to never return. He felt so weak. He couldn’t manage to wait and put up with it until he went to college, as he’d promised himself. He hadn’t been as strong as he always promised his mother he would be every time he prayed.

He made a guttural snort. Pray. Every prayer he sent to God was met with indifference. He prayed every night before going to sleep, he prayed as he fought the tears that wanted to fall as he struggled to go to sleep, he prayed to be noticed everywhere but back at home, and not a single one was answered. On the contrary, everybody at school looked down at him, even teachers, and once he put a foot at home he was met with judging glares that interrogated every move he made, every word he talked...

Home.

What was a home?

Was that hell a home?

Was his forgotten island in the Caribbean a home?

Home was the place where you grew up and felt safe and comfortable, a place you always longed to go back to.

Alexander had never felt that about anyplace.

He’d wished to leave Nevis. He’d wished to leave the orphanage. He’d wished to be kicked out from all the foster homes he was sent to. He’d wished to be out of that horrible nightmare the foster system had sent him to. He’d never wanted to go back anywhere...

Well, he was lying.
He wanted to go back to his mother.

He’d been for four years. Had been longing for smelling his mother’s scent and hear her voice. He needed to hear what she thought he should do, hear her advices one more time, just one last time and he’d be satisfied.

Alexander felt a pang in his chest. If it was because of the memory or the punch he had received there a few hours before, he could not tell. But it made him stop right in his tracks. His vision grew more blurred, his head was turning, the world around him spinning and warping. He fell on his knees, fatigued, light-headed. His stomach hurt horribly. When was the last time they had fed him?

He took unsteady and shallow breathes, trying to compose himself. Just then, he realised how cold the street truly was. He embraced himself, feeling his frozen skin under the palms of his trembling hands.

Chattering his teeth, he looked around. That street was deserted. Odd, but he preferred it that way. He didn’t want to make a fool out of himself, he surely looked pathetic. Besides, he didn’t want noisy adults asking him where his parents were or why was he out at his hours and in this cold, with only a shirt and shorts. He didn’t want anyone to notice the new marks on his bare skin. People noticing and asking meant problems, and he had enough on his plate already.

His eyes kept looking his surroundings, stopping only when he read a word that still made him feel secure. A bookshop. It was just ten steps away, literally. Maybe a bit more. His body was aching too much for walking properly, but he still could pretend he was like everyone else.

Alexander found himself heaving a little laugh. He’d come to America to make his name remembered, to be better than the rest, to be known and now, not one year later, he was walking on the streets, famished, wishing he was like any other kid he attended high school with.

If all those idiots back in the island, if that son of a bitch of Lavien, could see him now, they would laugh in his face, laugh at his failure, at how he was where he deserved to be. Alexander flinched, squeezing his eyes shut, when his vivid imagination (the only thing that the Fulton hadn’t managed to kill… yet) filled his head with their cruel cackling.

The ire he felt was enough for him to get on his feet and dragged himself to the front door of the closed and dark bookshop. He looked inside. With his poor luck, surely someone was there, or maybe the owner lived there or some other shit like that.
It seemed to be clear.

It didn’t cost Alexander much to force the lock.

Hey, some stereotypes people said about him were true... Not that Alexander would ever let them know.

He pushed open the door, closing it as quietly as he could behind his backs. The smell of unread pages, waiting to tell its stories, was heavenly.

Alexander walked between bookshelves. The shop was modest, but full of knowledge and fantasies. True and made up stories. About heroes who defeated their inner demons, princesses that waited to be rescued, knights slaughtering dragons, witches taking revenge of those who offended them and mistreated them for being a bit different from the rest. Biographies of men that made History, of women that told their stories as truthfully as they thought they had to.

All amazing stories. Some true, some real, some a mix of the two.

Nothing about him.

Alexander didn’t know what to think about his lack of worry before that affirmation.

He took a couple of books (one about a fantastic kingdom full of magic, the other about hidden treasures) and dropped himself in one corner.

He passed the pages, drifting away from his reality. God bless books and the people who wrote them.

Alexander felt his eyelids growing heavier by the third page of the first book he decided to read. He fell asleep before learning the name of the cursed baby.
Alex’s eyes burnt with the natural light of the sun. He tossed and turned on a firm surface. For a moment, he didn’t remember where he was, until the day of yesterday made his way back into his mind, to the fight he got himself into with his foster parents.

Ah, yes, I’m locked up in the pantry again, he thought normally, as he struggled to remember if today was a school day or not. If it was, he should be getting up and ready, or the punishment would be worse.

Alexander’s eyes opened quickly when he heard something metallic and tingling falling. He got up from the floor, changing into sitting position and regretting it immediately when his whole body ached at the sudden movement. He closed his eyes again, gritted his teeth for not screaming in pain and breathed slowly.

His vision was a bit blurred, his empty stomach hurting like hell not helping on the matter. When he finally raised his chin and his eyes adjusted to the natural light the room was now sunk into, he felt his heart skipping a beat.

There was a man in front of him.

An unknown man was looking back at him, eyes wide in a sensation Alexander dare not to name.

He was not in the pantry, now he remembered more clearly, he was in a bookshop.

A bookshop he had made his way into, illegally.

He opened his mouth to talk, to explain himself, to say an absurd excuse that wasn’t going to be believed, but his words abandoned him.

Alexander wasn’t surprise. Everyone had abandoned him, it was a matter of time his dear oratory would do the same at some point.

He didn’t know what to think when the startled expression of the man changed from one of gentleness.
“Fell asleep while reading?” he asked, as if they were old acquaintances.

Alexander felt stupid for nodding, but if the Fulton had taught him something was that sometimes it was wise to swim along with the current.

“If I got paid for all the times it’s happened to me, I’d be able to buy a bathtub that I’d later fill with all the money I gained from all the times I spent daydreaming”

The man let out a loud laugh. Alexander didn’t know why, but he smiled weakly. There was something nice about this man. Something…

No. No.

Don’t trust him. You’ve made enough mistakes throughout your whole life.

His stomach interrupted the man’s cackling, growling, demanding to be fed. The man’s eyes shone with what Alexander thought it was sympathy, but didn’t pay too much attention to it. He didn’t know him, why would he care about if Alex was hungry or not?

“You know? I left in a hurry this morning – another reason why I’d be filthy rich if I got paid for useless traits, would be my habit of oversleeping – and I was about to go grab breakfast after leaving some note on the door” explained the man, as he fidgeted with the keys he had taken from the floor when he’d started talking. “Do you wanna join me?”

Alexander blinked once. Twice.

“Pardon?” he asked, with tiny voice, totally astonished.

“Do you wanna have breakfast with me? I know a place where they serve you some pancakes that…” The man licked his lips, surely imagining the place he was talking to him about. “They are God sent, I swear”

Alexander looked at him. His stomach growled louder before he could talk.
“I’ll take that as a yes” concluded the man, with a smile. “Come, it’ll be on me”

“I…”

Another interruption. This time when the man covered his thin body with his huge coat. Alexander hated himself for enveloping himself with it, thankful for the warm it emanated. The man stretched out a hand.

Alex thought back when he first met the Fulton. How that man had done the same action. But, unlike that day, not a single red flag set off inside his brain. His stomach growled again, and it hurt like Alexander didn’t know it could.

Maybe he would regret it later, but at least he would have something inside his stomach.

He took the man’s hand.

The man helped him get on his feet, surprisingly gently. He never stopped smiling. Alexander noticed it didn’t quite reach his eyes. Alexander felt odd at how, not even with that, he felt any dangerous vibes coming from the man.

“Oh, where are my manners?” he said, stopping at the door. He looked down at the boy. “My name’s Henry Knox”

Alexander nodded and it took him a bit to understand the pregnant silence that followed the introduction.

“Alexander Hamilton”

The man’s smile grew a bit. “Well, Alexander” He opened the door and stepped aside. “Right after you, sir” he joked.

Alexander, despite the strange situation, found himself smiling.

Chapter End Notes
*Poorly-fucked: "malfollada". I hope I translated this right. Of course, it can be used for men and women. (Malfollado for men). We've got a lot of insults like this, like "malparido, malnacido (poorly-given birth)", "malcriado (poorly-raised/spoiled)", "malagradecido (poorly-grateful)" etc. Spain and its 1 000 ways of insult someone XD.

*Vera: Russian name that means "Truth" or "Faith".

*Comes from the factory (Viene de fábrica): Alexander insinuates that his huge self-esteem is one of his traits, just as black hair or blue eyes can be. Something you're born with.

*The song Alexander is playing on the piano is 'Je vole', from "La Famille Bélier". (It's a very cute movie, btw).

Thanks to gleek_runner and solacier for the comments. I forgot to tell you that I answered them on the comment thread (is that what you call it?). So, don't think I don't take time to answer you properly :)

And, there's only one part left for this episode to finish!

Sursum corda!
Chapter Summary

Past Alexander starts to do well until he doesn't. Thomas messes up. Again. Aaron loses it. Yes, the day has arrived.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: Anxiety attack
WARNING: Swearing, black humour
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Also, there's a bit of lams in here. Just a kiss, but still, warning for my poor romantic side trying to do its best. Oh, and for Alexander being a jerk to Eliza. And Thomas saying what he should not to Alex as well. Beware the cringe.

I don't know if I like how this last part turned out... I didn't want to write long-ass flashbacks but sometimes I feel they're lacking something. But then again, they're just little scenes of exact moments, not a whole story on their own. I don't know, I'm having mixed feelings. Libra's things. Today my scales are tipped to the 'I hate everything I've written, 'cause I could do a lot better' xD

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

—Vois sur ton chemin (See upon your path) from the film Les Choristes
Lucy Flucker was born within a wealthy family. Comfort and luxury were old friends of her, though not the best and not her favourite companions. Since a very young age she longed for more, she felt she had something important to do out there, someone was waiting for her. Since very little, Lucy felt she was different. While the girls back in her school dreamt about themselves as princesses waiting for their princes to come rescue them, she imagined herself as the valiant knight, on a white horse, sword in hand, defeating the vile dragon.

His father arched an eyebrow each time he saw her playing the ‘wrong role’, but her mother simply dismissed it by saying they were ‘children’s things’. Until she reached puberty, then she called it ‘rebel phase’. ‘It would end eventually’, her mother would promise her father. Lucy knew she didn’t believe it, but remained silent. She wasn’t rebelling to call for attention, she was being herself.

Years passed and still she still believed she was the knight in shining armour, prepared to save the day. She went to various lectures until she finally found what she thought appealed to her the most. Laws. She could change the world. Or America. Or just New York. But she would be contributing, she’d be doing something else than being sat, seeing the world passing by.

Her father didn’t understand, neither her mother. But she made her husband cede. Lucy would always thank her unconditional help and support.

She was the top of her class, she would spend nights without sleeping when finals came and she’d sacrificed going to some parties in order to pass her exams and write her essays as good as she could. Perfectly perfect.

She was glad her friends convinced her to take a break that night and helped her get an outfit for the winter’s ball that was happening that night. She’d have missed knowing the love of her life if she hadn’t attended it.

Henry and she clicked so fast it seemed almost impossible. Ironically, it was like all those romances in fairytales Lucy didn’t pay attention to while growing up, thinking they were too unreal for her likings. Who saw her and who was seeing her now, giggling and blushing and kissing at every chance they got.

Her father went ballistic when he knew. Her mother kept silent while father and daughter argue. Lucy was disowned. She couldn’t care less. She still kept in touch with her mother, who had
started to stand up more for herself after seeing her inner strength. That was enough for her, that made her happy.

But reality knocks on the door when you less want it.

After the honey-moon phase, Lucy’s temper and Henry’s stubbornness sometimes weren’t a good match. Especially when they differed on something. But when they refused to let their prides being bigger than the love and affection they still felt after each quarrel, they felt themselves growing stronger. Henry taught her when it was wise to use her temperament; Lucy taught him what things deserved his stubbornness.

Like, for example, their wedding. Some called them crazy for marrying at the age of 21. But they felt it right. And that was all that matter. Lucy’s father didn’t come, made up some excuse. Her mother went alone but happy. Lucy was satisfied.

There she was now, seventeen years of marriage later, as happy as a clam and feeling as safe as she always dreamt; she still practised Law (well, she practically perfected it), correcting the injustices she’d seen in the world. Her husband owned a modest yet successful bookshop (he’d always been a bookworm, and Lucy still found that trait very cute, especially when she threw glares at him during his afternoon readings and saw his face lighting up as one of a little child’s), and they were doing just fine.

Lucy didn’t think her life could get any better.

Of course, Henry hadn’t changed his habit of surprising her.

Alexander Hamilton. The kid’s name was Alexander Hamilton.

Looking at him broke her soul, but years of practising had taught her to keep a poker face when needed. Besides, the kid didn’t seem to like pity or compassion thrown towards him.

It was still very difficult not to frown in concern whenever Alexander flinch when some of them got too close or how he swallowed moans when he moved too fast.

He was difficult to get information from for the first couple of days, but Lucy always had a sharp eye.
“If you don’t tell us where you live, we can’t send you back” she commented, casually, one day. He was staying in their guest room, and barely left it. Just for using the washroom, and less more.

The kid shrugged, sat at the feet of the bed and with his glare low. “Who says I wanna be back?” he asked, defiant.

That was all Lucy needed to get to action. The physical marks and Alexander’s attitude spoke volumes on her favour.

After a total of five days, Lucy finally discovered where the kid studied. There weren’t that much of high schools near the area Henry’s bookshop was, and Lucy would’ve discovered it sooner, but she was waiting for the police to get reported about a missing child. They told her, day after day, that they hadn’t received anything of the sorts.

The teachers at the high school helped her without that much of a fight. Lucy didn’t know if feeling grateful or angry. If they didn’t ask too many questions, it was because they knew something odd was going on, but hadn’t acted until now, leaving the hard work to another person. She decided to focus on writing all the information down. Alexander was the most important thing.

Just when she was about to leave the secretary’s office*, a child that was about the age of Alexander stopped her. She was a bit impressed at first for his husky complexion, in juxtaposition of the gentleness of his features…

“Excuse me, are you a familiar of Alexander Hamilton?”

“No” It left her mouth rapid, but not loud enough for the secretary to hear. She wasn’t very good at lying, less to young people. “But we’re close” Or so I want to think, she thought, saddened. “Do you know him?” she asked now.

“He’s my classmate” explained the kid, frowning slightly. “He’s not come to class for days and it’s very rare for him, so I was wondering if he was alright?”

Lucy smiled at his genuine concern. Good to know not everybody he knows is bad. “He’s a bit sick, honey” she replied, as honestly as she could.

“Um… Are you going to see him today?”

“Yes”

The teenager passed him some papers inside a plastic bag. “It’s for a project. Tell him he doesn’t need to read or do anything if he’s feeling bad, but I know Hamilton likes to work, but health goes first”

“I totally agree”
There was a bit of relief as he said: “Good…”

Lucy smiled at him. “What’s your name, honey?”

“Hercules Mulligan”

“Well, Hercules, I’m glad Alexander counts with such a good friend as you” she said, sincerely.

The kid blushed. “Well, we’re not exactly friends, but…” He scratched the back of his head. “Could you tell him on my part I hope he gets well soon?” he asked, again with vision clouded by worry.

Lucy smiled brightly at him and put a hand on his shoulder. “I will, honey. And I assure you he will get better”

It was time to put on the armour.

Alexander had spent almost a week at the Knox’s. He had imprisoned himself in the guest room. He didn’t want to get out. He still hadn’t paid the breakfast Mr Knox had ‘invited’ him to yet, and he trembled just by thinking about what they might want in exchange.

He was fed by a bit of food they brought him. A toast, some cookies, a sandwich… Alexander just ate two bites of each thing, not knowing what his limit in that house was and not being interested in knowing. He could cope with that, hunger was his best friend by then.

Mrs Knox had stopped interrogating him (because Alexander wasn’t stupid. Though the questions weren’t direct, he still could sense the woman wanted information) and Mr Knox had stopped trying to interact with him. Lucy gave him the part of the project Hercules had gotten done and so he had a way to entertain his mind. He hadn’t heard from the Fulton in all that time. Things were going relatively well.

Until today.

“Alexander, can I come in?” asked Lucy, knocking on the door and sticking her head out.

He only shrugged. “Your house” he replied.

She opened the door completely, and Alexander then saw she was accompanied by the
husband. Alexander felt a feeling of déjà vu filling him. He was in a room with two adults he was in debt with. Adults that had put a roof over his head for a whole week and fed him with whatever they surely first laid eyes on. He swallowed afraid, feeling his heart rate increasing and a lump appearing in his throat.

“Working on the project?” chatted Lucy, with a gently smile.

“Yes” It’s a trap.

“Could you stop, so we can have a talk with you or do you prefer to finish it first?” she asked politely.

It’s a fucking trap. “I can resume this later” If they don’t beat you too harshly.

“Alright. Can I take a seat?” she pointed at the feet of the bed, the only spot with no a single sheet on.

“I-It’s your house, ma’am” he answered, now feeling his breath caught in his throat.

“Are you alright, boy?” asked Mr Knox. “You look pale. I can give you some water or…”

“I’m alright” interrupted Alexander, rather sharply.

He cursed himself when he saw the shocked expression on the man’s face. You’re a fucking idiot, Alexander…

<< Did I give you permission to talk?>>.

He’s going to beat you, the voice of reason warned inside his head. Fuck, Alexander, you’ve learnt nothing after one year?

“Bring him some, Henry” said Lucy, gently. “I think it’d be better if it’s only the two of us”

Mr Knox nodded and excused himself out of the room, closing the door quietly.

They’re going to do it in turns, thought Alexander, anxious.

“Alexander?” talked Lucy, with an even tone. “Honey, it’s alright, I just want to talk”
She’s lying.

“Honey, do you know the Fulton?”

Alexander felt his vision blurring after hearing that cursed surname. She knows them. They know each other. They’re going to beat you, to pass you as a rag doll from house to house to vent their frustrations.

Alexander, honey, breathe” soothed Lucy, getting up slowly and kneeling in front of him. “Can I touch you?”

It’s a trap, don’t answer. Just let her touch you or it’ll be worse.

“I’m just going to grab your hand, alright?” she asked, quietly, putting her hand gently on his own, trembling uncontrollably. “Listen to me, honey, everything will be fine, Alexander” she promised, solemnly.

Everything will be fine, everything will be fine… he mocked, inside his head. The same fucking sentence his brother told him after their mother died, and then he abandoned him. The same fucking sentence Mr Stevens told him before the freaking hurricane killed almost everybody in that island. The same sentence everyone said over and over and over again. The same promise everyone had made to him but no one fulfilled.

Everything will be fine, honey” kept talking Lucy, frowning in concern at his shaking fit. She squeezed his hand, reassuringly. “Everything will be fine”

“Stop” he managed to choke out.

“What?” she asked, thrilled to hear his voice.

“You can’t promise that. Everyone promises me that and they never fulfil it” he admitted, hating how little he sounded, how much his voice was shaking. “I hate that lie”

Lucy was silent, shocked, blinking at him. Alexander didn’t dare to raise his glare to look at her, surely, enraged expression. You’ve fucked up, you’ve fucked up as you fuck everything up. Now, she’s mad at you. Madder at you. Good job, you good-for…

“In that case” she talked, serious, and made him look straight into her eyes. It was a gentle
movement, but it still made him flinch, anxiously. “I promise you that I will do all within my power to make it better for you, as better as I can”

It was Alexander’s time to be shocked, then. He couldn’t comprehend the words that left the woman’s mouth. He was starting to feel numb.

“Alexander” she called, her expression and tone turning more serious, but not threatening in the slightest. “I’ll do my best and a bit more of that to make it better for you” she promised.

Before he could react, she enveloped him in a hug.

“We can talk about it later, honey” she said, comprehensively.

“I…” Alexander shook his head, as if waking up for a dream. Was this all a dream? He didn’t want to wake up, then. “It’s okay” he said, pushing the woman a bit until the hug was over.

“You sure?” asked Lucy, not very convinced.

No. “Yes” He straightened himself. “I know the Fulton…” he admitted. He saw how Lucy tilted her head to the side. She’d forgotten about her own question. Alexander kept going on, nonetheless. “They’re my… My foster parents”

“I know” nodded the woman, finally following the conversation. “We know what they did to you” Alexander tried to evade her glare, but Lucy again made him keep eye contact. She smiled with superiority, but it was not because of him. No, there was something else inside the woman’s head. Alexander felt a bit curious.

“And we’ll let them know what we know”

Alex raised one eyebrow, a mix of fear and what he thought it was hope (he hadn’t felt that in such a long time that he didn’t remember what it felt like) spreading across his chest and transforming themselves into anxiety. Lucy changed her resolute expression for one of excitement, then.

“Oh, I forgot! You’ve got visit!” she informed, getting up from the floor but not letting go of his hand.

“A visit?” he repeated, growing more nervous.
Lucy nodded. “Don’t worry, it’s a good one, I’m sure of it”

She led him out the room and down the hallway, until they entered the living room, where Henry was waiting for their conversation to be over. The man smiled at his wife when he saw the teenager holding her hand. Alexander lost the admiration in Henry’s eyes as he was too focus on the person sitting across from the man. His heart skipped a beat and felt a bit warm when the person smiled at him.

Alex looked up at Lucy with the phantom of a smile on his lips. Against all odds, the visit was good. Better than he was expecting it to be.

“What if he doesn’t come back?” Mrs Fulton asked, her eyes fixated on her husband, who had his head down, supporting his forehead by clasped hands. She curved her lips and straightened herself, walking away from the doorframe she was supporting her weight. “It’s been a week” she reminded, with a harsh tone. “We cannot keep saying he’s sick for another one. And remember the care system must send a worker to see how the child is doing. One thing is a quiet child and another different thing is a missing child. Not ever your friendship with that Jackson guy could save us if…”

The man interrupted the ramble of his wife by a punch on the table, that made all the objects lying there to tremble. Fulton looked up, enraged, and the woman took a step back, fearing the reaction the man might have. It’s been a while since they lost their thing to vent their frustrations on.

“I know it’s been a fucking week and I know what could happen if that brat doesn’t come back soon!” he screamed, overwhelmed.

They stood there, in silence, until the man lost control over his ire and threw all the things he had on his desk to the floor. The woman let out a surprised shriek.

“That fucking and ungrateful bastard!” damned the man, desperate. “Knew he was trouble since I saw him! If I can lay my hands on him again…!”

His enraged swear was interrupted by the doorbell. The woman paled as she looked at her husband. He nodded and, unwillingly, she walked to the front door.
Fulton let himself fall on the chair again, face buried in his hands as he tried to think of a solution. That kid was going to pay for this, he had gone too far now. How dare he? Who did that orphan, bastard, son of a whore, a kid who was kicked out for his own hometown, think he was? Fulton could feel his whole body trembling with impotence and anger. He was going to teach that unthankful and spoiled kid a lesson he would never for…

“Alexander!” he heard his wife exclaiming.

And the name made him to immediately raise to his feet and stride to where the entrance of the house was. He clenched his fists as he made his way down the hall.

“Where have you been?!” asked the woman, who blocked the vision of the teenager. “You…”

Fulton interrupted his wife by pushing her to the side, wanting to see the kid. And sure enough, there he was, with a cold and unreadable expression, wearing the same clothes he last had seen him with the exception of a green jacket that covered his upper body. The man gritted his teeth in rage when he saw the undaunted face of the teenager.

“Where the fuck have you been?!” he repeated his wife’s question, in a raised and most violent tone. The kid didn’t move one inch. That made him angrier. “Answer, you idiot! Now, you don’t have a voice or what?!” Still, no answer. The man wrinkled his nose in disgust. “You fucking…”

Fulton raised his hand, glad to see the teenager flinched, though he tried to conceal it. He still had some power over him. Good. Maybe now, with the enough amount of lessons and punishments, the kid would finally behave.

He never got the chance to slap the orphan, as a person made their way behind the kid. She put a hand on Alexander’s shoulder – the kid was startled at first, maybe forgetting she was there at all – and looked at Fulton dead in the eyes.

“I wouldn’t dare if I were you, Mr Fulton” warned Vera, with that polite tone she always used during their visits to the care system. “I think you’ve done it more than enough times already”

Fulton threw a hateful glare to the girl. “What the fuck are you doing with him?” he inquired, striding to the also expressionless girl. “Did he go back to the care system? To you, hoe?”

“Honey…” said the wife, a bit fearful. “The neighbours…”

“Shut up!” he hollered, his face redder as a tomato and not bothering in looking back. “You filthy whore, you’re made for each other”
Alexander’s lowered glare and slight trembling wasn’t enough for him, as the silence of the girl was making his blood boiling. His rage clouded his vision and, before he could stop himself, he broke the cold façade he had improved throughout the years by grabbing the neck of Vera’s shirt, making her stand on her tips.

“Were you hiding him!?” he questioned, throwing the control of his voice out of the window. He shook her, still not receiving anything, not even a slight shine of fear in her eyes, from the girl. “Answer me! Were you hiding him?! Do you know who you’re messing with?! I’ll make sure you get fired and to never work in this fucking city! Who do you think Jackson is gonna believe and support?!?”

“Stop!” shouted Alexander, shocked at the scene he was witnessing.

“Get inside, you queer, you’ll have your share later” hissed the man, not breaking eye contact with the girl.

“I don’t think so” said Vera, finally talking.

“What did you say?”

“Having Mr. Jackson’s favour for being close friends doesn’t mean having the police’s, sir” she explained, smirking despite the situation.

Fulton clicked his tongue. “Do you think so? I wasn’t the one who hid somebody else’s child. If you want, call the police to prove your theory” he challenged. “Making some foster parents your boss trusts worry unnecessarily…”

Vera’s smirk fell, and Fulton thought he had won the fight, until the girl spoke again.

“Did you look for Alexander in the past week?” she asked, deadly serious.

“Excuse me?”

“Did you look for him?” she repeated, looking him right in the eyes. “According to you, I’ve been hiding Alexander for a week. Did you look for him? Did you report his disappearance to the police? I don’t think so. They would’ve come to the care system just in case to make questions”

She enjoyed how the realization hit Fulton like a brick.

“Worry unnecessarily?” she repeated, with a hint of anger in her voice. “You two only worry for yourselves. I’m sure you’re this angry because you couldn’t think of a proper excuse for the next time one of my workmates came here to check the kid was alright, or if the school started to get too suspicious”
“Don’t think just because you work with children you know how it is to be a parent” the man retorted, with a scolding tone.

Vera narrowed her eyes at that. “You are no parents. A person who dares to raise their hand to their child, blood related or not, is not parent at all. Shouldn’t be called anything similar to it” she talked back, raising her voice considerably as the speech went on.

Alexander and Mrs Fulton stood there, in relative silence, exchanging their shocked expression from the man to the girl, still with her shirt under the tight grip of Fulton, whose free fist shook. Alexander was the first one who noticed. Vera was the second.

“Do it” she challenged.

The three witnesses got rigid at her words. Fulton was shaking terribly. Alexander was surprised to see him in such a state. It was more terrifying than the last time they’d fought.

“Vera…” he tried to warn her.

“Do it” repeated the girl, totally serious. “I’m an adult woman, I can defend for myself. Is that why you’re not doing it? Or is it because you like privacy better? Mr Fulton, you disgust me”

The last sentence was all Fulton needed to reach his limit and raise the fist. However, the punch never came as Alexander got in between the two adults, pushing Vera away from Fulton’s grip, and making the man’s fist to hit the air. The teenager stood in front of Vera, arms at both sides, in a useless way to shield the girl.

Fulton blinked perplexed at the kid in front of him. Vera was also surprised, but recovered from the shock fast enough.

“Honey” Mrs Fulton talked, with tiny voice, full of fear.

“Mr Fulton?” another female voice asked, louder and confident.

The man in question looked behind the girl. A woman and a man were standing there, seeing their whole interaction. Since when, he didn’t know, but it made the rational part of his brain to fear for the worst. Especially when his nerves allowed him to see the two police officers and even Jackson himself standing a few steps behind the marriage.
Vera put two hands on Alexander’s shoulders, and the kid jumped.

“I hope you don’t mind I decided to come with a few friends” commented the girl, jocosely.

“You fucking brat” insulted the man, under his breath.

“Mr and Mrs Fulton, you’re coming with us” one of the officers informed, as his colleague approached them with handcuffs.

“You’ve got nothing against me” argued the man, stubbornly. He pointed at Vera. “This girl kidnapped my son, you should be arresting her!”

“I’m not your son” said Alexander, with a frown, but barely raising the voice. Vera tightened her grip on his shoulder, and he was thankful as the action was grounding him.

“Mr Fulton, please, don’t make it worse” advised Lucy when she saw the irritated glare he threw to the child.

Fulton didn’t get to respond her as the officer had already handcuffed his wife and was now doing the same to him, maybe more brusquely than necessary. The Fulton marriage was led to the patrol car. The man was midway sat on the backseat, where his wife and Jackson (not handcuffed as them, but with pure dread on his face) when Lucy talked to him again.

“Oh, and Mr Fulton?” she began, casually. She smiled down at him, her eyes showing him the disgust she was feeling by just talking to him, though. “Everyone has their limit; thank you for reaching yours today. It made my job so much easier”

Alexander flinched when he saw his ex-foster father throwing daggers at the woman. The officer closed the door in his noses with a thump, both bid farewell to them and thanked them for their contribution. Lucy discussed a few things with the one who was sitting in the pilot seat as Henry made his way to where Vera and Alexander were standing.

The teenager looked over his shoulder. He felt the house wanting to swallow him, and trembled in his spot, his friend the lump in his throat making another appearance that morning. Henry patting him on the back with affection took him away from his absurd fears. Alexander looked up, seeing the man smiling down at him.

“Let’s go home, Alex” he told him, taking his left hand while Vera took the right one.

Alexander let them guide him to the Knox’s car, parked a few houses down. He threw a few glares to his ex-neighbours’ windows. Most of them were adorned by curious figures, glaring at the patrol car, driving away when Lucy was done talking to the officers. He felt a pang of sudden rage
going throughout his body. When were those curious and snoopy people when he was beaten or when he left his house limping or when they heard the thumps and furniture breaking, or his first week there, when he hadn’t learnt to not scream yet?

People. Always so selfish.

Alex felt Lucy putting a comforting hand on his shoulder. He looked up at her, and saw her smiling, glitery eyes looking down back at him. She was not sad, that smile was one of pure and genuine happiness. He then looked at both sides. Vera had her chin raised and clenched, she was squeezing his hand, as if fearing of him to evaporate if she let go of him. Henry had a clear relief in his face, only admitting he had to let go of his hand to open the car and get in there to drive them back.

Alexander softened his features and he felt a sudden sense of calm filled him. Maybe not all people were.

That night, Lucy wanted to celebrate. She put her apron on and spent the rest of the day in the kitchen, cooking all things imaginable. When dinnertime rolled by, her husband made her way into the kitchen. When Henry saw the table full of different types of food, he let out a whistle.

“Woman, you don’t measure!” he commented, eyes wide.

“It’s a special occasion!” Lucy defended herself. “Besides, that kid needs to eat” she commented, a bit less cheerful.

“You’re going to fatter him with all this!”

“We’ll keep the leftovers inside a tupper…”

“Jesus Christ and the Saint Virgen, where did we even keep all this food??”

Their conversation could be heard, though muffled, through Alexander’s closed door. Vera, who spent the rest of the day with him, and he attributed it to the room being right next to the kitchen. The girl laughed.
“Those two are something, aren’t they?” she asked, between giggles.

“Hm…” he nodded, absent-mindedly. “Vera”

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“Why did you do it?”

“Huh?”

Alexander clenched his fists, wrinkling the sheets on his borrowed mattress. He had heard the adults’ conversation after they had come back. Lucy had thought he would take longer in the bathroom, but nobody knew he had learnt to do it all fast just in case something could happen for entertaining or taking more time than necessary. Alexander had heard the three persons commenting the situation. They seemed to be happy and relieved, a thing that Alexander didn’t understand much, but what truly left him speechless was when he heard Henry asking, in a worried tone, where would Vera go from now on.

“Why did you give up your job for me?” he asked, straight to the point.

The girl blinked, surprised. “Alexander…”

“Jackson fired you when you threatened to tell Mrs Knox everything” he said, as if she didn’t know already, as if she hadn’t done it herself. “And I don’t think the care system would get any further after what happened today”

“You heard all that?” asked Vera, under her breath and avoiding his glare.

“Why?” he asked, confused. “Why did you do it?”

Vera raised her glare, resolute. “Because it was the right thing to do”

Alexander pressed his lips, his chest constricting. “But I…”

“You’re worth what we did today and so much more, Alexander” she interrupted him, gently.

Alexander didn’t believe her much. Alexander didn’t think he was worth so much sacrifice, or any sacrifice at all. He had thrown away his shot of becoming someone, he had given up on life, he hadn’t saved the Stevens from the hurricane, he hadn’t saved his family for their debt, he hadn’t saved his mother…

He felt the lump going up his throat again. “No, I’m not… I… I was sent here to make something out of myself, and I… I…”

“You did nothing wrong, sweetheart” promised Vera, feeling bad for the kid.
“Yes, I did. My mother… My mother gave up her life for me, a lot of people made sacrifices for me, and I let them all down” he confessed, without knowing why. “I gave up”

“Giving up is not wrong, sweetheart” explained Vera, gently, as she raised his chin so they could lock eyes. Her green ones shone with an affection Alexander didn’t understand, or thought to deserve. “What’s wrong is to not get back up to your feet. Please, never do that, Alexander”

Before he could promise her anything, the doorbell rang. Vera wiped the tears that were about to fall from her eyes and got up.

“Wonder who could it be?” she wondered, out loud, faking out a laugh to pretend she wasn’t about to cry.

“I’ll goooooo!” they heard Henry singing from the other side, along with his rapid footsteps.

“Don’t run! I waxed the floor this mor…!”

Lucy’s reprimand was silenced by a loudly thump, accompanied by a hiss of pain from Henry. Alexander found himself smiling when he saw Vera trying to contain her laughter. She opened the door, both finding the man spread on the floor.

“I’ll get it” said the girl, walking down the hallway.

“Thank you…”

Alexander watched him getting up. The man looked in his direction when he was finally on his feet.

“Hehehe, Lu’s habit of waxing the floor and that step at the entrance are gonna be the death of me” he laughed.

Alexander smiled politely, but sincerely.

“Alex, look who’s here!” Vera’s voice announced, as she made her way back to his room.

Alexander eyes widened a bit. “Mulligan”

Hercules smiled sheepishly back at him. “Mrs Knox invited me over” he responded his unspoken question. “How are you?” he asked, now concerned.
“Fine” Alex said automatically. “I… I haven’t had time to finish my part yet, I…”

Hercules eyed him with surprise. “Hamilton, calm down! We’ll talk about it when you’re able to go back, it’s not that important”

Alexander felt nervous at his words. A part of him wanted to believe him, another part knew the project was one of the two most important ones they would have that trimester. Guilt grew up inside his chest when he thought about how much inconvenience he was causing the poor guy.

“I’m sorry, Mulligan” he muttered.

“Hercules”

“Pardon?”

His classmate smiled at him. “I think only friends have dinner over the other’s house” he elaborated. “So, call me Hercules. Or Herc, whatever works”

Alexander was taken aback at first. “Alright… Alexander or Alex it’ll be for you, then”

“Okay”

“Dinner’s ready!” Lucy called them from the kitchen.

“Foooooood” celebrated Henry, attempting to run and falling on his butt again.

“This man will never learn” Lucy commented, exhausted, in the distance.

Vera and Hercules laughed openly after hearing the reprimand. Alexander got up from bed slowly. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t still hungry, as well as he’d said he couldn’t put up with it for a couple more of days. He’d been taking little bites of the food the Knox had given to him in the past week.

“All for you, Alex, eat all you want!” Lucy told him as soon as he made his way into the kitchen.

Alexander nodded automatically. His stomach growled when his nostrils smelt all the scents the kitchen was sunken into. Looking down, he saw all the streaming food on the table and he became shocked, unable to move. Vera took a seat at the corner of the table. Hercules was in front of Mr Knox, and Lucy was sitting across the empty chair Alex was behind at.

“Take a seat, dear” said Lucy, smiling. “Tell me, what do you like the most? We’ve got baked potatoes, soup, vegetables over there, freshly baked bread here, roast beef and… Dear, are you okay?” Lucy stopped when she raised her glare and looked the state he was in.
Those were no leftovers. Those were not a sad cold toast about to expire. Those were not a plate with a bit of rice. Those were plates full of all the things Lucy had been reciting and more. All hot, warm, waiting to be eaten. To be eaten by him. Sat on the same table the rest was eating at.

Alexander couldn’t stop the tears before they had already fallen. He’d never had a meal like that, just made for him, since his mother was alive, since he was a child. Maybe they didn’t have enough money for so many things, but it was made with the same dedication and love and thought. For a moment, Alexander thought he felt his mother again with him, he felt her warm enveloping him in a hug. He felt warmer when Vera got up and did the action herself.

Alexander clung to her, wetting her shirt with tears and breaking the silence he had sunken the kitchen into with his broken sobs.

“Sssh, it’s alright, sweetheart” Vera soothed him, as she caressed his hair, just like Rachel used to do.

That just made him broke even more. He cried all that he hadn’t cried since he was twelve. He felt a bit embarrassed when he remembered he was being watched, but he couldn’t stop.

“Now you’re safe, Alexander. Everything will be fine”

And, for the first time in his life, Alexander believed in that lie.

Washington had overslept that day. Which was both a good and a bad sign. Good because he had taken his missing hours of rest back, and bad because he hated the fact of getting up around lunchtime. Alexander could see the annoyance in his face when he saw him doing the dishes.

“I kept your share, sir” explained Alexander, with an understanding smile.

He went to prepare the man’s part of lunch, hearing his voice muttering a soft ‘thank you’ as he sat down. He served George the food and continuing washing the dishes in comfortable silence.
“Where are my mother and Jefferson?” asked George, when he was about to finish.

“Your mother locked herself up in the library and Jefferson went back to sleep. I think he has a migraine” explained Alexander.

George frowned at that. “Did he take anything for it?”

Alex shrugged. “I don’t think so. Not that he’d talk to me much about it”

“True” conceded George, getting up with his plate.

“Allow me, sir” said the youngest, taking the dish from his hands.

“No, you already had to cover my turn for cooking today”

“It’s alright. Besides, I think it’s a good chance to go fishing, with the sun and the lack of annoyance”

“Behave” reprimanded Washington. Though, after taking a glare at the clear and quietness of the outside world, he had to agree with his employee. “Guess I’ll leverage the last day” he commented, out loud. “Do you want to join me?”

“Sure. Just let me finish this first”

Washington nodded and walked upstairs, to go fetch the necessary. Just when Alexander was about to collect all his papers from the desk the living room had in one corner (his insomnia didn’t know what vacation was, excuse him), Alex received a phone call. He answered immediately when he read his wife’s name on the screen.

“Betsey, what happened?” he asked, worryingly. “Are you okay? What did you do?”

“… I love you too, hun” she replied.

“Don’t ‘hun’ me. What the hell happened?” inquired Alexander, more urgently.

“Nothing!” Eliza replied, almost offended.

“Then, why did you call?”

“Because I was missing my husband. Can I miss my husband, your Honour?”

Alexander considered her words, and then nodded, still suspicious. “Alright”

“So?”

“So, what?”

“I just told you I miss you”

“Thank you. I’d miss myself too”
“You’re incorrigible”

“It’s one of the many reasons people love me”

“Yes, would love to see you strangled”

“You woke up a bit dark today”

“Me? I was the one saying I love you, I miss you…”

“And I agreed”

“… You know what? I was going to make you happy, because I didn’t want to ruin your vacation…”

“You already did by confiscating my laptop”

“… But now, I’d simply tell you that the car broke”

“Ah, hahaha!” Alexander laughed with superiority. “I knew it! I knew—Wait, WHAT?!?”

“Yep”

“What did you do?!?”

“Nothing!”

“Cars don’t break like that!”

“I know. There’s… There’s a little light in here, flickering” she explained.

“A light where?”

“… Far away in the sky, ET might be missing the Elliot… Where do you think?! In the dash!”

“Wait, can you see what is it? Is it a figure?”

“Eh… … Yes, yes, I think so”

“Is it beside the speedometer?”

“Yes”

Alexander’s face turned red in a matter of seconds. “It’s all your fucking sister’s fault!” he accused, raising his voice.

“What did Angel do now??”

“No, Peggy!”

“Ah, true… What did Peggy do now?!”

“Using the car without refilling it with gas!”

“Yes, that might be it. See how it wasn’t my fault?” she threw in his face, clearly smirking.

“Tell her to fix this! Don’t do it yourself, we know each other, Betsey, and you’re a softie”
“I can’t. I’m in the middle of the street” she explained.

“You’re WHAT?!”

A loud horn was heard all of a sudden.

“Keep going, keep going, my sister’s an irresponsible!” Eliza said to the enraged driver.

“Get out of the way! You had to be a woman!”

“And you had to be a sexist pig!”

“BETSEY, DON’T INSULT PEOPLE, YOU CAN’T KNOW WHO’S INSANE AND WHO ISN’T THESE DAYS!”

“Someone insults your wife, and you scold her for defending herself. Nice” she complained.

“I’m trying to protect you from a stab or an aggression!” Alexander explained, anxiously. “For fuck’s sake, don’t you watch the news?!”

“No, they depress me”

“Well, you’ve gotta watch them!”

“Look, Alex… Call the tow truck or something”

“Why didn’t you call it?!”

‘Cause I have no money, and only you know the number of the credit card”

“You haven’t learned it yet?!”

“No, I…”

“And why don’t you have money with you?!”

“Because I wasn’t going to the supermarket or anything like that. I’ve got my life, you know?” retorted Eliza, starting to get angry. “I was trying to get away”

“Get away from what?”

“From the house, the kids, my sister… What? Only you can have vacation?”

“I never wanted to come to this vacation!”

Another upset horn sounded.

“Keep going, my sister’s an idiot and my husband, annoying” explained Eliza, once again.
“Yeah, and what else?!” shouted Alex, offended. He passed a hand through his hair. “I can’t relax for one minute in a row”

“Man, you only need to call the tow truck and explain…”

“Why don’t you let your sister do it?! She’s the one who started this!”

“Because she doesn’t know the credit card number” explained Eliza, boringly.

“She can read it! I’m sure she’s back at home, sleeping! That’s the only thing she does. Sleeping, sleeping, sleeping…!”

“Alex, for god’s sake, calm down!”

“I’m sick of nobody being responsible for their actions! Call her and…”

“I can’t. You told me to hide the credit card because you didn’t want her to find it”

“True. Damn you all to hell and back! All these problems because I can’t trust her with anything!”

“Alex…”

“I’m going to take that off her salary!” swore Alexander.

“I’m not gonna get in between that” said Eliza, unsurely. “I… That’s your and her thing. I just want to get out of here. There is a group of old men sat on a bench, looking directly at me”

“Jesus Christ, roll up the windows and locked the doors!”

“I think I’m wearing a too long V” commented Eliza, a bit nervous.

“That’s not excuse!”

“Oh, one’s waving at me. Hi, good afternoon!” she greeted, cheerfully.

“Don’t talk to them! Why do you always want to start conversations with everyone?!”

“If they see I’m polite, maybe they’d leave me alone”

“No! Ignore them! And wait there, I’m calling the tow truck, where the fuck are you?!”

“At the park”

“WHAT PARK?!”

“The one we take the children to… And don’t scream” She sighed, tiredly.

“Alright, stay there, I’m calling” he promised, hurriedly.

“Huh, I couldn’t move if I wanted to” muttered Eliza, jocosely.

“Betsey, it’s not funny!”

“Oh”

“What?”
“One of the old men is walking towards the car”

“What?! Don’t roll down the window! Eliza, don’t you dare to roll down the window!” he warned.

“But what if he’s hurt?”

“Nobody’s hurt at three in the afternoon! Less retired geezers, that’s their naptime! Look, open the glove box and take out my gun”

“You’ve got a gun inside the glove box?!” exclaimed Eliza, perplexed. “Alexander, our kids get inside this car every day! Why would you have that?!”

“Because the world is dangerous, Eliza!”

“Yes, with people like you, of course it is!”

“Take out the gun and showed it to him, so he knows who he’s messing with”

“He who?“

“… The old man you told me that was walking towards the car”

“Ah, yes. In the end, he just walked to the other side of the street. His light turned green”

“… I don’t care. Take the gun out”

He heard muffling sounds from the other side. He waited patiently, until he heard only silence.

“Betsey?” he asked, worried. “Hello? Betsey?”

A gunshot startled him, almost making him drop the phone.

“What was that?! Betsey, are you alright?!”

“… Alex?”

“Betsey!” relief invaded him at the sound of her voice. “What happened?”

“… … Alex, em… There’s a little hole in the roof of the car…” she explained.

“… … … …”

“Alex?”

“I’ll call the tow truck. Be patient”

“Alright, honey, love you”

“Bye…”
“Took you long enough. Next time, I’d call you when I’m there” she complained, under her breath.

“… … …”

Alexander shook in his spot.

“FUCK IT!” he shouted, enraged, throwing the phone against the floor. It broke into little pieces. Alexander breathed a few times and, then, horror spread across his face. “Oh, shit, my phone, I bought it the other day!” he lamented. In a millisecond, he changed his mood for one of pure rage again. “Fucking Peggy, you’re gonna pay for this!”

A clear of throat made him turn on his heels. George stood in the staircase, things prepared and dressed for the occasion.

“Did something happen, son?” he asked, a bit concerned.

“Yes, that my sister-in-law is reckless and now we all pay the consequences!” he vented, trotting to the staircase.

George nodded. “Yeah. Angelica’s good, but when she wakes up on the wrong foot, she can be…”

“I was talking about Peggy!” clarified Alexander, from upstairs.

“Oh, yes, Peggy, of course” George corrected himself, feeling a bit bad.

“Sir, can I borrow your phone for a moment?”

“Yes, it’s alright… But try not to break it, please”

“Don’t worry”

“Hope I could not worry…” muttered George.

A bang was heard from upstairs, then.

“What the hell is wrong now?! You fucked up my whole nap today as well!” Mary complained.

“Run, run away, George” he told himself, running to the front door without looking back.
The park was peaceful, Aaron’d give it that. If only the inside of his car could feel the same as the green paradise they were seeing out of the car. Theodosia had been doing most of the talking (as usual) with the children, and yet, Aaron never stopped feeling the intense glare of Augustine in the back of his neck.

Neither the teenager stopped when they parked, or when they collected their things, or when they made their way to under a tree, quite separated from the rest.

“As you like it, dear” said Theodosia, trotting to the isolated tree.

“Yes… Thank you…” he said, with a nervous laugh.

Theodosia frowned at him. “Are you okay, Aaron? You look a bit tensed”

“No, no, it’s alright” he lied.

She smiled and nudge him on the side. “C’mon! We’re far away from people, with our intimacy!”

“Yep, no one would hear us scream” added Augustine, with an unsettling smile.

Theodosia laughed. “Hahaha! That works for me!”

Theo pulled her father’s sleeve when mother and son were chatting lively as they trotted to the tree.

“Daddy, I’m liking the invader a lot less” she confessed, eyebrows frowned.

“Me too, dear” admitted Aaron, a bit scared. “Let’s not get separated from your mother, alright?”

“That works for me” she nodded, imitating her mother.

Aaron laughed a bit at that, feeling his nerves dying down at the cuteness of the little girl. The joy left as quickly as it came.

“Hey, Aaron, I forgot the jackets, and under the shadow it’s a bit cold” informed Theodosia, running in their opposite direction.

“But I thought we took everything with us?” asked Aaron, having a bad feeling about it.

“Yes, but I guess I got distracted while talking – you know how I am – and might forgot them” she excused, giggling with a little blush.

“Oh, well, I can go and…” tried to propose Aaron.

“No, no! My mistake, dear, you and Theo go with Augustine and help him get the things ready,
Aaron saw his wife making her way down the road, to where they’d parked the car, with sad eyes. Theo looked in the same direction, impassive.

“I’ll remind you again that my puppy eyes are very effective, Daddy” said the little one.

Aaron curved his lips and held her hand. “Stop with that. Let’s have a peaceful afternoon for your mother’s sake”

“Whatever…” Theo shrugged.

They arrived to the place, seeing Augustine had already put the tablecloth on the grass and was taking the plastic plates out the basket.

“Go help him” Aaron whispered in the girl’s ear.

Theo made a face. “No”

“Theo”

“No”

“Theo, you won’t go see Philip in all summer”

“… That’s unfair!” she complained, pouting.

“Welcome to life. Go” he instructed, totally serious.

Theo groaned as she went, crest-fallen, to where her stepbrother was.

“Accept my unwilling help, I’ve got friends I wanna see” she said, taking the tupper out, without looking directly at the teenager.

Aaron passed a hand through his flushed face. “That girl is reading too many books” he complained, under his breath.

Aaron took a seat on one corner, seeing his children doing their task in relative silence. The adult thought a million ways to keep the afternoon like that. He would be quiet and just talk when talked to. Easy peasy. His uncle had trained him for moments like these.
“Hey, Aaron” Augustine suddenly called, making him flinch in his seat. Looking up, he saw the teenager offering him a tupper that contained a tortilla. Theo was looking the whole scene with the corner of her eye. “Here, I made this for you” explained the teenager, smiling.

“You did?” asked Aaron, swallowing a bit uneasy.

Augustine nodded. “Yeah. I asked Mum how you liked it. We even went to buy the potatoes you like the most, and it has parsley, a bit extra of onion…”

“Rat poison” joked Theo.

“Rat poison…” repeated Augustine, unconsciously. He looked over his shoulder, upset. “Shut up”

“Your brain has betrayed you” gasped Theo. “Don’t eat it, Dad, you still have a good few years left to live!”

Aaron felt a tic in his right eye. “I’m 32, Theo”

The little girl gave him an up-down look. “You’ve lived them so badly, then…”

“Girl, you’re reaching the limit of my patience” warned Aaron, in a low tone.

Augustine almost tossed the tortilla in his direction. “Here, take a bite to cheer you up”

“No, Dad, you’ve got plenty of years to badly take!”

Aaron took the tupper and the fork, then. “It’s alright, Theo. And your mother and I will have a chat about your behaviour” he informed, cutting one little piece.

“My behaviour? He’s the one who’s trying to murder you!” complained Theo, pointing accusatory at her step-brother.

“Girl, there are lots of beautiful boarding schools for six-years-old…” commented Augustine, casually.

“Stop it you two” reprimanded Aaron, taking a bite of the tortilla. “You’ve only known each other for three days and you’ve done nothing but…”

“Dad?” asked Theo, worried.

“… Augustine…” talked Aaron, with a hoarse voice.

“Yes?” asked the kid, blinking innocently.

“What’s this red thing on the tortilla?” asked Aaron, his voice growing raspier and drops of sweat falling down his neck.

“Ketchup” answered the teenager.

“We…” Aaron cleared his throat. “We don’t have that at home”

“Yes, the little black bottle”

“That’s chilly sauce!” exclaimed Theo, feeling her throat burning without the need to taste it.
Aaron put the tupper down and launched to the basket. “Water, where’s…” Cough. “Where’s the water?!?”

“Oh, I knew I was forgetting something back at the truck” talked Augustine, with a fake tone.

Aaron jumped to his feet and ran down the path. He passed a startled Theodosia by.

“Aaron, where the hell are you going?!” she heard in the distance.

He ignored her and kept running until he reached the place he had seen through the window as he parked. The lake. Where a few children and old women were feeding the ducks. He pushed a couple aside, throwing the woman to the floor, and then threw himself into the lake. The children laughed and exclaimed, while the women commented what happened, as the ducks swam away, without looking back.

Theodosia ran to the place, embarrassment clear on her face.

“Aaron?!” she called, when the man didn’t swim back up. “Aaron!” She turned around when she heard a flash. She frowned enraged at the kids taking photos and recording with their phones. “Go pester your parents, kids, they had you for a reason!” she hollered, making them run away, terrified.

A loud splash and gasp was heard, and Theodosia turned around, arms crossed, seeing her husband taking deep breaths.

“Aaron, what the hell!”

“I…”

“When I told you I wanted surprises in this marriage, I wasn’t talking about this craziness!”

“But…”

“Now, you made us look like fools in front of all the park!” she accused, turning on her heels and hoofing back to where the two children were watching the scene.

When Aaron saw, even in the distance, the clear smile of satisfaction on Augustine’s face, he let himself go down again. “Damned family…” he cursed, making a few bubbles.
Alexander made sure Eliza had received the help she needed and that she had a way to go back home before calling Peggy and talk her ear right off for her attitude and letting Eliza live something like that. His anger become worse when the girl complained about being woken up from her nap. After that, even Eliza went to another room to do anything else that wasn’t getting in between that quarrel.

“No! You listen to me, young lady! One thing is to take the car without permission, and another thing is to not put it gas! You end it, you refill it!”

“I didn’t know the car was about to run out…!”

“A DICK* YOU DIDN’T KNOW!” exploded Alexander for the zillionth time during that conversation. “If you got your driver’s license as the rest of the world, you’d know that fucking light means the car needs gas! Don’t try to make me pass for a fool because…!”

Alexander cut his ramble midway when, with his peripheral, he saw the desk of the living room completely empty. He walked to it and looked at it for a moment too long. He moved the tongue inside his mouth in annoyance and inspired through his nostrils. He didn’t even pay attention to whatever excuse Peggy was telling him on the other side of the phone.

“Where are they?” asked Alex, loud enough to be heard, but not shouting. Yet.

He interrupted his sister-in-law and made Mary, watching her son with binoculars through the window, and Thomas, who was sat on the couch, reading some book, to look at him.

“Where is what, Grouchy Smurf?” asked Mary.

“Where’s the paperwork I left here a couple of hours ago!” he explained, now raising his voice considerably.

“Ah, that, yes. It was me” admitted Thomas. “I was cleaning and…”

“You WHAT?!”

Thomas’ jaw clicked shut at the sudden rage that took over Alexander’s features. Peggy was heard from the other side of the line, cackling cruelly.

“Oh, hohohoho, you’re gonna get it!” she declared. “Betsey, come here!”

“I don’t wanna…!” Eliza began to make an excuse.
“Hullaballoo, hullaballoo!”

They heard Eliza running to where her sister was. “I knew it was taking them too long!”

Alexander didn’t seem to mind the sisters, his phone still on his left hand, and both hands on his hips, as he tapped his foot furiously against the wooden floor. Mary made her way slowly into the kitchen, exchanging glares between the two men. Just when she made her way beyond the doorframe, Alexander exploded again.

“Talk, you fucking idiot. What the hell did you do?!”

“…” Thomas sighed and closed the book he’d been reading, not remembering to mark the page. “Hamilton, first of all, calm down”

“I won’t calm down until you fucking explain where the papers I worked so hard on are!” screamed Alexander.

Eliza gasped through the phone. “He touched his things??” she asked, in a whisper.

“Yes, yes”

“That man won’t get out of there alive”

“I know, I know” replied Peggy, with a sadistically happy tone.

Thomas got up from the couch, tiredly. “Calm down” he instructed, again. “I was cleaning before”

“Alright” nodded Alexander.

“Because the cabin was starting to be a mess again”

“Okay. Fair”

“There were a few dishes…”

“I cleaned them all before answering my phone” Alexander interrupted him.

“… No, because when I woke up, there were a couple in the sink”

“I…”

“Maybe Mrs. Washington ate something. I don’t know, Hamilton, I’m telling you what I saw” Thomas interrupted him, sharply.

“Okay, well. Go on” instructed the immigrant.

“And then I came in”

“Aha”

“And saw a lot of papers on that desk”

“My papers” spat Alexander, bitterly.
“Whoever’s” Thomas spat back. “And the desk was full of dust, so I took the papers, put them aside…”

“Why?”

“… Because I was going to clean the desk, and they were in the middle”

“In the middle of what? The desk that was created to have them on?”

“In the middle of my cleaning”

“And where are they?”

“I put them inside the second drawer”

Alexander opened said drawer, seeing a huge stack of papers.

“Did you read them?” asked Hamilton, with a cutting tone, as he took the stack out and started to leaf through pages.

Thomas frowned. “No, I don’t read things that are not mine” he responded, taking easy offense.

“There were more papers on here besides mine”

It wasn’t a question, but Thomas answered, nonetheless.

“Yes, there were. I took them all…”

“And put them inside there, making a mess” accused Alexander, frowning as he undid the stack, trying to find the ones that belonged to him.

“Not a mess” contradicted Thomas. “They’re there, they’re organised in the stack…”

“THE STACK FULL OF PAPERS OF DIFFERENT THINGS PUT TOGETHER. THAT’S NOT ORGANISATION!” complained Alexander, raising his voice.

“There we go, there we go” celebrated Peggy, being hushed by a nervous Eliza.

“… I told you to calm down” said Thomas, trying to keep it cool. “Listen, I can help you get yours organised…”

“No” interrupted Alex, rapidly. “You’ve helped enough already”

“Look, the desk was a dirty mess” Thomas defended himself. “I just cleaned…”

“You didn’t have to touch my things to…”

“Yes, I had to!” exploded Thomas, frustrated. “I had to, because the desk was full of dust and…”
“So what? If you’re bored, go read a book as you were doing! Don’t touch other people’s…!”

“Hamilton, if you don’t give a damn about your health, that’s your thing. But I won’t live in a place full of…”

“Then, leave, man! Go spend the weekend elsewhere, nobody wanted you here in the first place!”

And that felt like a bullet directed to Thomas’ self-esteem, as much as he hated to admit it. “I was invited here as well! And you can’t complain about my presence being a bother to you…”

“I can complain about whatever the fuck I want’ hissed Alexander, at the same time, being unheard by his workmate.

“…when you’ve been ignoring me”

“But didn’t you want me to disappear from your life?” he asked, trying to read two papers at the same time.

“That doesn’t mean we can’t act civil while…”

“Look, Jefferson” he interrupted, looking over his shoulder, slightly.

“What” spat the secretary, fed up with so many interruptions.

“There’s a Spanish song that goes ‘Don’t reproach me I’m unable to give you love, or say you don’t understand how I can be this way, for if I’m hurting you, I’ve learnt it all from you’” explained Alexander, making sure he was vocalising each word the clearest way possible.

“Don’t act so…”

“You can’t ask me for things you haven’t given me. Life does not work that way” concluded Alex, turning his backs on him again.

“You’re a resentful bipolar. When you were bored you came to me for entertainment” Thomas threw in his face.

Hamilton ignored his words and groaned in frustration, feeling overwhelmed at the papers in front of him. “Gosh, now I’d have to do all this again, I can’t keep working with these. How many fucking times will I have to tell you all to not touch my things!” he screamed, kicking the floor.

“For Christ’s sake, they were four shitty papers…”

“Four? Didn’t you say the whole desk was full of them?”

“And didn’t you say you can’t find yours because there are lots of them that are not yours?”

“You don’t even know what to do anymore to fuck my whole work up!” complained Alex, through clenched teeth. “Gosh, I can’t keep going on like this! It’s impossible”

“When are those due, anyways?” asked Thomas, rolling his eyes. “For next year?”

“For whenever the fuck I want them to be!” was the childish response Alexander gave.

“You’re overreacting” stated Thomas.

“Because it’s not the first time!” said Alexander, finally turning to face him, a couple of sheets in
each hand. “This is every time I try to do anything! Why do you have that obsession over…?”

“Hamilton, I cleaned because it was dirty. You’re not the navel of the world, less of mine…”

“Doesn’t seem like it! You’re always trying to bring down every fucking thing I do! I work hard on every freaking thing I do, alright? Maybe you’re not familiar with such thing, but I…”

Thomas clicked his tongue in annoyance. “Get off your self-made pedestal, Hamilton. You’re the financier of a little law firm no one gives a shit about, not the Secretary of Treasury. Now, calm down already!”

“I won’t calm down! And I’m not on any self-made pedestal, that’s you! Walking around as if you owned the fucking place. You know you got to work there out of pure pity and the bosses’ commodity, right?”

“Look… Y’all should be grateful, to varying degrees, because if you had any other man working there and standing your nonsense, maybe you’d have been fired a long time ago. You’re mentally unstable. I doubt there’s anyone else out there who’s able to stand all I’ve been…”

“Oh, yes? Well, welcome to the club, because you also should be grateful. Not everybody gets to keep working with the curriculum you have on your backs*”

And both knew what he was talking about.

The issue made Thomas’ blood boil, but what made him explode was the cocky smile Hamilton threw his way.

“Look, gremlin, go threaten your fucking mother, alright?!”

“I’m not threatening, I’m kindly reminding you…”

“Kindly my ass! Who knows if you’re only keeping it to yourself because you relate too much!”

“I already proved I don’t do such things!” Hamilton exploded as well, red as scarlet. “I gave you all I’ve done since I was hired, and…”

“That thing has too many damned pages for any man to understand!”

“Any man with an IQ superior of 90 could understand it!”

“And any exceptional gifted monkey could write in a more specific way than you do!”

The screaming continued for a while.

Mary Washington got out from the kitchen at some point, dragging a chair to the entrance of the room, being that way in the middle of the two arguing men, with a bowl of recently made
Something good had to came out from that hellish weekend standing those three.

“And you punched the bursar?”
“… Kind of”
“What kind of answer is that? Either you did it or not”
“It’s a blur”

Alexander felt his cheeks burning as Hercules’ laugh echoed throughout the first one’s dorm. To be honest, his ex-classmate from high school (and first friend) was the only reason Alexander wasn’t sulking for not having been able to get into Princeton. Having someone knowing him, for once, didn’t feel wrong. In fact, Alexander would dare to say he was glad to know his friend was going to study there, though not the same career.

He checked his phone, as Hercules decided to improvise an act of the scene Alexander didn’t want to retell with too much detail. He found himself smiling at the texts.

Lu:
Have a good first day of class!
Wanna know all about it once you finished!
Try to summarize it as much as you can lol
(is this the correct use of lol?)

Henry:
Hope the best for you today!
And don’t forget to tell Lu about it, you know how she is
Oh, and I wanted to ask you… Could you please write a glossary of text slang for Lu???

Alexander laughed a bit at that last one and then proceeded to answer. He knew they hadn’t
agreed with him on not allowing them to pay for his studies, but respected him until the end in his decision, nonetheless. Alex had also declined the chance to be adopted by them. It was unnecessary when he was only a few years apart from being a legal adult. And, besides, he didn’t like the idea of being that bounded to someone.

Some nights, he would remember all the good times he’d spent in that house, all the moments that seemed to have been taken out from a dream. The funny breakfasts; the outings to any museum or cinema to share an afternoon the three together; that time Henry had brought the Corgi from an animal shelter he heard some clients talking about in his bookshop; the dinners full of chats where everybody could speak their minds in any way they wanted; Alexander’s down moments when Dawn would accompany him, helping him to avoid to ask for more help to the Knox; the nights of insomnia when Alexander would sneak into Lu’s workroom; that time the woman had caught him and, contrary to what Alex was expecting from her, she decided to teach him all she knew and welcomed him the afternoons she had to bring work home.

It was about that time when he knew what he wanted to do with his life. When he saw Lucy smiling at each won case, when she came back home jumping from happiness because justice had been made and she had helped to make it that way, when her eyes shone with delight at each opportunity life threw in her way to make a difference, it was when Alexander felt again that call Neddy sometimes talked to him about.

Lu immediately let him borrow all the books he wanted, let him read all her old books from when she was a student, taught him all she knew, let him sit by her side to see how the work was done. None of them talked about how difficult the job could be sometimes. Both knew Alexander had gone through enough to know life was not a path full of beautiful roses, but they also knew they had the power to change it for the better, even if just a bit.

Alexander had brought a few of Lu’s Laws books with him. He had read and re-read them countless times. He didn’t want to sound very obnoxious (and if he did, what? He was just telling the truth!) but he already felt who was going to be first in class. He came more than prepared, and couldn’t wait until the teachers would tell them the essays they’d have to have done for the end of the semester, so he could start as soon as possible.

“Hey, do you know your roommate yet?” asked Hercules, after he was over his fit of laughter.

“Oh, are you finished laughing at me?” teased Alex, closing his phone and tossing it to the side.

“I wasn’t laughing at you, just at the situation you were involved in”

“Clever”

“Thanks. So?”

“No, I haven’t”
“That’s odd”

“What about you?”

“Mine won’t come until a few weeks later. He comes from aboard”

“Herc, you’re a magnet for immigrants” joked Alexander.

“That’s what I thought” laughed Hercules. “Well, if he’s like you, I won’t mind at all”

“Don’t count on it. I’m unique and unequalled”

“And humble, don’t forget the humble part”

Knock, knock.

“The sooner we name him, the sooner he comes” commented Hercules.

“It could be whoever” said Alex, walking to the door.

“Yes, the same day classes start, of course…”

Alexander rolled his eyes and opened the door. His polite ‘yes?’ drowned in his throat when he saw the boy in front of him, frowning at a piece of paper. He gripped the door tightly in order to not fall down and swallowed the lump in his throat. Alexander wasn’t the cloying type, not even the romantic type, but he wasn’t exaggerating when he thought his heart had just gone ‘boom’.

“Excuse me, are you Alexander Hamilton?”

“I…” He cleared his throat, feeling his face burning. “Y-Yes?”

The freckled teenager sighed. “Thank fuck, I’ve been going in circles since six” he explained his frustration as he tried to enter. “Hm… Can I get in?”

Alex blinked and stepped aside. “Yes, sorry”

The teenager made his way to the room, dragging a huge suitcase at his backs, along with the already fully packed backpack on his backs. Hercules jumped from the still not owned bed and nodded as a greeting. The kid imitated the gesture, dropping all his belongings on the nude mattress. Alexander stood there, watching the newcomer complaining about how the college was a labyrinth, he hadn’t even closed the door yet. His eyes finally moved away from the freckled boy when he heard a muffled giggle. He frowned at his friend when he saw Hercules also red in the face, but from a contained fit of laughter.
“What now?” he hissed.

“I’ve never thought I would see the day when you’d fall over the heels” responded his friend, in a low tone of voice, thank goodness.

“I’m not…” he tried to excuse, feeling his face warmer than before.

The boy interrupted him, walking to Alexander, stretching his hand out. “Ah, sorry, I didn’t introduce myself. John Laurens”

“Alexander Hamilton” replied the child, shaking hands.

“I know, I said your name before” reminded Laurens, with a faint laugh at the end.

And if Alexander’s face wasn’t red enough before, now it was a literal tomato.

“Are you okay?” asked Laurens a bit concerned. “Your face…”

“He’s easy to flush” responded Hercules. “Especially when he debates. Or, well, fights”

“Thank you, Herc” muttered Alexander, upset.

Hercules stretched out his hand to Laurens, who was seeing the exchange of words between the two guys.

“Hercules Mulligan, best friend” he introduced himself, receiving a handshake. “So, if you want any embarrassing moments, just tell me”

“I hate you” muttered Alex, again.

“Just doing my job” replied Hercules, with a teasing smile.

“I hope to find people like you in my class, honestly” commented Laurens, with a sincere laugh.

“What are you majoring in?” asked Hercules, curious.

“Ah, true! I’m studying human resources management”

“Informatics” responded Hercules, after a nod, more ambiguously.

“Laws” said Alexander, trying to recompose himself.

“One that has his goal very clear” commented Laurens. Was he looking Alex up and down or was that his brain playing tricks on him? “Well, I’ve gotta leave. My class starts sooner than the rest for a speech” he excused himself, turning around to rummage inside his backpack.

“Sure, we’ll see later?” asked Alexander, feeling a bit empty at the thought of the boy leaving.

“I guess so, we’re roommates” joked Laurens, trotting to the door.
Alexander slapped himself inside his head again. What the hell is wrong with me today?

“Bye!” he heard Laurens say, as he hurried out of the room.

“B-bye!” Alex stuttered, wanting to hit himself physically now. God, you’re sounding like an idiot.

Hercules elbowed him in the side, with a knowing grin. “So?”

“So?” he repeated, defiant. And it felt nice to go back to his usual self.

“The wedding, when?” cackled Hercules.

“For when you learn how to be funny” spat Alexander, rolling his eyes and going to fetch his own things.

“In that case, you’re late to ask him out” replied his friend.

“I’m not…” muttered Alexander, avoiding his friend’s glare.

“Hey” Hercules called his attention, and when Alexander looked up he saw all the mocking demeanour was gone. “Seriously now, Alex, I’m glad to see you like this. I think you need it”

“Need what?” he inquired, arching one eyebrow.

“A reminder that you’re not a robot”

“I don’t like Laurens!” he found himself saying, indignantly. “I barely know him”

“Yes, that’s why people call it love at first sight” retorted Hercules.

‘Love’ was not on the table here”

Not that anyone on their right mind would ever love you back, a tiny voice in his head taunted him.

“Whatever you say” conceded Hercules, shrugging. “But, really, sometimes it’s good to just go with the flow” he advised.

“You’re only one year older than me, stop acting like a wise grandpa” groaned Alexander, heading to the door.

“Your fault for skipping a year!” his friend teased.

“Huh, more like my intelligent brain’s fault” replied Alexander, finally leaving the dorm and sighing with relief.

He would go to class, ignore the turmoil his heart was still in and how it was harder to
breath when he thought back on his roommate. Alexander was just nervous because the kid was a stranger, that was it. It didn’t matter if this wasn’t the same anxious sensation he was accustomed to, maybe his body was trying some new anxiety on him to drive him madder.

“I’m gonna text Lu and Henry the good news!” he heard Hercules shouting.

Alexander was starting to doubt if having Hercules around was such a good idea as it first seemed.

“You’re a reckless fool”
“I’m fine”
“It’s bruising”
“No, it’s not…”
“Your eye is blacker than when I dragged your mindless arse here”
“That’s because the illumination of this room is crap! Ouch!”

Alexander saw Laurens grabbing the ice bag he had thrown to the stubborn man’s direction, putting it carefully on his swollen left eye.

“I’m sorry” he mumbled,
“No, you’re not…” retorted Laurens, hissing from pain.

Alex left himself fell on the bed across from his roommate’s. “Why did you do such an imbecility?”

Laurens snorted, not meeting his glare. “Said the guy who lectured an older guy who went to give a speech in his class the other day”

Alexander frowned at him. “That was justifiable. That Jay guy didn’t even know what he was talking about…”

“The teacher had to ask you to take a walk on several occasions”

“Just a couple of times…”

“Seven, in total, until he finally threatened to lower your mark” recalled Laurens, finally looking back at him with eyes half-closed.
“What would you know? You weren’t there!” retorted Alexander, folding his arms upon his chest, childishly.

“Laf told me”

“Noisy baguette” complained Alex, under his breath.

“You made a guy on his thirties cry, Alexander”

“…He sniffed, there were no tears for what I saw…”

“Alexander”

“I never broke his nose, though!”

Laurens punched the mattress and got up from it with a jump. “Oh, for fuck’s sake! Yes, yes, I gave Monroe a nosebleed, and I’d do it again!”

“You could be expelled, John!” Alexander reminded him, ignoring how much his heart ache at that thought. “You didn’t have a reason to…!”

“After he somehow discovered your family history and spread it throughout the whole fucking college to spoil your year…!”

“Shit, John, Monroe’s not the first one who tries to mess my whole life up!” exploded Alexander, raising his arms in the air, frustrated.

“He calls you ‘whoreson’. Almost the whole fucking college is starting to…!”

“And are you going to fight the whole college then?!”

“Try me”

Alexander was shocked for a few seconds. “John, really…”

“It makes my fucking blood boil so much” confessed Laurens, with the same venom but in a lower tone. “You don’t deserve all that crap Monroe and company throw in your way. You worked hard to get what you have”

“I didn’t come here to make friends” Alexander told him, in a cold tone. “If the whole college doesn’t like me, I don’t care; and if someone wants to drag my name through the mud, let me handle it. I’m more than used to it”

“So, you’re asking me to hear people talking shit about my friend and do nothing about it?” asked John, defiant.

“I’m not a maiden in need of defending, I am a young adult!” he complained.

“Alex, you’re the closest friend I’ve got” Laurens gave as an excuse.

He only shook his head. “John, don’t get offended because of me. Really, you wouldn’t have a break” he advised.

“But…”

“You’re going to get in trouble” continued Alexander, now with a faint worry in his cold tone.
“John, your father went ballistic after you broke up with that Martha girl, I don’t want you to get into more trouble because of me”

Alexander flinched at the feeling of déjà vu he felt every time he remembered the heated conversation he’d eavesdropped between Laurens and his father. He’d love to say he couldn’t imagine a single man get that angry, but he knew he’d be lying. Alexander tried to convince himself that having a short and strong temper wasn’t the same as being violent or an abusive parent, but he couldn’t help but feel sorry for his friend. Alexander would never forgive himself if John get in a dangerous situation because of him.

“He didn’t get mad because I broke up with her” confessed Laurens, fidgeting in his spot.

“He did not?” asked Alexander, his worry and anger turning into curiosity.

“No, he…” Laurens sighed, passing a hand through his dishevelled tied up hair. “I just told him I like somebody else, and he didn’t approve or like it one bit” he admitted.

Alexander pressed his lips. Selfishly, he’d felt happy when Laurens came back to the dorm that day and told him he had broken up with his girlfriend for real. It didn’t lift Alexander’s hopes, but at least his heart wouldn’t have to stand another stab by all the times he’d have to find his friend sharing an intimate kiss or walking, hand in hand, through the hallways with the girl.

This is what happens when you lose your time hoping instead of working, the malicious voice tortured him again.

“Ah” replied Alex, tightening the grip on his sheets, his knuckles turning white. “I… I hope she treats you well” Better than you’d have ever treated him.

Laurens kept avoiding his glare, cheeks turning red. “It’s not a ‘her’” he whispered, as if embarrassed, which was so un-Laurens, that Alexander, at first, thought he had heard wrong.

He opened the mouth to ask him to repeat the sentence, or to explain himself a bit further, but his lips were covered by his friend’s in a sudden kiss. Alexander was shocked at first, not reciprocating the action. He couldn’t bring himself to believe it. He thought he heard a faint echo of the voice, trying to spoil the moment, but Alex, for once, was faster than it and grabbed John’s turtleneck and deepened the kiss.
“Only you two could go from screaming enraged at each other, to kiss passionately” a voice took them out from their stupor.

Laurens got separated from him in an instant, and Alexander turned his flushed face, ignoring how much the embarrassing action hurt. He frowned at his whole group of friends there. Hercules with a smug smile on his face; Lafayette with a sly one, exchanging his glare from one boy to the other; Angelica was behind them, a bag of food in one hand and dedicating a sideways glare to her sister, Eliza, who was watching them with an unreadable expression of her face while she embraced herself.

“Were we interrupting something?” asked Angelica, after clearing her throat.

“No” hurried to say Laurens.

“Yes” deadpanned Alexander.

“Alex!”

“We wanted to bring you some food” explained Eliza, her voice a bit subdued, and Alexander arched an eyebrow in concern for his friend. “We… With all the commotion, you couldn’t eat” she continued, playing with her long hair and lowering her glare in the end.

“Thank you” said Laurens, striding to Angelica and taking the bag from her hands.

“Yes, thank you, you’re very kind, yadda, yadda. Now, could you leave?” spat Alexander, tapping his finger on the mattress.

“Alexander, please” begged Laurens, becoming redder.

“Yeah, we’re being very inconsiderate” agreed Hercules, nodding at the group at his backs. “The guy’s been pining on the lad since the year started and here we are, pestering”

“Hercules, damn you to hell!” shouted Alexander, punching the mattress with fury.

Lafayette raised a curious eyebrow. “For this being the country of the free, you all are a bit, how do you say it? Prims”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Stop doing that, faker. You got the highest mark at the last essay”

Lafayette shrugged, with an innocent smile. Angelica whispered something to a down Eliza, who only shook her head and curved her lips in a weak smile. Alexander tried to ask her what was wrong, but the sister talked first.

“Well, the show is over. Let’s go to our dorms” she instructed, grabbing Lafayette and Hercules from the back of the neck of their shirts and pushing them backwards, between whines of complain. “Come ooon” she hurried.

“See you later, Alex” said Eliza, throwing him what Alex thought was the most forced smile he’d
ever seen. And he knew a lot about those.

“Betsey, are you…?” he tried to ask.

“And congratulation to the both of you” she interrupted, rapidly, before grabbing the knob and closing the door quietly.

“Damn, I owe Peggy ten dollars…” complained Angelica, from the other side.

Alexander frowned at the door while Laurens let himself fall on the bed, face buried in his hands. He groaned loudly.

“Shit…”

“Don’t worry, they’re noisy but not gossip” consoled Alexander.

“No, I touched my eye and it hurts…” said Laurens, hissing and looking for the ice bag.

“Here” said Alex, finding it first on the desk below the window and passing it to his friend. “So, what now?” he asked.

“Wait until it heals”

“No, what about what happened before” clarified Alexander.

Laurens let out a tired sigh. “My father doesn’t know you, Alex, he doesn’t even know your name” he explained. “I wouldn’t want to get you into trouble for me”

“Where have I heard that before?” teased Alex.

“Shut up, asshole, I’m trying to be profound!” complained Laurens, throwing him the bag of food.

Alexander avoided it quite easily. “Sorry, keep going”

“I just wanted to say that I don’t want to put you in an uncomfortable position” said Laurens, glaring down. “Right now, it’s difficult with my family and I wouldn’t want to…”

“Hercules didn’t lie or was just teasing, you know?” Alex interrupted him.

“Excuse me?”

It was Alex’s time to go red. “I’ve been waiting for something like this to happen since I first laid eyes on you” he admitted. He raised both hands when he saw Laurens’ eyes growing wide. “I know it sounds cheesy, unreal, not even I believed it could happen that way, but…”

“Well, at least you have a nicer way to tell people” commented Laurens, conversationally, and both boys relaxed under the lack of tension their chat had. “I fell for you that time I saw you shouting like a madman to those who were bugging Laf because of his accent”

Alexander laughed. “Yes, my moment was prettier” He looked at his friend with a frown. “Jackie, what I’m trying to say is that I won’t mind waiting for you or keeping it a secret”
“I can’t ask you to do that” said Laurens, feeling bad.

“You’re not, I’m offering”

Laurens rolled his eyes with affection. “Always with a comeback”

“It’s part of my charm”

“Sure…”

“And if someone gets to know” continued Alexander, getting up to sit beside Laurens and hugged him by the shoulders. “You’ll fight them and I’ll talk their ear off”

Laurens laughed at that. “We’re the perfect team”

Alexander laughed along with him. And allowed himself to be positive and think that maybe, this could work out.

Washington was a responsible man. And as such, he deserved his time of relaxation, of peace, of quietness, of solitude. If Alexander and Jefferson didn’t know what that is, that was their problem. And if his mother preferred to lose time trying to make his weekend miserable, that was her business. Washington didn’t mind, he’d get in his personal bubble and ignore the whole world if necessary. He needed and deserved a break, and he was going to have it, honest-to-God*.

That was why he decided to ignore the first screams he could hear the whole way from the cabin to the lake; that was why he kept fishing and enjoying the sunny day; that was why he took out his phone to listen to some music that’d help him muffle the annoying shouting (how hadn’t he come used to it by then, he didn’t know). But when not even music would evade him, and he took the earbuds out, and he could understand clearly what his employees were saying to each other as if they were arguing right beside him…

Well, Washington was responsible even when he tried to be on vacation.

He rowed all the way back, jumped from the boat and ran to the cabin, leaving his things behind. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know what had happened, but he had to act. He wasn’t in the mood to defend his employees from some nearby neighbour, a normal person who knew how to live life. A pang of envy hit his chest. I only had eleven years left to retire, he thought, bitterly.

George arrived to the cabin in record time, taking into account his age and how little he had
exercising himself lately. Panting and nervous, he swung the door open, finding a too familiar scene.

Alexander was in one corner of the room, red in the face, gesticulating exaggeratedly, his voice making the wood surrounding them to tremble, and sheets flying around him, as some kind of ironical metaphor of the hurricane Hamilton was when angry, or excited, or upset, or any other human emotion really. In front of him, Jefferson responded to all the immigrant threw his way (which was kind of impressive, though it also ignited the inner fire of Hamilton’s anger to levels Washington didn’t want to witness) in a more collecting manner, just losing the control of his voice in a few occasions.

Both knew what buttons to push in order to make the other lose control of their tempers.

Washington closed the door with a thump, worry growing when he saw the two men still didn’t acknowledge his presence.

“What’s the meaning of this?!” he asked, trying to be heard over the quarrel. He walked to where his mother was, sat on a chair in the middle of the storm, eating popcorn. He scowled at her. “Mum, what happened?” he asked.

Mary barely looked at him, but answered, thankfully. “Lemongrab cleaned the desk, taking and keeping the gremlin’s paperwork in one of the drawers. And that seemed to be the straw that broke the camel’s back, because the gremlin started to lose it and throwing past shit. And shut up, or I’ll lose track”

Washington blinked dumbfounded. Not because his mother already knew the nicknames of his employees (whom she talked about all those things with, anyways?) or because she was able to follow the fight as if it were something she was accustomed to, but because…

“Paperwork?” asked George, feeling numb. “All this because Jefferson cleaned and put Hamilton’s paperwork aside?”

Mary hushed him, and he found himself also following the fight, not knowing how to act or get in between such a violent hurl of past things without getting hurt in the process.

Slowly, George started to follow the heated conversation. Things he had already pushed to the back of his mind coming back to him at each thing Alexander said. He couldn’t understand how he could remember all those things so perfectly well, when some happened three years ago, but George was starting to understand why the man was in such a bad mood half of the time. He’d make sure to talk it out with Alex when all this ended. Please, just let this end soon, he prayed, having a bad sensation about the whole thing.
“Hamilton, look at the whole mess you’re making just because I cleaned a damned desk!” complained Thomas, interrupting the rant thrown at him. “You have your paperwork already, go back to your room, finish it, re-do it, eat it, I don’t fucking care, but let it go already!”

“No!” Alexander shook his head stubbornly. “It’s not just because of this, this comes from a bunch of shit I’ve been repressing since…”

“Repressing?” echoed Thomas, scepticism in his tone. “You spend the twenty-four hours of the day talking and complaining about every little thing…”

“And all the times I’ve been quiet” assured Alexander, crossing both arms and tapping one foot, indignantly.

“Well, be it a bit more” advised Thomas.

“I don’t want to. I already…”

“With you, people don’t have to be warned about if you’re angry that day, they have to be warned about if you’re in a good mood. Because it’s such a strange occasion, you could give someone a stroke due to the surprise”

“Well, I’ll pray for that someone to be you one day”

“You’re already killing me with endless headaches, with so many tantrums and…”

“You were already having two migraines per week before you knew me, excuse me”

“Yes, and now I’ve got five a day”

“And I don’t throw tantrums, I…”

“And what do you call what you’ve been doing for almost an hour and a half?”

“That’s me, sick of your behaviour…”

“What behaviour? Cleaning?”

“I don’t need maids to do my shit for me” spat Alexander, offended. Thomas was taken aback. “What maids?”

“If you’re used to…”

“Look, boy, if you’ve got a trauma, go to a therapist and take care of it” interrupted Thomas, sharply. “But leave me out of it. I don’t want to know about…”

“You don’t want to know if it’s not to your advantage”

“No, I don’t care in general”

“You’re a smart-ass, only getting close to people to get…”

“That might be you. Look who you’re friends with”

“Who I’m friends with? With everybody that can’t stand you, because I only get close to normal and decent…”
“No, everybody with a name”

Hamilton’s cheeks grew redder. “If you’re insinuating…”

“I’m not insinuating, I’m stating it!” exploded Thomas, enraged. “You get closer to people with a name and in a time of need, you flee, you forget about everyone”

There was a tense pause, the air getting thicker in the room. Alexander made a ‘tsk’ sound.

“I guess you’re saying that because of how much I’ve made you pay me, or how much I took your personal disgraces to my gain”

“Because you stopped taking care of it for one mistake…”

“That was not a mistake” interrupted Alexander, starting to get seriously mad. “A mistake is when you let the light turned on or get two dates mixed up, not coldly calculating…”

“The one who’s always calculating is you. You spend nights calculating how much you can take from that person, from the other one, from the new one…”

“No, I prepare myself and the ones close to me for whatever that may happen in the future”

“Jesus, hanging out with you might be marvellous, always bitter about something that could happen…”

“I’m not bitter, and I’m an awesome company, for your information…”

“…always with the same song on repeat, thinking the sky might fall any minute…”

“Because it could!” argued Alexander, exasperated. “Maybe you don’t understand, but I’ve seen you must be prepared, you can’t always count on everybody, especially when tight times come”

“Didn’t you have more money that could spend?” asked Thomas, with bitter mockery.

“It’s not about that! It’s about stability! It’s about not knowing what can happen tomorrow, it’s… Fuck, if I had spent my life just ‘living the moment’, without planning things for the long run, I would’ve been dead by now”

“You’re not gonna change my mind if you put it that way”

“Life is hard” spat Alexander, resentfully. “Not all of us had the luck to be born in a golden cradle*…”

Thomas heaved a sigh as he rolled his eyes. “Mother of Christ. Alright, yes, Mary Sue, w’all already know you came here to talk about your book*. You don’t need to…”

“See how you’re always disrespecting and bringing down every fucking word I say?” spat Alexander, offended.

“And see how you’re always thinking everything is a personal…?”

“You invent things at my backs to destroy my reputation, and yet you’re still so shameless that…”
“Destroy what reputation? You’re an immigrant who came here because people back at your island took pity of your sob story and that’s it. As well as everybody else you ever crossed paths with…”


“Don’t scream at me!” demanded Thomas, feeling his head pounding.

“Yes, I will fucking scream!” retorted Alexander, trembling in spot already. “I fucking will because you’re insinuating and talking shit you know nothing about!”

“Well, that’d make two of us”

“I…”

“What the hell do you know about my life to criticise…”

“I do not talk about your life! I don’t fucking care what you did when you were 15 or 3! I care about what you’re doing now, I care about what you’re doing to me now! I care about all the lies…!”

“A shit you don’t care. In every fucking fight we ever had, you always go back to…”

“The difference between you and I is that I say the truth, and that hurts more than any lie!”

“Your truth”

“My truth based on reasons, based on things I’ve seen and heard with my own eyes and ears”

“Your truth based on paranoias you create…”

“You’re the one that’s paranoid! You can’t even take someone’s helping hand without thinking they’re holding a knife in the other” accused Hamilton, with a bit of rancour. “When was your birthday?” he asked, out of the blue.

“Why?” asked Thomas, puzzled. Then, he decided he didn’t want to know and simply responded, to end sooner with whatever craziness had taken over his workmate. “In April”

Alexander half-closed his eyes. “Which of the thirty days?”

“On the 13th”

Alexander paused for a moment, muttering something.

“Good, I’ll have time” he concluded, looking back at Jefferson. “I’m gonna make you a glossary, because I see your vocabulary is not that extent”

Jefferson moved the tongue inside his mouth, clearly annoyed by the taunting tone in
Hamilton’s voice.

“I’ll make sure to add important words such as ‘friendship’, ‘humanity’, ‘gratitude’, ‘humility’…”

“But could it be possible that you’re the one saying that?” interrupted Thomas, pinching the bridge of his nose. “You’re the one making a fuss because ‘you don’t want maids to clean’…”

“That’s a very different thing…”

“I don’t understand how someone who is working as what he’s working as thanks to charity can be so full of…”

“I’M NOT WHERE I AM BECAUSE OF CHARITY! I’M HERE BECAUSE I ACHIEVED IT ON MY OWN, SINCE I WAS VERY YOUNG, WORKING VERY HARD…!”

And Thomas simply exploded, his head hurting too much to handle another screamed rant.

“YES! I LEFT MY ‘PERFECT’ LIFE AS WELL TO LIVE ON MY OWN, WORKING HARD FOR ASSHOLES TOO, AND YET, YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE GOES BETTER THAN MINE!”

There was a pregnant pause, in which Hamilton’s enraged expression fell and was replaced by an illegible one; Washington shook his head to look at both men, a frown of concern in his features; even Mary froze in spot. Thomas felt as if cold water showered him while he waited for his workmate to react. That was why he didn’t listen to James’ advices about talking the problem that happened between Hamilton and him out*.

Thomas waited patiently, his anger dissipated and replaced by dread for the unpredictable, for his workmate to start shouting, insulting and throwing the first object his eyes laid on.

But Hamilton did something worse. So much worse than what Washington and Thomas were expecting.

Alexander stood there for a few seconds, as if processing the words his workmate had just said, and then, he simply turned around and went upstairs, in complete silence. Forgetting about his paperwork, Thomas needed to add.

Mary broke the silence with a sardonic laugh. “Hohoho, you’ll get it when you go back to work”

“Mum” admonished Washington immediately.
He sighed and looked at the secretary with a bit of anger. Thomas wasn’t surprised he was going to take Alexander’s side. He always did though he didn’t say it with those exact words.

“I’m going to shop what I need for tonight’s dinner” he explained, with a severe tone that made Thomas flinch as if he were a little kid. “Let’s see if by dinnertime you two can solve this out. Can I trust you to be mature while I’m gone?” he asked, cocking one eyebrow.

“Yes, sir” nodded Thomas, avoiding his glare.

“Good”

“Let me go with you” said Mary, getting up from her chair.

“It’s not necessary, Mum” dismissed Washington, striding to the door.

“Yes, it is. The show ended in here”

Washington opened his mouth to retort, but Peggy’s voice through the phone interrupted him and startled the three persons in the living room.

“A shitty show, if you ask me”

“Peggy!” reprehended Eliza.

“I wanted more shouting and past shit. Now, what will I do for the rest of the afternoon?”

“Peggy, hung up already!”

The sisters struggled for a bit before a series of ‘beep, beep’, sounded. Washington went to the desk to fetch his phone and sighed at the sight of the sheets on the floor.

“Please, Jefferson, clean this” he asked for.

“Yes, sir” said the younger man, obliging quickly.

Washington threw a glare upstairs and heaved another sigh. This is surely my top 2 worst ideas ever, he though bitterly, as he exited the cabin accompanied by his mother.
Aaron looked in front of him. Two parents playing frisbee with their children and dog. Their laughter filled the park, along with the lively chats of other people a few metres from them. There were a few couples still in their honeymoon phase, cuddling and feeding the other with wide smiles on their faces; a group of children playing superhero by the lake; and a few persons simply walking their dogs or just exercising.

Then, he looked over his shoulder, seeing the deathly glare Theodosia was dedicating him. Then, he looked at his lap, a sad tupper full with nothing more than a salad his wife had dressed wrongly for the sake of vengeance. Aaron let his head fall, defeated, as he kept eating slowly and separated from his family, in order to dry under the sunlight.

The rest of the day didn’t get better. Theodosia played with the children a small football match as he cleaned the things they left behind. Later, Theo played with the dolls while Theodosia and her son chatted (away from him, might add) and laughed at some in-joke. The little girl got closer to her lonely father at some point, handing him a Barbie doll.

“Daddy, do you wanna play with me?” she asked, innocently.

Aaron smiled at her. “Of course, honey. What’re you playing at?”

“Tea party” she replied, taking a seat and putting the rest of dolls down.

“Ah, we’re having tea and eating biscuits?” he asked, finding it cute.

“Yes” She showed him a brunette doll. “This is Esmeralda, and she’s going in undercover to find out what Lotso is hiding from the government”

“…Alright?”

“And this is Tony, who’s a drunkard” She picked up the male doll and tossed it aside. “Get out of the way, drunkard, you’ll spoil the investigation!”

“Girl, where have you learned that vocabulary?” asked Aaron, looking at the whole scene in awe.

“TV and some books I found under Mum’s bed”

Aaron felt sweat going down his neck. “What books…”

“Like…” Theo’s jaw clicked shut and she frowned at the nothingness.

“Are you okay, honey?” asked Aaron, putting a comforting hand on the girl’s back.

“I need to go” she said, staring him straight to the eye.

“Oh” Aaron breathed out a sigh of relief. “Theodosia!” he called, receiving a sideways glare from his wife. “I’m gonna take Theo to the restroom”

“Alright. Be safe, honey” said the woman, smiling at the little girl.
Finding the public restroom was easy. Aaron waited outside the little building, anxiety growing in his chest until he saw the girl getting out, shaking her wet hands.

“Feeling better?” he asked, taking her hand.

The girl nodded. “Now, I can drink another huge soda” she said, smiling brightly.

“… Haven’t you learned anything?” asked Aaron, sighing in defeat.

“I’m little, I don’t have to learn that fast” replied Theo, waggling her eyebrows.

“Hm, I think you’re too smart” commented her father, laughing a bit.

“Better for me” shrugged the girl.

“Absolutely”

They made their way to where Theodosia and Augustine were now taking something out of the basket. The woman smiled at the both of them.

“Just in time. We were about to eat the pie” she explained.

Theo let go of her father’s hand in an instant. “Yay, pie!”

“Did you wash your hands?” asked the mother.

“Yep”

“Good, take your part then!” congratulated Theodosia, putting a cut piece on a plastic dish. “Aaron, which part do you like the most?” she asked.

Aaron was about to choose when he noted the fixated glare of Augustine. A bad feeling went down his spine.

“… Who… Who did this?” he asked, pointing at the pie.

“Me” replied Theodosia, with a cocked eyebrow. “You were there while I baked it”

Aaron sighed, relieved. “True, true. I’ll have this one”

“On it”

They ate in comfortable silence, just enjoying the quietness of that hour of the day. Most
families had returned to their homes, the old and young couple parted to keep going on with other plans they had for the day and the ones footing had left when afternoon rolled by.

Theo’s whine returned Aaron back to his own family. He saw the little girl’s dress stained in the part of the chest by a piece of pie that had fallen from the fork. The little girl frowned and contained a sob as Theodosia put her plate aside and commented about how she had to learn how to be more careful.

“No one’s gonna take the food away from you!” scolded the woman. “Aaron, please, take something to clean this”

“Yes”

“Here” said Augustine, taking something out of the basket and passing it to the man.

“Thanks, honey” said Theodosia, with a smile. “Now, stay still…” she instructed, fighting for cleaning the dress properly. “What the hell is wrong with these napkins?!” she complained.

“Calm down, it’s skill” advised Aaron, calmly. 

Theodosia tossed the napkins in his direction. “Throw these away already”

“Here, there’s more” said Augustine, with a frown of worry.

“This fucking stain is gonna get cleaned as my name is Theodosia” muttered the woman.

“Don’t swear in front of…” tried to admonish Aaron.

“GO THROW THAT AWAY!” she screamed.

“Stop making a show out of a family day!” complained Aaron, getting up and striding to the nearest bin.

He muttered a few curses about Theodosia’s impatience and raised his fist, more than willing to throw those napkins with a lot more of force than necessary. He stopped when he felt the touch of the napkins he was holding, less soft than one’d expect. With a bad sensation, he lowered his hand and uncrumpled one of the napkins… Or well, the sheet.

Aaron felt a tic in his right eye when he saw that was the paperwork he’d done last night. The paperwork he had to do twice because the first one flew out of the window. The window Augustine had left opened.
Aaron inhaled slowly. “Alright, it’s okay” he whispered to himself. “I… I’ve got the e-mail Eliza sent me, I’ll just have to do it again… Surely the third time would go faster. It’s totally fine… There’s no need for a confront…”

“AARON” Theodosia hollered from behind. “AREN’T YOU DONE YET?! COME THE FUCK BACK, YOU USELESS, AND DO SOMETHING TO HELP!”

… … … … … … … … …

“Fuck it”

Theo turned her glare away from the flustered face of her mother, and her eyes grew wide when she saw her father sprinting up towards them, a glance of pure wrath in their direction.

“Uh… Mum?” she tried to say.

“What” spat the woman, frustrated at the stain growing bigger.

Theo never had the chance to speak, her father appeared in front of them. And now that he was so close, the girl swallowed afraid at how enraged her father looked. She’d never seen him like that.

“About time” said Theodosia, too focus on her problem to direct a glare to her husband. “Come on, help me…”

“Augustine” said Aaron, not minding his wife at all. “Where did you get these?” he asked, showing the papers he was holding.

“Oh, that, I thought it was old” replied the teenager, shrugging. “As they were scattered all over your desk…”

“My desk in my workroom where you’re not allowed to put a foot in” interrupted Aaron, sharply.

Theodosia frowned. “Aaron”

“DON’T” Aaron threw daggers in his wife’s direction. The three witnesses stiffed in their spots when they saw Aaron shaking uncontrollably and with a beating vein in his neck. “THIS IS IT!” he declared, throwing the crumpled papers to the side. “I’M NOT GONNA TO FUCKING PUT UP WITH MORE BULLSHIT FROM YOU, AUGUSTIIIIINE!”

People around the park turned their heads to where the commotion was coming from. Theodosia looked at them, panic in her eyes, while her daughter hugged her arm, terrified.
“Em… Aaron…” she tried again, now calmer and gentler.

“SHUT UP!” commanded Aaron, starting to be red in the face. “HE’S BEEN ASKING FOR THIS SINCE BEFORE HE GOT OUT THAT FUCKING PLANE!”

He looked enraged at the teenager, who flinched, paling at the sight in front of him.

“COME HERE, AUGUSTINE, COME HERE!”

“Daddy…” begged Theo, with tiny voice.

Her father didn’t even hear her. “COME HERE SO I CAN FUCKING SLAP THE HELL OUT OF YOU!”

“Aaron, please, that’s not…” tried to argue Theodosia, unable to move from spot.

“NO! THAT’S WHAT’S BEEN GOING WRONG IN THIS RELATIONSHIP: THE LACK OF BEATING. IF I HAD DARED TO DO HALF OF THE HALF OF WHAT THIS ASSHOLE HAVE DONE TO ME, I WOULDN’T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY FOR A FUCKING MONTH!”

“But…”

“COME HERE, AUGUSTINE, I WON’T REPEAT MYSELF!”

Augustine began to sob. “N-No, please, I’m sorry” he assured.

“SORRY DOESN’T CHANGE IT! COME HERE!”

Augustine looked beggingly to his mother, who only could keep looking at Aaron, hugging her daughter, at the corner of the tablecloth. Augustine had his attention back on his stepfather when this grabbed him the wrist to pull him closer to him.

“Come here, you had it coming, you fucking trouble-maker!” ordered Aaron, struggling with the boy, who had his feet glued to the floor, refusing to be an inch closer.

“No, no!” he refused.

“I fucking let you come inside my house, I stand your bullshit, I try to be nice and the only fucking thing I receive are kicks in the butt!” reprimanded Aaron. “If you don’t want to know me on good terms, you’re gonna know me on…”

And just like that, something flashed in Aaron’s eyes. He looked around, seeing his wife and daughter hugged to each other, a terrified expression on their faces, and Augustine, frowning in
regret and a bit of fear. The three exchanged a glare when Aaron froze in spot.

“Aaron?” said Theodosia, with tiny voice.

Aaron’s eyes became watery. He let a chocked sob escape his lips and let go off Augustine’s wrist, turning on his heels and running back to the car, sobbing uncontrollably. The people he came across got out of his way, just in case. The rest of the family looked at him, perplexed. Theo shook her head, frowning.

“This family can’t go anywhere…” she lamented.

Two months and a half.

They hadn’t spent so much time without talking to one another since never in their relationship.

So, when Laurens saw the ID showing Alexander’s name, he thought he was going to reach the moon from jumping from happiness.

They agreed on meeting at some café, quiet and relaxing. It didn’t help Laurens to calm his nerves. His knee bounced anxiously as he waited for his ex-boyfriend (he had stopped hoping from the opposite after so many ignorance from Alexander’s part) came through the door and took a seat across him.

They exchanged a few polite words, and it made Laurens want to cry from impotence. How could he have mess up so badly? Especially with his best friend. Maybe because of that people say you are not supposed to date them, it damaged the closeness and trust and everything you could’ve shared with that person. Laurens wasn’t one to regret past actions, but right now, with a quiet and serious Alexander in front of him, he wished to be able to go back in time and not have started their relationship.

And what made his blood to boil more was when he remembered all those comments from past friends or family members (the few who still talked to him despite his sexual orientation,
respecting him though not understanding it completely) was when he had to stand comments about how Alexander didn’t deserve him for being ‘heartless’, ‘cold’ and too ‘superficial’. If only they knew how much Alex had sacrificed his happiness for him, concealing their relationship during college; ignoring taunts about if ‘he was learning how to behave like a normal and decent man’ for his lack of interest on other people’s approaches; standing Martha’s hateful glares and the rumours she would help Monroe spread across campus; standing up for Laurens when his father tried to confront him about being ‘unnatural’ and a ‘sinner’; all the emotional support Alex was for him when his father refused to talk to him and disinherited him.

And how did Laurens thank his boyfriend from all that? By cheating on him. Good one, John. God, he’d never forgive me…

“Are you alright?” asked Alexander, all of a sudden.

“Huh?”

“You barely touched your food” he pointed out.

Laurens looked down, seeing his salad the same way the waitress had brought it. He shrugged. Alexander sighed and put his fork down.

“Jackie”

The nickname made something inside Laurens to turn. Alexander hadn’t called him that since he’d found him in bed with another man.

“Listen, I’m sorry” said Alexander.

Laurens blinked, dumbfounded. “Beg your pardon?”

“Not for my reaction or anything of the sorts” explained Alexander, serious. “But for not hearing you out in all this time. I… Betsey helped me to calm down and see reason”

“Betsey?” repeated Laurens, still not believing they were having this conversation.

Alex nodded. “I’m staying with her for a bit” he explained, a bit ashamed. Alexander hated to live off of others. “Since… Since Angelica left with her husband, they had that room vacant and when Betsey knew about what happened…”

“I should’ve been the one leaving” interrupted Laurens, biting his bottom lip anxiously.

Alex shrugged. “That’s not important. What’s important is that… Though I’d never be able to go back into a relationship with you, I would hate to lose your friendship”
“I would hate it too” he confessed. “These two last months have been hell”

“Sorry. You know how stubborn and hot-headed I can be”

“No, I’m the one who’s sorry, what I did… I still say someone dropped something in my drink…” he muttered.

Alexander half-closed his eyes. “In which one of the 21 you drank?”

“Look, I…” Laurens sighed. “I have no excuse. In fact, I’m surprised you still want to be my friend”

Alexander looked at him for a moment before shrugging. “Maybe we weren’t meant to be a couple. We’re too hot-headed and similar. But we never failed as friends, why turn the back to something that has not been broken?”

Laurens looked back at his still friend. He clenched his fists and pressed his lips. The words should’ve comforted him, left him at peace. He hadn’t lost Alexander, he should be happy, right? Laurens locked eyes with his ex-boyfriend and almost shivered at how cold his glare was, he almost flinched at how sharp Alexander’s words had been. Laurens had been feeling something was wrong with Alex since he started practising… What the hell, since a few years before that, when he had to defend himself from any enemy that tried to bring him and his merits down. Laurens had sensed Alexander didn’t only work as if he were a machine, but had started to act as one as well. Lacking of emotion or feelings when he talked or acted. More than once, Laurens had asked him how he was thinking he would be able to work as a lawyer with that attitude. The answer left him worse than his ignorance:

“They’re clients. They need legal help and advice, an objective vision. If they want pampering, they’re free to go to a therapist once I’m done with them”

Laurens thought maybe after their relationship was as opened as it could be, his partner would calm down and show his true nature, the one Laurens had fallen in love with, the one who fought for the rights of people because someone needed to do something, because there were people, human beings, suffering injustices and needed help.

All the contrary. The more Alexander practised, the more his heart turned into stone. It was worrisome, but Laurens comforted himself thinking maybe it was a façade Alexander’s work required. He still made jokes and helped his friends when they needed it, and comforted them as well as he could.

But now… Now Alexander was there, discussing their break-up, telling him he still wanted to be friends as if he were in a reunion, discussing what things belonged to whom, or who deserved the custody of the children, or who was in the right and who in the wrong. He was cold, concise, objective and trying to reach a fair agreement as if their relationship was purely formal and professional.
It made John sick to the stomach. But a part of his brain, the rational part, told him Alexander’s was just hurt, that he still needed time, that this was his way to cope with emotions…

He could only hope to be right.

“Jackie?” Alexander called, taking him out of his worried thoughts.

“Yes?”

“I asked you if you’d like to come with us?”

“Us? Where?” he asked, totally lost.

“Herc, Laf and the Schuyler sisters. We were going to watch a movie tonight at the Schuyler’s. The parents are going out” Alex explained.

“Ah… Yes, of course, I’d love that” he nodded, with a tiny smile on his lips.

“Good”

And Laurens tried to ignore the business smile Alex threw in his way.

Eliza was a good girl, Laurens decided, if Alexander was going to trust his heart to somebody else, it better be Elizabeth Schuyler. The girl was an angel, always acting with good intention and with a strength not even she realised to have. Laurens let her know once they were left alone in the kitchen, preparing the popcorn and other snacks for the movie session.

“I’d give a speech about ‘don’t hurt Alex’, but from me it’d be very hypocrite” began to say Laurens, as he watched the bag of popcorn going in circles inside the microwave.

“Excuse me?” asked the girl, looking over her shoulder.

“I see how he looks at you” said Laurens, in lieu of a proper answer.

Eliza’s face grew red. “N-No, John, it-it’s not what you…” she tried to excuse, turning completely to face him.

Laurens smiled at her. “It’s alright, Betsey, I’m not saying you took the opportunity in your advantage, you don’t have that malice within”
“I just… I… Alex and I are just friends!” replied the girl, playing nervously with her loose hair.

“Just like Alex and I before that kiss. That you very rudely interrupted, by the way” he joked.

“John…” tried to say Eliza, clear guilt in her face. “I… I wanted you two to be happy, I didn’t…”

“Betsey, I know!” Laurens interrupted her. “Here, if it makes you feel better, I give you my blessing”

“But-But we’re not…!” she denied, her cheeks red.

“Just one thing?” interrupted Laurens, not trying to persuade her any longer. “Just… When Alex and I talked earlier today…” He sighed, not finding the right words.

“Jackie?” said Eliza, concerned. She walked to him and put a gentle hand on his arm. “Jackie, what’s wrong? I thought you were fine again”

“We are. Jesus, we’re better than I ever thought we’d ever be again!” he commented, the happiness and relief clear in his voice.

“Then, what’s the matter?”

John looked her right in the eyes. So much gentleness, so much positivism, light and will to live, so much love for life… Laurens sighed once again. He could only hope Eliza could give Alex back some of that, showed him those traits made you stronger and not weaker as the world had taught him. He could only hope this wouldn’t end the other way around. Eliza didn’t deserve that. Alex didn’t deserve that.

“Just take care of him, alright?” he whispered.

“John, what’s going on?” Eliza demanded to know, tightening the grip on his arm. “Did something happen to Alexander?”

“Not yet” he replied, uncomfortably. “And if we don’t give up on him, maybe nothing bad would ever happen to him”

“I’ll never let him fall” promised Eliza, solemnly, all the previous nervousness gone.

The microwave startled the two friends with its loud ‘beep’. Eliza let go of his arm and went to take the popcorn out and serve it into a bowl.

“You’re a good friend, Jackie” Eliza complimented, as he prepared to make his way out of the kitchen. She turned around to smile at him. “I’m glad you come to amends. Maybe Alex is not good at showing his emotions, but have no doubt that he’d be left heartbroken if he lost you”

Laurens smiled softly at her. “Thanks, Betsey. There’s no one as trusting or as kind as you”
“Alexander…”

“I have to leave”

“Alexander!”

“Woman, can’t you see all the work I’ve got to do?”

Eliza couldn’t take it anymore. She didn’t even remember their two children, who were only three and one. She could feel the tears burning in the corner of her eyes, her eyes hurt for so many contained tears. Tears of impotence, of helplessness. She… She just couldn’t take it anymore.

She slammed the table with all her might, the table where those stupid documents, files and essays lay. She hated their existence so much. She locked eyes with her husband, who was fast to straighten himself and face her and all her ire.

“Look around you!” she shouted, exhaustedly. “Why is it never enough?! What will be enough for you?!”

She was sick of this. She was sick of raising the children all by her own, she was sick of going back to a cold and half empty bed. She was sick of so many sleepless nights waiting for her husband to come back home and sleep beside her. Just one hour. Half an hour. Was that a lot to ask for? To your husband? The father of your children?

Eliza shook in her spot. She didn’t know what to do. This was not the Alexander she had fallen in love with, this was not the Alexander who would act to help people for the sake of it, because it was the right thing to do. They’re clients, they’re source of money, they can’t be anything more. Was it all true? Did he really think that? Eliza had talked it out with Laurens too many times to count. One of the times, the man had hugged her, sharing her pain, and that conversation back at her parents’ kitchen came back in a flash.

Eliza promised to never let Alexander fall. But she hadn’t counted on him letting her fall, letting her crash. Did he even care for her? For their children? All those family moments delayed, all those romantic dinners fallen into oblivion, all those promises of him thinking about taking a break, of him dedicating her a bit of his time, of sharing with her a fraction of his mind… Maybe she was being selfish, maybe she was asking for too much… Maybe they weren’t meant for each other.
Maybe she didn’t know who she had married.

She had started sobbing without noticing. It was too much, everything was starting to be too much. She had dedicated her whole life to him, to his career, to his obsession to be someone in the future... She had forgotten about her life, about her own story just to help another man tell his. And that man, her husband, wasn’t thanking her, was forgetting her as the rest of the world would, as Alexander feared it’d happen to him but didn’t care if another person had to suffer.

“I...” she heard Alexander say, with foreign unsureness.

She looked up at him, her vision blurred from tears. “Alexander...” she whispered. “Please, just...” She breathed in a sob and wiped the rivers of angst from her face. “Alexander, I won’t pretend to know all the challenges you’ve faced... That you’re still facing, but... Please, just talk to me, let me inside your heart. Let me be part of your life, I’m your wife”

“Betsey”

“And I thought I was your friend as well” she muttered, saddened, as she lowered the glare again.

There was a pregnant silence, only broke by Eliza’s uncontrollable sobs. This was not an act, she was not pretending to emotional blackmail Alexander. She was just tired and lost, she didn’t know what to do anymore. She needed help. She needed to know what to do to make this better, to repair this marriage, this couple, this family, this friendship.

“I’ve got so much work to do” she heard Alexander say, coldly.

And then, his footsteps. And then, the door slamming shut. Eliza buried her face in her hands, letting all her frustrations out. God, what can I do? she wondered, she prayed. I thought that I could be enough, she thought, brokenly. Maybe she would never be enough. Maybe Alexander needed someone else by his side that didn’t slow him down, that didn’t make him choose between his legacy and family. Someone less selfish, someone that wouldn’t start crying to get his attention. But she couldn’t stop the tears, it just hurt too much...

“Mama?” a childish voice asked. She felt someone tapping her thigh. Eliza looked down, seeing a worried Philip looking up at her. “Why do you cry, mama, are you sad?”

“Mama’s alright, honey” she replied, the shake of her voice giving away her lie. “It was just a misunderstanding between Daddy and Mummy, nothing’s wrong”

Philip raised his arms, and Eliza understood him immediately, taking him into her arms. Son and mother hugged each other.


“It’s alright, mama, have a hug”

_Eliza laughed, feeling a bit better._

_She had to fight. She had to keep trying, she had to keep her courage up. She refused to let everything go down the drain. This could get better._

_Maybe she was overreacting, maybe nothing was wrong with Alexander, maybe he was just that way, maybe he hadn’t learnt how not to be cold because of his troubled childhood._

_Eliza was resolute to be there. Whatever fights Alexander would have to face, she’d face them with him._

_It couldn’t get that bad, right?_

_Nobody talked in the way back home. Aaron went directly to his workroom and locked up there, re-doing his job for the third time. Funny enough, it wasn’t as hard or annoying as one’d think. Theo knocked on his door to inform him dinner was ready and he nodded numbly, unable to look his daughter in the eye._

_He made his way to the kitchen, where he found his wife and daughter already sat, chatting as if nothing had happened. Aaron frowned at the empty chair._

_“Where’s Augustine?”_

_Theodosia became serious all of a sudden. “We talked, he admitted all he did to you and I grounded him”_

_“But…”_

_“Aaron, why didn’t you tell me?” she asked, looking directly at him._

_“He didn’t want to hurt you” responded Theo, in her father’s behalf._
Theodosia frowned. “That’s not excuse! Aaron, this is a family, we need to talk things, I told you!”

Aaron nodded, though not speaking. What could he say when he almost made the worst mistake in his life? He was about to take a seat when his wife’s words stuck a chord in him, a bitter taste filling his mouth. Without thinking, he went to fetch another dish that he filled with a ration of food and exited the room.

“Where are you going?” asked Theodosia, blinking disconcerted.

“I’m gonna have a chat with your son”

“Aaron…”

“You’re right” admitted Aaron, making her to remain sat. “Let me handle this, please”

Theodosia considered it for a moment. “Alright, but if something happens, tell me”

“Will do” he promised.

Aaron went to Augustine’s room, knocking on the door. There was a bit of silence, and for a moment he thought if the best option was to tell the teenager it was him the one who wanted to get in his room, after the scene at the park. He was about to talk when the door opened timidly. Stepson and father looked at each other. Aaron showed the teenager the dish.

“I brought you dinner” he said, not knowing what else could be the best first thing to say.

Augustine shook his head. “Mum told me…”

“I know” interrupted Aaron. “I… I talked it out with her. Can I come in?”

Augustine thought for a moment, and then made way for him.

“Thank you” said Aaron, smiling.

He frowned slightly when he saw the room was barely changed. Augustine’s suitcase kept being at the feet of the bed, totally full of clothes and personal belongings. Aaron decided to let the dish on the kid’s desk.

“Haven’t made up your mind about decorations?” he commented.

“Didn’t think I’d stay for long” admitted Augustine.
Aaron heaved a sigh. “Look, Augustine…”

“I’m sorry for what happened” interrupted the teenager, looking genuinely sorry. “You’re still not my favourite person to be around, but… I admit that what I did was wrong”

“You’re angry” Aaron stated it more than he asked it, but received a nod, nonetheless. He threw another sigh to the air. “Can I sit down?” he asked, pointing at the bed.

“Your house” shrugged Augustine.

“Your room” countered Aaron.

The teenager threw him a glare, then sat down and made a vague gesture with the hand so the adult imitated him. Aaron dropped beside his stepson.

“I’m sorry as well” admitted Aaron, after thinking and re-thinking what he wanted to say.

“Don’t need to be”

“Yes, I…” he sighed again. Really, it seemed to be the only thing he knew to do right then. “My uncle wasn’t the best guardian” he admitted, deciding to be sincere. “Neither of his ways of educating and rising a child are good examples to follow, and I’m sorry I almost made the mistake to do so”

“Well, I surely was asking for it” Augustine laughed half-heartedly.

“No, there’s never a good reason to raise your hand to a child. Don’t forget that” he advised.

“Alright…”

“Look, I know you hate me” Aaron blurted out, before he changed his mind and the words would go down his throat to never be spoken. “I know you don’t want to be here with me, I know because I felt the same way when I had to go live with my uncle” he admitted. “And you despise that your mother now is married to me, but, for her, we have to try and be civil” he explained, carefully. “I won’t ask you for calling me ‘Dad’ or to even respect me as such. Your mother’s Theodosia and your father’s Jacques. I don’t have to be anyone to you if you don’t want to, and I’ll respect it”

Augustine’s eyes widened at the speech, not believing what he was hearing. He lowered his head. If he wasn’t feeling guilty before, now he surely felt like the worst.

“I don’t hate you” he admitted, in a whisper, barely throwing the adult a glare.

Aaron was taken aback by that. “Oh… Well, now you made me look bad, because I really hated my uncle”

And both laughed at that remark. Aaron smiled, feeling a weight being lifted from his chest.
“I’ll leave you to eat in peace” he said, getting up from the bed.

“Aaron” called Augustine, when he was about to open the door.

“Yes?”

“Thank you” said the boy, with an honest smile.

“Whatever you need”

He exited the room and closed the door quietly at his backs. His wife, waiting at the other side, enveloped him in a hug and kissed him repeatedly.

“Were you listening to a personal conversation?” he asked, faking annoyance.

“Until he’s 21, I can” declared Theodosia.

The door opened suddenly, startling the hugging couple. Augustine stuck his head out.

“Om… Aaron?”

“Yes?”

“Em… Uh… Don’t use your toothbrush” he advised, before closing the door quickly.

“… Wait, since when I’m not supposed to use it?” he asked his wife, terrified.

“Darned if I know”

George made sure he bought all groceries in record time. He didn’t trust Alexander or Thomas to be under the same roof for more than one hour alone after what happened. He hurried through the aisles, barely paying any attention to his mother who, for once, was letting him live.

Or so it seemed until he announced they were leaving.

“Mum, come on, we need to… What are you doing?”
Mary stopped mid-action, a bag of chips halfway to the interior of her purse.

“I refuse to pay almost ten bucks for two sad bags of chips” she said, pushing the bag down and zipping her purse.

“Ten? Did you take two bags???”

“Of course, if you’re going to steal, steal properly” she lectured.

“Mum, you can’t…” tried to reprehend Washington, feeling his heartrate increasing.

“Ma’am” a man called, arms crossed, dressed formally and with a name tag in his white shirt.

Shit, cursed Washington inside his brain.

“What’re you doing?” asked the man, frowning.

“That’s what I say. What’re you doing bothering us when we haven’t called you” spat Mary, with confidence.

The manager narrowed his eyes in annoyance. “Ma’am, we saw you” he simply stated, making Washington dizzy.

“Saw what?” challenged Mary.

“Saw you taking two bags of chips and seven chocolate bars”

“Seven bars as well, Mum?” whispered Washington, feeling about to throw up.

“No, no, I have not” denied the old lady, shaking her head.

“Ma’am, we recorded it” said the man, pointing at the camera that was in one corner, watching their interaction.

“For Christ’s sake” complained Washington, under his breath. “We’re sorry, sir, we’ll pay now when we…” he tried to fix the problem peacefully.

“No! I haven’t done it!” argued the lady.

“Mum, stop it!” begged Washington.

“Ma’am, and how do you explain this?” asked the man, pointing at the empty box of chocolate bars.

“That’s what I say. Why do you have that empty there? Don’t you have personnel to keep things correctly?”

“Ma’am, don’t try to make pass for a fool, alright?” warned the man.

“No, no, we…” began to apologise George.
“I’m not a thief!” exclaimed Mary. “How dare you!!”

One of the girls working there came closer to the scene. “Ma’am, you’ve been stealing from us the whole week!” she complained, irritated. “We’re sick of this game!”

“No, that’s not true!”

“Ma’am, we’ve got it all recorded” the man reminded her again.

“Just pay the items and we’ll let you go” added the girl, conciliatory.

“I don’t have nothing to pay. I’ve not taken anything” she assured, stubbornly.

The manager gritted his teeth. “Ma’am, will I have to call the police?”

“No, no…” said George, panicking.

“Yeah, call them, call them” encouraged Mary, with a mocking smile. “Call them if you’re so brave”

“I’m gonna call” said the manager, as shocked as the girl at his backs.

“Do it, do it” nodded Mary, laughing cruelly at the end. “Come on, you’ve got nothing”

“… Jess, call the police”

“Alright”

“No, but wait!” said George, paling.

“What?!” interrupted Mary, enraged. “Are you really going to call the police for… What? Ten bucks?”

“Weren’t you complaining about not wanting to pay ten bucks before…?” growled George, indignant.

“Ma’am, ten plus ten plus ten from all the other days you came here to take things for free!” complained the girl, at the counter, waiting on the phone.

“Jesus, Mum, in what were you thinking?!” admonished George, infuriated.

“They’re lying!” said Mary, pointing accusatory at the two workers, who frowned in her direction. “They hate me and I don’t know why!”

“Well, I’ve got a few theories” said George, rolling his eyes.

Mary turned to face the manager then, with teary eyes. “My own son doesn’t love me. See how sad my life is?”

“In which side you’re on, ma’am?!” questioned the manager, in shock.

“The Police is coming” informed the girl, Jess, as she made her way to them.

George saw the people around them whispering and throwing glares. He sighed and passed a hand through his face. Yes, this surely was my worst idea ever. Not even me founding that law firm was as bad…
The Police ended up coming in a matter of five minutes. George had to bury his face in his hands when he heard Jess explaining how she had witnessed the lady stealing several items from the store since she arrived last week to spend time on the cabin. A few clients stayed close by, though they already had their carts full. The line was frozen as everybody decided that watching the scene was more entertaining than living their own lives.

“Ma’am, could you please open your purse?” the officer asked, politely.

“The zip is broken” lied Mary, easily.

“Ma’am, we saw you opening a few minutes ago!” complained Jess, face red.

“There, calm down” instructed the officer, maintaining his cool. “Ma’am, please, don’t make this more difficult. Pay whatever you’ve taken and…”

“I haven’t taken anything” assured Mary one more time.

“Ma’am, I saw the videos” said the officer, boringly, pointing at the laptop on one of the counters.

“That’s not me”

“Ma’am…”

“No”

“Ma’am”

“No, no, it can’t be me”

“Look” said Jess, passing the officer by and tossing the screen in the lady direction.

Mary looked at the video with boredom. “Ah, but I was just reading the expiry date”

A few people laughed and George felt his face burning from embarrassment. The officer stood there, in shock and speechless. He turned to the manager, seeing the whole thing with arms crossed and a serious expression.

“Do you want to file a report, sir?” he asked.

The manager looked surprised for a moment. “No, no. I just want her to apologise”
Mary broke the shocked silence, kicking the floor with rage.

“I WILL NEVER APOLOGISE FOR SOMETHING I HAVE NOT DONE!” she declared, fist raised.

“Ma’am, we’ve got evidence against you!” threatened Jess, matching the oldest’s ire.

“If this pushover doesn’t have balls to sue me, then I’ll sue y’all!”

“MUM!” said George, fear clear in his eyes.

“That’s enough, ma’am, I’m the one who’s gonna report you for shameless!” declared the officer, losing the patience.

“No, sir, please…” said George, swallowing with terror.

“Excuse me?!” Mary turned to the manager, looking the fight, unmoved. “You! Let me borrow your phone for a moment!”

“Eing?” said the manager, lost.

The officer exploded again. “But, ma’am, don’t have such a nerve! Apart from stealing from him you’re gonna take his phone as well?!”

Mary rolled her eyes and looked at the girl. “Then, you, let me borrow your phone!”

Jess took a few steps backwards. “Yeah, for not seeing it ever again” she said, a bit afraid at the thought.

“Then, you!” she pointed at her son, having the worst time of his life. “Take your phone and call your employees!”

“Why?” asked George, perplexed.

“Because I need a lawyer, can’t you see?!”

“Mum, don’t get my employees into your problems!”

“They’re invading my cabin…!”

“My cabin!”

“They must give something in exchange!”

“Alexander doesn’t practise and Jefferson isn’t even a lawyer!”

“You just had to come here with useless pieces of shit!”

The officer interrupted their quarrel, raising his voice a lot more. “Enough with these herding cats! Give these people what you’ve taken from them and…!”

“I haven’t taken anything from them!” lied Mary.
“A shit you have not!” screamed Jess.

“Alright, alright” said the manager, conciliatory. “Let’s talk…”

“No! I’ve got the right to have a lawyer and a call!”

“YOU WATCH WAY TOO MANY TV, MA’AM!” exploded Jess.

“Ma’am, give me your ID card” ordered the officer, stretching one hand out and frowning in her direction.

“No, I’m gonna get out for a bit. I don’t feel well” said Mary, putting a hand on the forehead to emphasize her point.

“Ma’am, you can’t leave”

“You can’t stop me, less for ten bucks” argued Mary.

“I can if you refuse to identify yourself” explained the officer, trying to stay calm.

“I need to leave”

“Ma’am…”

“My husband’s dead”

“… Ma’am, don’t mix things up! What does that have to do with this?!” asked the officer, not believing what he was living.

“If he’s seeing me up from Hell, he’d be saddened!” explained Mary.

“Mum, Dad’s been dead for forty years, don’t bring him into this!” complained George, offended.

“Did she just say ‘Hell’…?” commented Jess, starting to feel afraid.

Mary nodded in her direction. “Yes, for cheater”

“Like you can blame him” muttered George.

The officer shook his head, as if waking up from a trance. “Ma’am, I’m sorry for your loss, but you can’t leave”

“No one can hold me!” shouted Mary.

“Ma’am, I’m the authority”

“A jackass is what you are”

… … … … … … … … …

“WELL, THAT’S ENOUGH! ARE YOU TRYING TO LAUGH AT ME?! BOTH OF YOU GET IN THE PATROL CAR!” exploded the officer, red in the face.
“Both?!” repeated George, “But I did nothing!”

The officer didn’t have time to retort as Mary began to hit him with the purse.

“Mum, don’t make it worse!” said George, hurrying to hold her back.

“Listen! Listen to the bags she had inside the purse!” condemned Jess, triumphally.

George heard people around laughing, unable to contain themselves anymore. With his peripheral, he saw some where pointing at them with their phones.

Well, now we’ve got viral vids as an evidence… he complained, inside his brain.

Maria Reynolds came into the Hamilton’s life as a hurricane, unexpected and at full force.

Eliza had seen her at the park on a few occasions, for what she’d told him, and one day she’d decided she wasn’t going to ignore her bruises and evasive demeanour any longer.

“I’d rather be overreacting than turn my back on someone that might need help” his wife had said to him.

So, after a lot of convincing and persuasion, Maria came to the conclusion that she didn’t have to live like that, that her daughter could have a better future. She went to the law firm he worked at and required the help of two lawyers. Alexander sighed when he saw Burr was going to be accompanying him. The guy was not of Alexander’s likings. Too quiet, too secretive, too resistant to take sides, to act and speak his mind. That didn’t make him a bad lawyer, for what Alexander knew (and lived on an everyday basis, with that habit the man was starting to have about declaring a court-war to him; not that he wasn’t going to win it). So, he could cope until the case was over. Which would happen very quickly.

Mrs. Reynolds was married to a scumbag. He could win the award of worst husband, father and man without changing anything from his daily actions. And he’d also win a Guinness with that intake of alcohol. And the fact that Maria had a bit of slyness helped a lot. She had hidden a camera
behind the mirror of her shared bedroom the last few weeks. Angelica and the afternoon she spent explaining how she should do it were to blame for that important detail.

The videos helped the police to arrest Mr Reynolds, who, for a change, came home drunk. The officers had proof enough to take him out of the house in handcuffs. Maria called Aaron that night, for what he was told, a crying mess, trembling with nervousness for what was going to happen from now on. Aaron allowed her to speak with Susan, who was staying with him for that day. A thing both Aaron and Alexander agreed on was that the girl didn’t need to see more of that horrific situation her parents were involved into.

“So, that’s it, right?” asked Eliza, at the doorframe of his workroom, while he re-read the case for the zillionth time that night.

“That’s it what?” he asked, not raising his glare.

“Maria’s case” she clarified, frowning slightly. “Her husband… That guy is in prison already, right? Happy ending?”

Alexander shook his head. “She has to go to court, declare, explain, answer some questions…”

“But the videos…”

“Justice is not that easy, Eliza”

Eliza flinched and embraced herself at the tone of Alexander’s voice. She was starting to get sick of that condescension her husband had started to talk to her with as well. She was fed up with Alexander talking to her as if she were stupid. As if the whole world was stupid in comparison to him.

“Are you going to see her tomorrow?” she asked, sharpening a bit her tone too.

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“I was thinking about going with you”

This time, Alexander did raise his glare. “Why?”

Eliza narrowed her eyes. “I was thinking she might need support”

“She has two attorneys, what more support could she possibly need?”

“Human support” replied Eliza right away. “Emotional support. You know what that is?”

Alexander sighed and returned his glare to his papers. “That’s not something…”

“I know” interrupted Eliza, straightened herself in her spot. “You are a lawyer, so is Burr; you only give her legal support and help. If she wants another kind of help, she can look for a therapist” she mocked a bit his tone of voice, and for the daggers that were thrown her way, Eliza knew she
succeeded in doing so. “Well, in case you’ve forgotten, I am a therapist. So, let me do my vocation”

“Never said you could not” muttered Alexander, shrugging.

“Good”

Eliza scrutinized her husband. Something was not right. And she wasn’t only talking about all the bad signs she’d been seeing for some time. Alexander’s coldness and apathy were, to her regret, old friends of her husband by now. But there was something wrong in Alexander’s distracted behaviour, in his lack of speeches about the case she’d hear him speak in the solitude of his workroom, in his avoiding glares, in his tense shoulders, in his shallow breathing while he read the case, in his obsession (more than usual) about reading and re-reading the same pages for days, in the stoic expression he had wore the day he and Aaron had to watch the videos Maria had as an evidence before taking them to the police station.

Her serious expression softened. “Alexander, are you alright?”

He didn’t respond. For a moment, Eliza thought he hadn’t heard her, so, she tried again.

“Alex…”

“Please, close the door on your way out” he interrupted, not meeting her glare. “I still have so much work to do”

Eliza went rigid at the dismissive attitude towards her, at the same words thrown at her which she despised with all her soul.

‘He’d never be satisfied’, John had told her on numerous occasions; ‘Be careful with that one, love; he will do what it takes to survive’ Angelica had warned her while she was getting ready for their first date.

Eliza pressed and curved her lips. Grabbing the knob, she wished him goodnight and closed the door quietly.

Alexander didn’t want to acknowledge what was happening to him. He tried to keep going
on with his life and, especially, work. A bit of exhaustion, an aching body, a heavy chest would never be enough to make him stop. He’d had it rougher and he’d never stopped. Why doing it now?

The Reynolds case was easy. They were going to win. Today’s trial would be a piece of cake. Eliza was able to calm a worried Maria; Aaron explained their idea calmly. Alexander, strangely, stood to the side, hearing without listening and seeing without looking. His head was spinning, and the living room the four of them were in was starting to warp. He lowered his glare, his eyes landing on the paperwork he had re-written countless times already. He took the paper, relieved to feel something physical under the fingertips. Work always helped him, kept him in guard, kept him fighting. Work would always be there for him.

He blinked a couple of times, the words blurred and difficult to distinguish. Pull was the first word that came into clear view. In the shown videos, we clearly see Mrs Reynolds being pulled by the hair by her husband, Mr James Reynolds—

<<What did I just say?!>>

Alexander shook his head, furrowed his brows. He cleared his throat and swallowed the sudden lump that blocked his larynx. What was wrong with him lately?

Keep working, he told himself, and resumed his reading. ‘Mrs Reynolds is slapped—

<<Don’t interrupt your mother, scum!>>

Alexander took in a shaky breath. Keep going, his brain commanded, refusing to take a break. Mrs Reynolds fell, then to the floor, receiving a couple of kicks from—

<< We gave you a home and this is how you thank us?!>>

Was the room becoming smaller or was that just him? Alexander got the neck of his shirt separated from his skin, feeling suddenly overwhelmed. He cursed at the words moving uncontrollably. He denied to admit he was the one making them move by shaking so much.

<< You’ve fooled everyone in here into thinking you’re worth something>>

<<This kid is impossible to live with!>>
“Alexander?” a gentle voice called his name.

He finally came back to the present time, the voices in his head still intertwining with each other. Through a blurry vision, he could see the frown of worry of his wife.

“Alexander?” Eliza said again, more urgently.

“Are you feeling alright, Alexander?” asked Maria, also concerned.

“Hamilton?” joined Aaron, cocking an eyebrow before the unusual lack of response.

“I…” he said, with tiny voice.

<<He’s nothing without Mrs Knox behind him>>

Alex cleared his throat.

<<You’re a bastard and a whoreson. You can’t escape it>>

“The bathroom, please?” he asked, politely.

Maria blinked, a bit shocked. “Yes… Um… Down this hall” she explained, pointing at some direction.

He got up on wobbly legs. “Thank you, miss”

<<Have you read this? He wrote it all himself>>

<<That’s not possible, he surely copied from somewhere else!>>
“Do you want me to go with you?” proposed Eliza, starting to feel nervous.

Alexander dismissed it with a hand and walked out the spinning living room, facing now the tight hallway. He made his way to the end of it, his head going in circles and having to support his weight by the two walls by his sides.

<<Who does he think he is? If he doesn’t like it in here, he’s free to leave!>>

<<No one will miss him, anyways>>

He made his way into the tiny bathroom, closing the door behind his backs. He walked to the sink and turned the tap on. The sound of the water didn’t help to stop his messy thoughts. On the contrary, it seemed to make them worse.

The water flooded the first floor.
Neddy woke him up in a rush.
The screams, the cries for help.
The destruction.

<<It’s good to know the people are going back to normal after such an event…

I wish the same happens to you soon, Alex…>>

He splashed some water against his heated and red face and then turned the tap off. Now, his strangled breathing was clearer to his ears. Alexander couldn’t decide whether he preferred the water running or his pathetic whimpers.

“Put it together” he whispered, between shaky breaths.

A sob escaped his mouth, and he pressed a clammy hand against his pale lips.

<<What? Are you gonna cry?>>

Alexander squeezed his eyes shut, lowering his head as he tried to take in a deep breath, with
no avail. His legs shook beneath him and he was too scared to look at his reflection.

<<Look at you. You’re a mess.  
We’re trying to make something worthy out of you, and this is the way you thank us?>>

“Shut up” he complained, under his breath. “Come on” he encouraged himself. “Un, deux, trois… Un, deux, trois…” he counted, growing more nervous instead of calmer. “Come on, god damnit, what’s wrong with me?” he cursed, tightening the grip he had on the sink.

<<His brother left him here?>>
<<Just like his mother, he can’t keep anyone around him>>
<<It’s not surprising, he’s so obnoxious>>

“Un, deux, trois… Un, deu…”

Alexander stumbled on spot, almost falling to the ground. His head began to pound, and he raised a hand to bury in his now messy hair, soaked in sweat.

The sensation made a flash to cross his mind. The last thing he wanted to see or feel ever again.

<<Chéri, je suis désolée…>>

“Not this fucking thing…” complained Alex, his voice shaking uncontrollably.

<<Je t’aime… Je vous aime tant>>

Alexander then put his other hand on the other side of the head, as well, this time gripping his hair brusquely.

“Stop” he commanded, but his brain was already running free.
To his disgrace.

<<That kid’s non-stop, I think he doesn’t even sleep!>>

<<He just works, he doesn’t even try to interact with the rest>>

<<He thinks to be above everyone else>>

Alexander tried to count inside his head, but he couldn’t manage to think clearly, the voices, the taunts, the hatred was going in circles, disorderly, inside his head. It was chaos, it was destroying his mind slowly but resolutely.

<<You work, you write, you talk, you fight as if you were running out of time, as if it were going out of style, as if you needed it to survive…>>

“I need to” he muttered, the grip on his hair growing stronger. “I have to, I…”

<<Life is passing you by>>

“No, I’m…

I’m making full use of it”

<<I’m making full use of it>>

His youngest voice responded at the same time.

Alexander was starting to feel sick to his stomach.

<<Look around you! Why is it never enough?! What will be enough for you?!>>

<< Well, sorry for forgetting how you saved the family with the fortune you made...>>
Ah, no, it’s true, you did not.

I’ll never be good enough, thought Alexander, panicky. I’ll never do enough.

<<You’re never satisfied!>>
<<You’re not worth it. You’ll never be worth it>>
<<Will you ever be satisfied? What will it take?!>>
<<Are you writing again? What for? They’re all messy, useless things>>
<<Alexander, please, take a break.
Please, just come home.
Come back to sleep…>>

“I… I can’t. I…” he excused himself to no one in particular, just his reflection was there, judging him, judging all his mistakes.

<< Elle nous a quittés, Alex… [She’s gone, Alex…]>>

She died because of me, he thought, hating the warm feeling of tears running down his cheeks. She died, she gave up because of me, because I wasn’t strong enough. It should’ve been me.

<< The doctors said he has a chance to survive>>

It should’ve been me, kept repeating Alex, inside his head, as he went to grab the sink again, his legs unable to put up with his weight. With all the weight he felt on his shoulders. I couldn’t help them, he thought, shaking like a leaf and unable to control his tears or how fast he was beginning to breathe. I couldn’t help anybody, I can’t help anybody, I’m not doing enough, I’ll never do enough.

<<There are people who’ll hate you.
Those will try to break you>>.

And what happens when that person trying to break you is yourself? Alexander should’ve asked, he should’ve asked so many things, told her too many things…
I can’t anymore, it was all my fault.

<< A day will come in which you’ll see all the destruction your inner hurricane is making. You’ll see how many broken things live inside you>

I can’t do it, thought Alexander, and, to his horror, that wasn’t part of his tortuous thoughts. That had been him, it’d been his voice. He knew, was realising, he couldn’t do it.

<< You’re not feeling it now, you’re choosing not to feel or see it, but there will be day when you will>>

<<Alexander, please, just talk to me, let me inside your heart. Let me be part of your life>>

The room was spinning, looming over him. Alexander didn’t dare to look up, he didn’t dare to keep his head up. I can’t do this, I can’t do this, I’m going to ruin this, I’m going to ruin everybody’s lives…

<<And that day, you will see just how much destruction you’ve been bearing within>>

He had made his father leave; had let his mother die; had made his brother to abandon him as well; had failed at saving the Stevens; had messed up every single foster home he was sent to; he’d taken all the Knox gave him for granted; had neglected his friends; had hurt Eliza… He had…

He had abandoned his children.

Alexander had become his father.

<<There’s nothing broken inside me>>

Alexander wanted to scream at the top of his lungs, but his lack of oxygen and shaking fit just allowed him to let a simple and pathetic whimper escape his mouth. He couldn’t do anything right.
He grabbed his hair, pulling it in desperation, and making himself fell to the floor. He sunk into himself, becoming a little trembling ball on the floor of a client’s bathroom. I’m pathetic, he insulted himself, as he sobbed and yanked his hair, punishing himself for his ineptitude.

“I can’t do this…” he muttered, sounding broken and defeated. “I can’t do this, I can’t do this…”

He repeated the discouraging sentence over and over. The world around him disappearing. It was only he and his mind. A meeting Alexander had do the impossible in order to never have to live.

Alexander didn’t know how much time he’d spent like that until he felt himself being pulled into a hug. The warm body enveloping him returning him back to the present world slowly. His eyes adjusted to his surroundings, and Alexander could see the bathroom door was wide opened; his ears caught a distant conversation along with hurried steps becoming closer and clearer.

Eliza stepped on the door, genuine terror crossing her sweet features as she saw the state he was in. Alexander didn’t even want to imagine it, he felt small enough. His wife made her way into the room, kneeling in front of him. Just in that moment, the person that’d been hugging him got separated. Alexander was slightly surprised to see it’d been Burr. He avoided his glare. He knew what his workmate was thinking.

Alex looked down, seeing Eliza had taken his hand, but he wasn’t feeling it. He wasn’t feeling anything exterior, but in the inside, everything was too real and too intense for his likings. Eliza’s lips moved, but he didn’t hear any words coming out, the noise of his beating heart and blood running through his veins deafening his hearing.

Eliza frowned in concern, and put a gentle hand on his tear-steaked cheek. With her thumb wiped away the new that were still falling, against his better wishes. How lower was he going to fall that day?

Maria appeared then, a glass of water in hand. She walked in and passed it to Eliza, who put it in his lips and helped him drink until he almost choke.

“Sorry” he heard her apologising, faintly. “Alex, honey, can you hear me?” she asked, slowly, as if talking to a little child.

And, as a little child, Alexander felt his eyes burning with more tears that wanted to break...
“Ssh, everything will be fine, Alex. I’m here” she soothed, her hot breath hitting his ear and grounding him somehow.

Alexander didn’t have enough strengths left to stiff at the well-known lie.

“He should go home” advised Burr, sounding strangely distressed. You’ve done this to him, Alexander told himself inside his head.

“Yes” Maria agreed, with tiny voice. “We can… We can let the trial to another day, when he feels better”

Eliza nodded in their direction, grateful. Alexander ignored the glares he got for being silent while people around him commented about what he should do.

“Let’s go home, honey” cooed Eliza, passing an arm around her shoulders and getting up slowly. “That’s it. It’s okay, honey, I’ve got you” she promised, smiling softly in his direction.

Eliza grew more worried when she saw her husband wasn’t putting to much of a fight for being dragged to the front door. Burr didn’t say anything about how Hamilton avoided his glare at all costs. Maria looked serious at the pale man, embracing herself, knowing pretty well what had happened thought not knowing the reasons behind such a horrible breakdown.

The Hamilton marriage (more like Eliza) bid farewell to Burr and Maria, who did their best to show a reassuringly and polite smile in their direction. Eliza helped Alexander sit on the co-pilot seat and she drove them home. The silence felt too heavy, especially after having been married to a motormouth for five years.

“Alex?” she asked, as soon she had to stop at the first red light on their way back. The man didn’t respond, just looking through the windshield with a lost expression. She placed a hand on his husband’s cold one. “Alexander, honey, don’t worry. You just need some rest” she encouraged. “Everything will be fine afterwards”

“No, nothing ever is” he talked back, withdrawing his hand and looking in the opposite direction.

Eliza did all within her power for not crying as well.
“He’s been in bed for more than a week. Maria and Burr are delaying the day of the trial, but there’ll come a moment when they’d have to… To do it. With or without Alexander”

Eliza poured the hot tea in three cups. She passed one to her older sister, who’d come to know how her brother-in-law was doing. Angelica looked at the steaming liquid, as if it were the most interesting thing in the world. Eliza put the other two on a tray, along with four half sandwiches.

“He hasn’t left the room in all this time?” asked Angelica, not meeting her sister’s glare.

Eliza shook her head, numbly. “He… He just leaves to go to the bathroom, but nothing else. The kids are starting…”

Eliza’s voice broke at the mention of the kids. They’d been asking for their father. One thing was to know Alexander was at work, but another one was to know he was locked up inside his bedroom, barely talking or doing anything. Eliza never thought she’d say this, but she missed the furious tapping and scratching of her husband’s writings, or his loud voice, commenting every single detail life thrown his way.

Angelica got up from her seat, embracing her little sister with all her might. Eliza wet her shirt with a few tears she couldn’t keep from falling. Angelica caressed her loose and dishevelled hair. Alexander wasn’t the only one who’d lost interest in looking presentable.

“I don’t know what to do” admitted Eliza, between sobs. “I…He… He won’t talk to me. I don’t know…”

“It’s alright, Betsey, we’ll do everything within our power to help you two get out of this” promised Angelica, her strength clear in each word. Eliza envied her personality so much sometimes…

“I could’ve prevented this” said Eliza, suddenly. “I was seeing something was going wrong, but…”

“Betsey, you’ve married an Icarus” Angelica told her, tightening the hug. “He’s flown too close to the sun”

That didn’t help her to feel better, or the situation to get better. But the sooner Eliza knew the truth and learnt how to cope with it, the sooner she’d be able to act as the situation needed it.
“Alexander?” Eliza’s tiny voice called from the other side of the door, after two polite knocks. “Can I come in, honey?”

“Yes” he responded, not very interested.

The door cracked open, slowly, and the figure of a tired Eliza stood at the other side. He had done that to her. He was destroying his family as his father had done, as Alexander had sworn to never do when he had his own. You mess everything up…

Eliza sat beside him, her eyes scrutinizing every inch of his being. Alexander turned his head, not wanting to see her disappointment. His wife sighed and passed a distressed hand through her hair.

“I don’t know what to do” she admitted, totally serious. “I don’t know how to approach you or fix this” She took his hand and squeezed it. “I need your help, Alexander. Please, tell me what I’ve got to do, and I’ll do it”

There was a pause before Alex replied: “I don’t know either”

He locked eyes with his wife, who was staring straight at him. There was no disappointment, just sadness. And exhaustion.

“How is Maria?”

Out of all the things he’d thought about asking, this wasn’t one of the top 20. Eliza seemed as surprised, but answered, nonetheless.

“They’re delaying the trial”

“They can’t keep doing that” Alex frowned.

Eliza shrugged. “Angel said the same”

“Is she here again?”

“She comes every time she can, and when she can’t, she calls” explained Eliza, almost upset at the scepticism of her husband. “She loves you a lot”
Alexander turned his head away again. Eliza’s frown grew deeper.

“The kids ask why you’re like this”

“What have you told them?”

“That you’re sick, but they still want to see you”

He huffed. “Thought they’d grown used to not having me around”

“Alexander!” exclaimed Eliza, in a scolding manner.

“That was what happened to me” he defended himself, with a vague shrug. “My father was never there for the first ten years of my life; when he left us, it was as if nothing changed”

“Alex…”

“Well, except for his debt. That little bitch grew better than my brother or I did”

“Ale”

“Do you know what I promised to myself after my father left?”

Eliza didn’t dare to ask. Alexander interpreted her silence as an invitation to confess.

“I promised and swore to never be like my father”

A cruel, cold laugh escape his lips. Eliza felt shivers going down her spine at the sound.

“You’re not your father, Alexander” she conceded.

“You said it yourself, the kids are always asking where their father is”

“Yes, and I can give them a concise answer” Eliza took the liberty to lie down next to him. “You know how I know you’re not like him?” she asked, in a whisper.

“How?” asked Alexander, failing at sounding uninterested, needed of something that, for once, convinced that he was in the wrong.

“I’m sure he never sat in a bed for weeks feeling bad about his mistakes as a parent” She passed an arm behind his back and began to caress his hair. “We’ll get over this, Alex. I’m here, Angel is here. Peggy, John, Herc, Laf. Even your children, though they don’t understand very well what’s happening. Everyone is here for you, and we’re going nowhere”

“I don’t know why” he confessed, before he could stop himself.
Eliza threw an upset glare in his direction. “Because we care about you”

“I haven’t earned that. I’ve been…”

Alexander sighed deeply, tiredly, and buried his face against his hands. Eliza moved beside him and knelt on the mattress, so she could be able to look directly at him and take the hands away from his eyes. She had a resolute glare, a serious expression. A strength and power she didn’t know she possessed, that he hadn’t realised she had. Gosh, how did that even happen?

“I don’t care what you did or what you said” assured Eliza, deadly serious. “I just care about the fact that you need help, and I’m gonna give it you. We all are going to give it to you. And before you ask…” she added, more playfully, when she saw him opening his mouth to retort. “We’ll do it because you’re worth it”

Alexander flinched at that sentence, a flashback again coming back to the front of his mind. This one, though, more pleasant than the rest that hadn’t stopped visiting him. All Vera had sacrificed for making him live a good life; all the Knox had done for him… He might not be worth all that, but those three people, along with the others that Alexander had known and still remained by his side, still thinking he was worth fighting for, didn’t deserve that him threw away his shot.

He leaned forwards, pressing a forceful kiss against Eliza’s lips, who moaned in surprise. Without giving her time to react, he also hugged her.

“You’re the best of wives and best of women, Betsey” he whispered, against her hair.

She blushed and giggled, embarrassed. “Shut up, flatterer”

She almost fell against her noses when Alexander made his way out of the mattress. She looked over her shoulder.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m gonna call Maria, I want to meet with her to tell her she had to keep going” answered Alexander, opening his wardrobe to choose what clothes he’d be wearing.

Eliza frowned in worry. “Alex, hun, I don’t think you’re…”

“I will not take part into it” he admitted, in a low tone.

“What?” she asked, in the same volume.

Alex turned around, a bitter yet resolute expression on his face. “I want her to win, she deserves to
This time, Eliza surprised him by jumping from the mattress and hugged him tightly. He reciprocated the action almost immediately. Eliza smiled, satisfied. This is the man I married.

“I… I don’t know what I’d do from now on, Betsey” he admitted, hating how weak he sounded. “But… But I…”

“It’s alright” she assured, caressing his back. “I’ll be here for you. Whatever you decide” she got separated from him, placing a comforting hand on his cheek. Alexander grabbed it and pressed it further in his skin, the gentle touch making him feel a bit better. “I’ll support you” she promised.

“Thanks, Betsey”

Knock, knock.

“Wouldn’t want to interrupt the soup opera, but…” began to say Angelica, smiling at the marriage.

“Angelica, were you eavesdropping?” scolded Eliza, folding her arms upon her chest.

“Eliza, do you really ask things like that after so many years?” asked Angelica, imitating her tone and posture. She smiled warmly when she saw Alex trying to contain his laughter. “I think you won’t have to worry about what to do with your life, Alex”

He cocked one eyebrow. “Oh, and why is that?”

Angelica threw one of her smiles that clearly said ‘I know something you don’t and wouldn’t guess in a million years’.

“I’ll just have to make one call. He’s heard so much about you, from several sources, including myself, so, you’re welcome” she let the words hanging in the air, as she waggled her eyebrows. Alex rolled his eyes with affection. “And you already know him, so, I know for sure that you’d love working together”

“I know him?” echoed Alexander, tilting his head to the side.

“What are you scheming, sis?” asked Eliza, with a smile.

Angelica winked and took her phone out, triumphally. “Leave it to me”
The only sound the three men heard was the quiet motor of the car, which, thank goodness, was fixed that same morning. After all the bad luck they (especially he) had lived the last three days, this little thing was a miracle.

George looked through the rear-mirror, seeing Thomas sat at the backseats, looking through the window uncomfortably, and then to his right side, seeing Alexander doing just the same, but with a more bothered expression. He swallowed.

“Thank you for taking me and my mother out of the cell” he talked, finally breaking the heavy silence the ride had been sunken into.

“It’s okay, sir” replied Alexander, looking back at him for a brief minute.

No one talked for the rest of the ride.

Not until they reached the houses the two men lived in, side by side. George bid them goodbye, he was reciprocated by the same farewell and a ‘thank you’ (that didn’t sound very honest, but this time George couldn’t blame them) and both parted ways, without dedicating each other a last glare.

Washington stayed there for a couple of minutes. He let out a sigh. God have mercy of us now back at the law firm. Surely his worst damned idea ever…

Alexander entered the huge building Washington wanted to meet with him in order to have more help against his boss. He was told all the things that King guy used to do, not in detail, but it was enough to understand why anyone would want to face the man and demand for something in exchange or simply leave without repercussions.

He’d want to say he couldn’t believe those people existed in real life, but he’d be lying. Sadly.

He looked around himself, seeing a lot of movement from each person that appeared in sight. Plenty of conversations filled his ears and, for a moment, Alexander’s nostalgia transformed
into a knot of anxiety inside his stomach. He decided to shake his head and get to the task at hand.

“Excuse me?” he asked to the receptionist, who had been watching him the entire time and had already a smile prepared. “I’m here to see Mr Washington?”

The blonde girl nodded. “Yes. His office is in the second floor. The… Um…” she struggled for a moment. “Em… The third? Or fourth?” she looked back at him, a blush on her cheeks. “Em… It’s one of the first doors of the second floor, sorry, I can’t…”

Alexander smiled gently at her. “It’s alright. Thank you for your help” he nodded, walking to the elevator.

The girl looked at him, a bit surprised for his attitude. Alexander tried to ignore the guilt in his guts when he thought about how a few months ago, he’d have snapped at her for such ineptitude.

He pushed the elevator button and waited until it reached that floor. Just when the doors dinged, he heard a little collide at his backs, accompanied by grumpy growl and cursed words dedicated to someone. Alexander looked over his shoulders, seeing a man a few years older than him knelt on the floor, gathering the papers the collision made him drop in a nervous manner. Alex looked to his left then, seeing a man in a suit, still throwing curses against the uselessness of some people in here. He frowned in his direction and turned on his heels, forgetting about the elevator, opened in front of him.

“Are you alright, sir?” he asked, kneeling by his side and helping him picking up the papers. “Here, let me help you”

“I-It’s not necessary, you…”

“It’s okay” he assured, passing him the documents he had already on his hands. “Here”

The man hesitated for a moment before taking the papers. “Thank you” he said, sounding surprised.

Both got up and Alexander frowned slightly when he saw the man was quite tall in comparison. He saw the girl back at the counter, seeing the scene with wide eyes. Alexander felt a bit bad for them and started to understand why Washington and Angelica were so mad any time they talked about this place. If such a thing as helping someone shocked that much, he’d have to get down to work immediately. The thought of it put a smile on his face.

“Well, have a good rest of your day” said Alexander, waving at the receptionist in the distance, who waved back, quite unsurely.

“Same” said the man, arching one eyebrow.
Alexander stopped when he saw the elevator doors closed. He made a tsk sound with the tongue as a complaint. The man behind him heard him, and stayed there, with a frown.

“Sorry, it was…” he began to say.

Alex waved one hand to dismiss it. “I’ll go upstairs, not a problem” he said, heading towards the staircase.

The man and the girl watched him go. The receptionist walked to where her workmate was.

“You okay, Tommy?” she asked, concerned.

He nodded. “Yes, nothing new, Marisa”

“I wouldn’t say so” she said, glaring at the staircase. “A part of me wants him to work in here and another one hope he doesn’t get the chance. This place would ruin his personality” commented the girl, totally serious.

Thomas sighed. “Just when I’m sent abroad, decent people start working in here”

Marisa smiled sympathetically at him and nodded, with understanding.

“I wish we’ve asked for his name” she commented, all of a sudden.

Thomas shrugged. “If he’s going to work in here, you’d learn eventually”

“Yeah, but I’ll be here to do so”

“Well, I doubt I would ever have anything to do with that man”

“True…”

“How is everything going with Augustine?”

Aaron stopped at the sudden question. He’d found Alexander in the break room taking his first mug of coffee of the several that were about to come, and both had greeted respectfully. Aaron noted the upset aura around Alexander once he and Thomas came back to work, and decided to leave the mind alone until he felt the vibes changed. Almost a month later, nothing did. Alexander
ignored the secretary as if he had evaporated from the staff, and the world in general. Thomas didn’t seem to do much to fix it, but was as uncomfortable as the rest of the team.

All in all, it’d been a hard month, more than that summer when the two men met. And that was saying something. And, also, it’d been quite the surprise to hear Alexander caring and asking about his personal life. He smiled a bit at the thoughtfulness of his workmate.

“Better than I thought” he answered, as both made their way down the hallway to where the immigrant’s office was.

Alexander dedicated him a surprised glare. “Really?”

“Yes, we… talked a bit, and things are slowly going well” he explained, ambiguously.

Alexander nodded. “Yes, that’s what usually happens when you talk things with people” he teased.

“Another moment ruined by you” fake-complained Aaron.

They were startled by John Adams, running in their opposite direction.

“Nobody’s eaten your last donut, Adams” screamed Alexander.

He received a cursed word no one understood, but knew it had to be that for the enraged tone the lawyer’s voice possessed. Aaron stopped in his tracks again when he saw Jefferson, enraged, knelt on the floor, picking up some sheets spread across the floor.

“He bumped into you?” asked Aaron.

“More like push me without second thought” answered Thomas, relaxing a bit at the conversationally tone Aaron held.

Aaron nodded and knelt on the floor. “Let me help you”

“Thank you”

They both stopped their task when they felt Alexander simply passing them by, dedicating the scene a simple and quick glare, and going directly to his office, a few steps away.

Both flinched at the sound of Alexander’s door slamming shut.
Aaron didn’t comment anything, just passing the sheets he had gathered to the secretary. Jefferson nodded as a ‘thank you’ and got up, throwing a glare over his shoulder. He sighed, resigned, and passed Aaron a few papers.

“Could you please give Hamilton these? He’s not…”

“Alright, it’s alright” assured Aaron, wanting to avoid an awkward situation for the two.

“Thank you”

Aaron looked at him leave, feeling a bit bad for him. But decided to stand to the side. He didn’t know what had happened to make Alexander that mad or Thomas so willing to put up with the CFO’s childish way of dealing with the problem. Not even Madison knew what happened, for what he always shrugged whenever someone asked him and frowned at each one of these kinds of scenes they all had to witness. Washington didn’t know what to do this time, and Angelica was as lost as him, though she knew. Eliza and Peggy were the only ones who knew what happened, as they heard it through the phone, but refused to say anything to anyone that wasn’t his sister, and surprisingly, neither of the three ever betrayed Alexander’s trust.

The lawyer exhaled, tiredly, and knocked on Alexander’s door, while praying they would find a solution to this soon.

HISTORY LESSON:

*"Yes, Mary Sue, I know you've come here to talk about your book":*

It was March of the year 1993, a Spanish program called "Queremos saber" (We want to know) had a writer as a guest, Francisco "Paco" Umbral. That same week, the president Felipe González promised to step down if the accusations of his party being corrupt were true (which were). Felipe was jeered by the students of the Autonomous University of Madrid, who called him corrupt (and, to make matters worse, he did not step down as he promised). The program previously mentioned had as public a bunch of young people who were commenting the whole thing for around two hours. The hostess kept passing images of what happened back at the University, asking for the public's opinion; meanwhile, some of the guests, as Umbral or Emilio Romero (another writer and journalist) barely said a thing.

The program only had 5 minutes left before it finished, and Umbral exploded.

According to him, the hostess called him because they wanted him to talk about his book "La Década Roja" (The red decade), that talked about the last ten years of our politic, if I recall correctly, and that'd have to do with the subject they'd be discussing that day. Umbral went a bit cuckoo, throwing in the hostess' face how she had lied to him, that they'd laughed at him, that he'd come for nothing, that he didn't understand what he was doing there, and saying little pearls such as "You lied, as the rest of the TV, which is putrefied, does to each of us. I didn't come here to talk about the
people's opinions, which I don't care about at all. I don't come to the TV as a pariah, not being paid, just for your little programs can have our names and then ignore us”.

The hostess (who, later in her career would lose the people's love for being obnoxious and doing trash TV) was a bit shocked, saying she was about to let him talk about the book (with five minutes left for the program to finish. Yeah, right xD). And Umbral kept complaining, telling her "We've just seen absurd images about things we all know about, about a thing we all have already seen... Then, advertisings; then, more images... And time goes by, goes by, and we don't talk about my book! We either talk about my book, or I'll leave! I came here to talk about my book!"

And the famous quote was born. It became legendary. Even to this day, 25 years later, people would still use the "I came here to talk about my book" to refer to people who are obsessed about discussing or talking about one single issue, and not seem to look beyond that. I even saw some calling them Umbral, after the man that started it all.

Here, I was waiting for the best moment to use it. And something tells me I'd use it again at some point, because I'm that kind of a genius who repeats jokes XD.

What Jefferson is saying is that Alexander seems only focused on "his sob story", about how he went beyond expectatives, etc. etc. And can't talk about anything else, or always tries to come back to the same, in case people forgets how "above he is in comparison to everybody else".

Now, apart from those news of two light-mooded chapters coming ahead, let's lighten the mood a bit more. I came with this comeback when I finally watched the video, and it was at night, and at night my mind goes crazier than it's already is XD. And I imagined the room where it happens going like this: Jefferson and Madison giving Hamilton the runaround, and Hamilton saying all the things Umbral said at some point. Now imagine him as "I came here to talk about my debt plan. We either talk about my debt plan or I'll leave”. I think it fits him as a glove XD

Also, a funny fact about the whole mess: back in the nineties, everybody called Umbral obnoxious with airs, but nowadays everybody saw he was in the right, after so many things coming out about lies that have been on the TV and how the programs had gone so down to the point barely anyone watch TV. And interesting fact, if you ask me.

Chapter End Notes

*Secretary's office: I hope I translated that right. Back in my first school, we called it that. It's when you go to ask for permission to enter if you were too late or to ask for some information.

*A dick you didn't know (Y una polla que no [lo sabías]”*: A vulgar expression we use as a "You didn't know, my arse", or similar. We can also simply say "Sí, y una polla (Yeah, and a dick!)”.

*Honest-to-God* (Como Dios manda - As God commands). That's how we say "To do something properly”.

*Actual lyrics: "No me reproches que no sepa darte amor. No digas que no entiendes cómo puedo ser así; si te estoy haciendo daño, lo aprendí de tí". The song is "Aprendiz", written by Alejandro Sanz, talking about a period in his marriage in which he and his wife started to be torn apart by time and past things. The most famous cover is by Malú. Though this song is about a marriage, I always associated it with any kind of
relationship that goes to hell through time because one part stood a lot of bullshit and, when they reach the breaking point, the person who's been hurting them questions why they are so cold or mean to them.

*To be born in a golden cradle (Nacer en una cuna de oro): Our version of "born with a silver spoon in your mouth"

*"With the curriculum you have on your backs": Alexander is talking about the money Thomas took from when he worked for George King.

*"That was why he didn’t listen to James’ advices about talking the problem that happened between Hamilton and him out": Thomas is envious that Alexander's life goes so well while his, doing the same thing as he did (leaving the life he knew and starting anew) is going horrible. He didn't want to admit that was the reason he didn't want Alexander to help him.

*Alexander leaving in complete silence and his cold treatment is a personal vent for past experiences with people that wasted their times envying the things I've got or achieved, instead of doing something with their lives.

*The whole scene of Mary Washington messing up in the store is based on a true event that happened someplace in my country. I've changed the circumstances (and the final, no one was hit with a purse XD), but the root was a real story.

*A not very funny thing about myself: I based Hamilton's reaction on how I can or want to react when someone touches my things. Even if it's just for cleaning. Just tell me to move it, and I'll do it, and I'll even clean that spot myself. But never touch my things xD

*A funnier thing about me: I was like Theo when I played with my dolls. I once made Snow White a badass secret agent XD.

NOTES (MORE LIKE RAMBLING XD):

BTW, I feel like the last flashback wasn't well explained. Alexander was hardening his heart because he knew his job was difficult and didn't want to get too involved into anyone's case or life; it backfired, as he started to be insensitive even with close people and he bottled up everything that happened to him, as he never went to get the help he needed to get over his past experiences (traumas and PTSD). Rachel's first husband sent her to jail to "teach her how to be a proper wife", as she was very "it's my life and I'm gonna live it". Here, she only passed for something similar Alexander had to live with the Fulton. Maria reminded Alexander of the abuse he and Rachel endured, and everything he'd been pushing to the back of his mind just popped up and hence his breakdown.

On a more bright note: as I know this had a bittersweet ending, and the next chapter is gonna be a bit angsty again, I'm writing another 'filler-chapter', 'special', 'I-don't-know-what-anymore' chapter about Alexander taking care of another meeting and another phone call. So, I'll upload those before the real chapter, so we can light the mood a bit.

Sursum corda!

*Reads all the shit she's written* ... ... ... Sometimes, I feel like I should start a blog about random thoughts and experiences that flop up inside my head, later I watch YouTube videos about creepy people that live out there and the idea goes away quickly.
But really these lengthy notes are not normal, wtf.
**The prank call: Charles Lee**

Chapter Notes

PLEASE, READ!: In case you couldn't read the note I posted on July 4th. Here, the European Parliament wanted to pass a law with two articles (11 and 13) that are not very friendly towards fans... or the Internet in general. You can know more about this by checking the News on AO3 or with the #saveyourinternet. On July 5th, the parliament voted, and the law didn't pass. But this only means they would re-do the whole thing again and try to make it pass around the beginning of September. This can be both good and bad. They can erase the two problematic articles, they can make them even worse or they can leave them intact. We won't know until September arrives.

So, by the moment, everything in here is the same. But, if for some kind of bad luck the law is approve, I think I'd simply erase the account, as I wouldn't want my stories here without me having access to the pages or have them eliminated by third persons. Let's hope logic won't decide to go on vacation when September arrives.

Now, with the chapters, which, I hope, can cheer you up after the last four anguish chapters and this note ;D'

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, things escalating quickly.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After a month, the law firm started to become accustomed to the coldness their secretary and financier lived in. They lowkey missed the quarrels those two would get into and the witty comebacks, but decided to listen to Aaron’s advice of simply wait for them to come to terms or simply become as civil as they could after such an argument (which still the Schuyler sisters and Washington refused to tell the others what was about. Saying Laurens and Madison were more upset than the rest before the silence of their best friends was an understatement).

Maria decided to simply organise her writings and leverage the peaceful atmosphere to remember more clearly a few quotes her workmates had said during that week. She made sure to write those aside for later use or just to remember.

The quietness of the building was disrupted when Laurens began to laugh from someplace, loud enough to call the attention of the whole staff. Maria saw the freckled man getting out the break room, tears streaming down his face as he stumbled to the elevator, grabbing his stomach as he laughed uncontrollably. The receptionist arched one eyebrow at his attitude. Laurens supported himself by the wall, as he waited for the elevator to go down the first level. He looked over his shoulder for a moment, seeing the puzzled look on Maria’s face. He waved at her, before bursting out laughing again. Maria returned the gesture, anyway.
The doors dinged opened and Laurens got in, still bent over himself and cackling as a madman. Maria waited for the doors to close to jump from her chair and walked directly to the break room. There was nobody there. She scratched her head and decided to look where the numbers of the little screen above the elevator’s doors stopped. She tilted her head when saw it was the third and last floor, where the heads of departments had their offices.

She went upstairs without haste, but without pause. She was able to hear Laurens’ laughter throughout the whole process. She found Aaron, Hercules and Lafayette getting out their offices when they heard him laughing so hard and Maria simply shrugged, keeping going. They followed her without much thought.

By the time they reached the last floor, they saw Laurens knocking on Alexander’s door. The CFO gave him permission to enter, but the man was too busy laughing against the wall to even hear him. Hercules rolled his eyes and made the action for him, and Laurens stumbled in when he saw the door opened. Maria, Aaron and Lafayette stayed at the doorframe, seeing the whole scene.

Alexander stopped his writing when Laurens let himself fall upon the desk, his eyes puffed-red from all the laughter. The CFO looked to the door, and the four persons standing there shrugged, not knowing what had happened. Alexander poked his friend with the pen, not receiving an answer. Alex leaned back on his chair, arms crossed, tapping one foot impatiently.

“Whenever you like, Jackie” he said, loud enough to be heard above the fit of laughter.

Laurens looked up for a bit, his voice shaking from giggles. “A-Alex… Hahahaha, have you… Hav…?”

Laurens let his body fell, only not kneeling on the floor by having his arms on the desk, his face buried in them.

“Well, he’s having the day…” complained Alexander, rolling his eyes.

“It’s better than his bad days, though” commented Hercules.

“True” he conceded.

Laurens tried again. “A-Alex… S… Oh, my God” he took in a breath. “Have you seen… Hahaha, the last of Lee?” he finally asked.

“Lee? Did he finally give you his reports?” asked Alexander, a bit of hope in his tone of voice.

Laurens frowned, confused. “What reports?”

“… The ones you need to hand Washington each month, John”
“Ah, no, no, he doesn’t answer my calls”

“Then, what happened?”

Laurens started to laugh again. “He… Wait…” He scrolled up something in his phone. “Here. Read this”

Alexander took his friend’s phone and read the text that was in front of him.

“What is it?” asked Maria, desirous to know what was going on.

“Read it out loud” begged Hercules.

Alexander blinked a few times. “I don’t think I can. This man surely needs to learn how to use a comma… Or how to write in general” He frowned, darkly. “I wonder who’s writing him his paperwork”

“Trifles. Just read what’s on there” said Maria, walking to the desk and trying to take a glimpse of the phone.

“This is for projecting it in the meeting room” decided Alexander, shaking his head.

“Let’s that be the first issue to comment next week” laughed Laurens.

“There’s his evil vein” said Hercules.

“But what is it?” asked Lafayette, less eager than the rest in appearance.

Alexander titled his head to the side. “Let’s see if I can… ‘Hello’, with one L, but let’s just ignore the misspellings, because we’d never end reading this otherwise…”

Hercules shook in spot from contained laughter and Lafayette had to bite his bottom lip when his lips curved into a smile. Hamilton simply shook his head in resignation and kept reading.

“‘Hello, my name’s Charles, and I’d want to comment you all an issue that has nothing to do with the subject at hand, but that’s been worrying me for the last couple of days’”

“He says it because he wrote that in the middle of a forum that was about gardening” explained Laurens, taking the liberty to sit on the couch the room had.

“Only Heaven knows what he was doing there” said Hercules.

“Poor plants” commented Alexander, before resuming his reading. “‘I went to the cinema with my wife the past Saturday, March 17th… And then he said before that he’s been worrying for a couple of days. Alright’ He sighed. ‘I parked my car, a navy blue Cadillac ATS, and while I was’…”

Alexander stopped for a moment, re-reading the same sentence thrice before shrugging and continuing. “‘While I was in the car, someone stole my wing mirror from my cinema’”
Laurens burst out laughing again, along with Maria, who covered her face with her hands. Alexander had to smile, despite himself.

“I…” he let a few giggles escape his lips. “I guess he was nervous or something…”

“Oh, my God” said Maria, under her breath.

“And he means the other way around” concluded Alexander, his mood lightening considerably. “He writes the name of the cinema… The parking lot his car was… ‘There was also a huge yellow scratch on left the side of the car’…” He read and nodded a few times.

“That’s some bad luck” commented Lafayette, feeling bad for the man.

“Just in case somebody was there when the whole thing happened, so they can contact me and tell me what they saw. My number is…”

“Who in hell is gonna call him?” asked Hercules, flipping out.

“You know who” said Laurens, with a knowing smile.

“Non, non” said Lafayette, immediately.

“Come ooon”

“No, John. Don’t you remember the last one with Adams?”

“Fuck, it’s true” nodded Hercules, his smile dropping. “He sounded like Regan”

“But Lee is a little piece of shit in comparison!” whined Laurens.

“Well, he put his phone number on the Internet” commented Alexander, putting the phone down. “For somebody else to do it…”

“Alexander!” exclaimed Lafayette, in a scolding tone.

“Yay! You got out of bed on the right foot today!” celebrated Laurens, running to hug his friend.

“I want to try too!” said Maria, raising her hand. “Three against two. Thank you, democracy”

“I was gonna vote yes as well” commented Hercules, shrugging.

“Herc!”

“Four against one, then” said Maria, throwing an innocent smile in the Frenchman’s direction.

“Come on, Laf, it’s not like Lee deserves any better” contended Hamilton. “He barely comes here and we have to call him several times before the end of the month comes, so he does his job” Lafayette sighed. “Alright, alright” he ceded.

“It’s not like we’ve got more option” said Alexander, fishing his own phone out his briefcase. “I was gonna show that to Eliza and her sisters”
“I can tell a lost battle when I see it” said Lafayette, shrugging.

“Now, I was only joking the last time, but I’m going to start to charge you!” commented Alfred, with a laugh, as he read the text Lee had written.

“I’m willing to pay you for each prank call” said Peggy, lying on the whole couch.

Alexander moved her legs away to sit at the other end. “Of course, it’s not your money”

Peggy stuck her tongue out as Eliza made her way into the living room with a tray full of biscuits. Alexander saw it with a frown.

“I’m the one who’s gonna start charging you for all the food you eat”

Eliza rolled her eyes. “Alex, be nice”

“They’re eating and invading my house. I can’t be nicer”

“No, the worst part is that you’re right” Eliza sighed and threw a glare to Peggy.

“Keep staring all you want, I won’t move” said her younger sister.

“Hm… Maybe we should start asking you for a rent” she commented, crossing both arms.

Peggy moved unwillingly, so the middle of the couch was empty. “Alright. Jesus…”

“Thanks” said Eliza, smiling with superiority and taking a seat in between her husband and sister.

Angelica came in, fiddling with her phone. “Hey, nobody else is coming?” she asked, seeing the group a bit smaller than usual.

“Aaron’s sick and Theodosia has to help her son with something from school. I called Martha earlier, but she said she wasn’t feeling very well either, and I didn’t want trouble by calling Washington, so…” explained Eliza.

“Yeah”

“They’re dropping like flies with this crazy weather” commented Hercules, sat on the table with his boyfriend.

“Yep, I still have a sore throat” said Laurens.

“That’s because you stay out till 5 AM all nights” reprehended Hercules.

Laurens looked at the rest. “He doesn’t miss one single opportunity” he complained.
“Let’s have a peaceful afternoon” warned Lafayette, with a frown of discomfort.

“And what about Jefferson and Jemmy?” asked Maria.

“No” was the only response she received from Alexander, turning upset.

Angelica and Eliza looked at Maria and shrugged, helplessly. Maria nodded in understanding and looked down, not wanting to be part of that.

“My eyes hurt” said Alfred all of a sudden.

“I feel you” nodded Alex, comprehensively.

“I can only hope he doesn’t hurt me in any other way after the prank” said Alfred, returning the phone to Laurens, a bit uneasy.

Angelica waved one hand. “Nah. Don’t worry about him. He’s much ado but nothing”

“I hope so”

“Don’t worry, if he does anything to you, tell me” said Laurens.

Alexander arched one eyebrow. “Laurens, stop getting into fights with people”

“That’s rich coming from you!”

“But I know the limit”

“Yeah, sure” the whole living room said, sarcastically, before laughing.

Alexander half-closed his eyes. “I’m surely gonna charge you for the food”

The phone rang a few times before someone picked it up. Angelica was already recording and the rest stood in silence, expectantly.

“Yes?” Lee’s voice said, politely.

“Hello? Am I talking with, um, Charles?” asked Alfred, faking uncertainty.

“Yes, who is it?”

“Look, sir, I just saw the… Well, the ad or the little text that you published a few days ago…” began to explain Alfred.
“The text?” repeated Lee, sounding confused.

“Uh, yes, yes. Talking about… Something that happened to your car? Back at the movies?”

“… … Aaaaah, yes, yes, yes!”

“Thank goodness he was worried” muttered Alexander.

“Do you know something about it?” inquired Lee, hopeful.

“Yes. I’m calling because I read that you had a scratch? A yellow scratch on…?”

“Yes, yes. Do you…?”

“And I immediately felt related”

“… Related?”

“Yes”


“See, that same day, on the same cinema you wrote there…”

“Aha?”

“… I went to see a movie, earlier in the day”

“Okay?”

“And when I tried to get out the parking lot, I hit the car beside me”

“… … But… But that means…”

“I hit it” interrupted Alfred, casually. “And I lost a bit of the paint of my car, which is yellow, hence the epiphany I had”

“Eh, but…”

“And I also broke the wing mirror”

“My wing mirror” stated Lee.

“Yeah, I guess”

“But, but, sir…” Lee fought to talk properly. “Eh… Sir… Eh, the car was… Was the car a…?”

“A Cadillac. Navy blue. That’s why I called”

“… But…”

“I was trying to get out and I hit it. I scratched it and broke the wing mirror” summed up Alfred.

“But that means it was you”

“Someone give the guy a Scooby-snack” commented Laurens, containing his giggles.
“Yes, yes” nodded Alfred. “It was all me”

“… … And how do you have such nerve for contacting me and telling me it was you? And with that attitude?” asked Lee, clearly shocked.

“I’ve…”

“But who are you?” interrupted Lee, sounding angrier.

“Sir…”

“Who are you?”

“I’ve got the wing mirror right in front of me” said Alfred, totally serious.

“Right in…? Who the fuck are you?” questioned Lee again, more brusquely.

“I saw it there on the floor” made up Alfred, ignoring the man’s rage. “And I took it”

“You… Why?”

“Because you never left evidence behind”

“What evidence? That’s my mirror”

“Sir”

“I want my mirror back. I want it now”

“I know, sir, that’s why I called. I’m willing to give you your mirror back”

“Good”

“But you’d have to give me my yellow paint back as well”

“Excuse me?”

“I want you to give me my yellow paint back”

“… … Sir…”

“That’s my yellow paint”

“But, sir, I should be the one demanding you things. You were the one who scratched and hit my car”

“Look, sir, I haven’t scratched anything to you. Your car…”

“But you just admitted it a few seconds ago!” complained Lee.

“Your car was parked wrongly”


“Uh, we start soon” congratulated Angelica, getting a bit closer to Alfred.

“Your park was… Sorry, your car was parked wrongly, that was not…”
“But parked wrongly how?!” inquired Lee, raising his voice.

“That’s not the proper way one should…”

“It was right! It was in the rightful place, between the two lines!” argued Lee. “What’re you talking about now?!”

“You must give me my yellow paint back” insisted Alfred, deadly serious. “I’ve got a very ugly scratch on my… On…”

“Well, just like I do!” interrupted Lee, shocked. “You made that! You should be the one paying me that!”

“I won’t pay you a dime” declared Alfred.

“… What do you mean you won’t…” tried to ask Lee, puzzled.

“You were parked wron…”

“I was not!” interrupted Lee, enraged. “I was not! And even if I was, you have no right…!”

Alfred interrupted him, raising his voice. “Yo, I don’t care about your life! You must give me my yellow paint back, mushroom-head!”

There was a long pause at the other side of the line. Alfred looked at the phone a couple of times, smiling a bit and trying not to laugh. Angelica shook by his side, hunching over herself, as the rest of the living room. Lafayette whispered something in Hercules’ ear, and his boyfriend just shrugged. Alfred looked at Laurens, a bit lost.

“He made Lee’s only neuron to overwork itself” Alexander whispered, making the other two Schuyler sisters and Maria, closer to him, to lower their heads in contained laughter. “Now, we have to wait until he restarts”

“Sir?” said Alfred, starting to be concerned. He contained a giggle when a loud and exhausted exhalation was heard through the receiver. “Don’t you understand it yet?” he pressured, resuming his cocky tone.

“Let’s get along, alright?” advised Lee, with a pissed off tone.

“We’re gonna get very along as soon as you give my paint back” said Alfred.

“I won’t give you anything back” declared Lee, fed up. “You don’t have any more yellow paint left in your car because you left it all on my passenger door, got it? And the car was new…”

“What new?” interrupted Alfred, insolent. “Don’t lie, you’ve got a banger”

“Um… Look…”

“Your car doesn’t work by gas, but by coal”

“Gee” commented Peggy, looking at her backs to not look at Angelica, who had a hand on the wall to avoid kneeling on the floor from her fit of mute laughter.
“My car is new, alright?” argued Lee, clearly offended.

“Yes, new from World War II”

Even Alfred had to put a hand over his mouth to keep his silence. Eliza and Maria were red in the faces, and the first one hid her face against Alexander’s neck.

“The World War II is what we’re gonna have if you don’t calm the fuck down” warned Lee. “And especially, if you don’t give me my wing mirror back”

“The wing mirror…”

“Do you think this is normal, sir? You call me and act so cocky as if you haven’t done anything wrong…” lectured Lee. “You broke a part of my car, you stole it from me, you scratched the passenger door…”

“Well, don’t start talking my ear off” complained Alfred. “The only thing…”

“You can’t demand me anything!” exploded Lee. “You made a mess, now you fix it. You have to give me your insurance information or something like that, because you left me there, with the whole…”

“You’re absolutely right, sir” conceded Alfred, sounding apologetic. “I’ll give you the e-mail address of my insurance so we can sort this out”

“That’s it, that’s the way I like it” nodded Lee, satisfied.

“Write it down, please”

“Yes, wait”

They heard muffling sounds from the receiver. Something malicious occurred to Maria, as she smiled wickedly and took her own phone out, looking for something.

“Here” said Lee. “I’ve got…”

“Are you writing down?” asked Alfred.

“Yes, yes, I already have paper and a pen” assured Lee.

“Good. Write, please”

“Aha?”

“Suck-my-balls@fuck.you” recited Alfred, with an innocent tone of voice.

“Su… … …”

“Oh, my gosh” said Eliza, giggling a bit nervous.
Lee’s longer exhalation and irritated mutters were enough to made them all to look at different parts of the room, afraid to make eye contact with somebody and spoil the prank.

“Sir?” asked Alfred, when he felt he could talk properly. “Are you…?”

“Look, dickhead, I’m gonna give such a blow that there’s gonna be not one single flamenco dancer able to keep up with what I’d leave you dancing” threatened Lee.

“Lol” whispered Peggy, looking over at Alfred in shock.

“So brave over the phone” commented Alexander, shaking his head.

“Listen to me” said Alfred, trying not to laugh. “I hit your car because it was…”

“And you’re gonna give me my wing mirror back, as my name’s Charles Lee” he swore.

“I’m gonna keep the wing mirror” said Alfred. “I’ve got a friend who lost his the other day, he’s got the same car as you…”

“But is this for real?” asked Lee, under his breath.

“Now, it’s his wing mirror”

“Yeah. What else?”

“Or, or” began to say Alfred, conciliatory.

“Or?” repeated Lee, suspicious.

“I was looking for prices before I called, and I saw this thing costs around… 100 bucks, a bit more… I’ll give it to you for the bargain price of $50”

“…. Are you trying to sell me my own wing mirror? Are you an idiot?”

“I’ll give it to you for…” tried to talk Alfred, in a calm tone.

“No, look, you’ve reached the limit of my patience. Where are you?” Lee demanded to know, irritated.

“Charles…”

“It’s Mr Lee for you, asshole”

Alfred bit his bottom lip to prevent a laugh. The others just exchanged glares.

“He’s so over his head” complained Lafayette.

“I’m trying to reach a friendly agreem…” kept saying Alfred.
“Friendly agreement, selling me my own wing mirror? Are you on drugs?”

“No, I’m a responsible person”

“You’re going to pay me what…”

“I don’t smoke pot while talking to someone on the phone. That’s totally disrespectful”

“… And he keeps laughing at me” complained Lee. “This is…”

“I’m not laughing, I don’t like to…”

“Look, give me your insurance, and give me my wing mirror back. It’s mine”

“Give me 50 bucks and…”

“50 bucks?” repeated Lee, with enraged mockery. “50 dicks is what I’m gonna give you”

“He’s losing it and they’ve only been talking for ten minutes” muttered an impressed Eliza.

“Something tells me the one on drugs is him…” commented Alexander, a bit taken aback by the man’s rage.

Maria got up as Lee cursed Alfred’s name. She tapped the man on the shoulder and showed him her screen. Both smiled devilishly and nodded.

“Tell me where you live” ordered Lee, suddenly. “Tell me where you live, so I…”

“I won’t tell you my…” said Alfred, a bit surprised.

“So I can go there and smash your face in” finished Lee.

“But what did he take today?” asked Laurens, in shock.

“I won’t tell you where I live, Charles” said Alfred, emphasising the name with an imp smile. “And don’t give me that attitude…”

“Are you sure you’re somebody to talk about attitude?” asked Lee, with a sarcastic laugh.

“…because I’ll break your wing mirror”

“You don’t have balls”

“Challenge me”

“Look, break my wing mirror and I’ll break your neck”

“The only thing you know about me is that I live in New York. ‘Cause I took the mirror and hit your car there”

“Yes, yes, I know you’re…”

“In that cinema”
“Yes, the cinema, yes”

Alfred smiled mischievously. “What were you doing? Watching a drama romance with the missus, uh, wuss?”

“That’s none of your fucking business” snapped Lee, taking easy offense. “I want my wing mirror and your insurance, because you fucked my whole car up…”

“The car was already a piece of shit before I even…”

“The car was new” reminded Lee, salty. “Where do you live” he asked, dryly.

“Listen, fifty bucks…” tried Alfred, once again.

“Fifty stabs in your sides, that’s what I’m gonna give you” threatened Lee.

“Who are you gonna stab, chard-face, I go to the gym twice a day” explained Alfred, with superiority. “Your shitty knife bends against my iron abs”

“I wanted to solve this on good terms” promised Lee, serious. “But after seeing your attitude…”

“Listen, I hit your car because it wasn’t parked properly” Alfred insisted.

“That’s not true!” denied Lee, once again, frustrated.

“And be careful, because you’re starting to make me mad…”

“I’m the one making you mad?” repeated Lee, perplexed. “You’re the…”

“Maybe next time I see your car, I’ll pass over you as well” threatened Alfred, with a casual tone.

Laurens let a single giggle escape his lips. Lafayette nudged him slightly on the arm, to silence him, though he was also having a hard time concealing his own laughter. He could always blame Hercules’ red face for that.

Thankfully, Lee was too shocked to hear anything else from the other side of the phone.

“But do you see what you’re saying? I mean, do you hear what you’re saying?” he asked, lost at words.

“Look” Alfred tapped Maria on the arm and she got ready. “You’re starting to make me lose my patience, sir” he warned.

“But, sir, don’t you understand that this whole… This… This thing that’s happening between us is not…”

“If you keep pushing me” interrupted Alfred, not minding his words at all. “If you keep pushing me…”

“What” challenged Lee.
“I’ll break your wing mirror. It’ll be nobody’s”

There was a tense pause at the other end. Lee exhaled dangerously slow.

“You don’t have balls to…”

“You don’t know who you’re talking to, right?”

“And do you know who you’re talking to, mister?” replied Lee, cocky. “I work at a law firm. I snap my fingers and I have three perfect lawyers waiting for me to explain this and get a solution”

“He lives in Wonderland…” commented Peggy, rolling her eyes.

“He’s been avoiding us, and now he says he loves us…” complained Alexander.

Eliza hushed the both of them, fearing the serious expression that took over Angelica’s face at Lee’s remark.

“Sir, I upload vlogs to YouTube, huh?”

“You’re playing with fire” kept threatening Lee.

“I can make a whole video about you, and you’ll be ruined. Internet does not forgive”

“I don’t fucking care about what you upload to YouTab, Youtag or… or… or… or whatever the fuck that is”

Alexander hunched over himself, shaking from laughter. Eliza and Peggy looked at him, shared a surprised look and then pressed a hand over their mouths, accompanying the immigrant in his mute laughter.

“I want my wing mirror back” kept talking Lee, ignoring what was happening at the other side of the phone. “I want my wing mirror, I want your insurance, I want to meet you, so I can fucking tell you a few things…”

“I won’t pay you shit!” declared Alfred. “And you know what?” He made a gesture to Maria, who nodded.

“What?”

Maria pressed something on her phone, and a sound of glass breaking and shattering was heard. The whole living room avoid the others’ glares and tried not to laugh out loud, as Maria had
the worst part of it all, being so close to Alfred and an enraged Lee.

“To the hell with the wing mirror!” declared Alfred, pretending to be fed up.

“You’re a fucking piece of…” began to insult Lee, raising his voice.

“I just broke half of it” informed Alfred. “I can still sell you the other half for 30 bucks”

“But you still…? But you…”

Lee chocked with his own words and muttered a few curses under his breath, clearly overwhelmed.

“C’mon, 25, I woke up generous today” added Alfred, with snide humour.

“Generous? Listen, scumbag, that was it. I’m coming for you. Where do you live?” Lee demanded to know.

“Like anyone would ever tell” commented Peggy, giggling slightly.

“You’re making me nervous. I’m usually nervous, but you’re reaching a new level” talked Lee, in a hurry.

“You’re the one making me nervous”

“Where do you live” he repeated, totally serious.

“I will not…”

“I’m gonna slit your throat. To you and the rest of your family” swore Lee, losing control.

“Charles, I’ve got a hamster” Alfred made up suddenly. “He’s running in his little wheel, you’re scaring him with so much screaming” he explained, sounding a bit worried.

“I will kill the hamster as well”

“Gosh, we always call everybody the same day they drug themselves” commented Peggy, making Eliza and Alexander to contain their laugh in unison.

“Why are you so aggressive?” asked Alfred, now sounding concerned for the man. “We can be friends”

“We can be friends?” echoed Lee, beyond enraged. “He even laughs at me! Look, I’m gonna…”

“You’ve got a lot of hatred within” lectured Alfred, seriously. “You only need a hug!”

“You hug me, and I stab you in the back”

“His speciality” commented Alexander, making Maria and the Schuyler sisters to have a harder time controlling their laughter.

“Do you realise all this could’ve been prevented if you knew how to park properly?” asked Alfred.
“That again?! I parked just fine! It was you…!”

“You know what? You made me mad already. Bye-bye, good cheer”

Alfred pointed at Maria’s phone with his chin, and the girl pressed the same button from before. The sound of glass breaking sounded once again.

“Fucking hell!” cursed Lee, losing control completely of his tone of voice.

“There! Now, think about what you did!” reprehended Alfred.

“Think about…? But is this real?!” exclaimed Lee.

“Shameless man. Here I was, trying to sell you this, way cheaper than it actually costs…”

“I’m flipping out. What?” commented Lee, at the same time.

“Wanting to be friends, to have a hug… But no, the mister is a stubborn piece of shit”

“Yes, what else?” retorted Lee, with a small and sarcastic laugh in the end.

“You know you’ve hurt my feelings today, right?” asked Alfred, in a low voice, wanting to gain pity.

“And you know who you messed up with today, buddy?” asked Lee, with confidence.

Alfred smiled slightly and answered, with mockery. “With a man who no longer has a wing mirror, but a scratch on his car”

The whole group smiled nervously and contained their laughter as well as they could. Lee laughed more openly and dryly.

“Yeah. You’re gonna pay for that. For the two things” he assured.

“Nah, I don’t think so” contradicted Alfred, shaking his head with security.

“You don’t think so?” mimicked Lee.

“Nope. As much, you’ve gotta give me my yellow paint back”

“You’re going to pay me the mess you made” said Lee, deadly serious. “You’re going to…”

“I wouldn’t have made a mess if you had parked…” Alfred tried to reproach.

“I PARKED FINE!” exploded Lee, making the whole group to look in shock at the phone. “And be careful; I could take you to court for all the shit you’ve been talking in the past minutes!”

“What court? What court? Always the same with going to court. Let’s fix this like real men. Name a place and let’s meet there”
“… But are you out of your right mind or…?”

“People these days, bunch of pussies, all of them. ‘Uuuh, uuuh, I’m gonna sue you, I’m gonna sue you’. No, no, no, I do things right, I fix things with my fists, like humanity have been doing its whole life” Alfred got his mouth closer to the mic and talked in a low, dark tone. “And life went a whole lot better”

“But, sir, are you listening to what you’re saying right now?” asked Lee, clearly calmer than before.

“He scared the shit out of Lee already” commented Laurens.

“I can’t blame him this time” said Hercules.

“Tell me one place to meet” insisted Alfred. “Wherever. I don’t care”

“A place? But you lost your mind, kid, you’re not fine” said Lee, evasive.

“That’s the real him” muttered Alexander.

“At least he doesn’t get out of his house at first chance to scream at some restaurant’s manager” teased Eliza.

“Do you know the pharmacy that’s a couple of streets down the cinema?” asked Alfred.

“This is surreal” commented Lee, under his breath.

“We can meet there. Close to bandages, which you will surely need after I’m finished with you”

Lee laughed sarcastically. “Yeah, and you’d also need a few paracetamols”

“What paracetamols? I’m sure you’re a dwarf with anger issues, nothing more. All cocky on the phone, and then in real life you shit yourself” insulted Alfred, with over-confidence.

It ignited something in Lee. “Listen, pal, you don’t wanna mess with me, further than you already have. I could kill you with one single punch”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yes, smart-ass, yes”

“Well, you know what?”

“What?”

“I might end dead today, but you’ll still have a scratched car with no wing mirror”

“SON OF A…”

Alfred hung up the phone, and the whole living room was filled with laughs that seemed endless. Lafayette was the first one who recovered from the fit of laughter and got up from his seat, to call the attention of the group.

“Alright, alright. Let’s call him” he said, between giggles.
“Do we really have to?” asked Alexander, wiping away one tear.

Lafayette rolled his eyes at his friend. “Yes, Alex. We must” he emphasized.

“We should vote that…”

“No, not this time” Lafayette interrupted on time. “Alfred, please, call him and explain…”

Lafayette’s good action was interrupted by Alexander’s phone, ringing with insistence. Alex went to see who was calling him, and his eyes grew wide.

“Who is it?” asked Maria.

“It’s Lee” he answered, as perplexed as his friends.

Angelica turned to Lafayette, clasping both hands in a begging manner. “Please, let Lee kiss Alex’s ass before telling him”

“I wanna see that” agreed Hercules, exerting some influence on his boyfriend.

Lafayette sighed. “Let’s see what all that’s about” he ceded.

Alexander answered the call. “Hello? … Hold on, Lee, hold on. Slow down!” he instructed, getting up from the couch.

“The speaker” Laurens mouthed to his ex when both locked eyes.

Alexander obliged almost immediately, and the distressed voice of Lee was heard by everyone, who exchanged confused glares.

“Lee, calm down” Alexander instructed again. “Take a deep breath and explain what…”

“For fuck’s sake, Hamilton! I’ve told you three fucking times already that a lunatic just destroyed my car and now wants to fight me!” explained Lee, with rage and trembling voice. “Did you forget your listening comprehension back at the dinghy you came on or what?!”

Alexander moved his tongue in annoyance, containing his temper.

“See how he deserves to not know the truth?” Laurens muttered, receiving a shrug from Lafayette.

“Lee, calm down” ordered Alexander, less friendly. “It was…”

“I can’t fucking calm down, Hamilton!” interrupted Lee. “I told you a freaking madman just threatened to kill me and…”
“Lee, it’s alright; it was a joke” revealed Lafayette, walking closer to his fellow immigrant.

Alexander frowned in his direction. “You shouldn’t have done that”

“It… What?” asked Lee, perplexed.

“It was a prank call, Mr Lee” explained Maria, giggling a bit.

“A prank?” repeated the man, confusedly.

“A prank” reassured Peggy.

“We know nothing about your car, your wing mirror, who was it…” clarified Hercules, just in case.

“Man, did you really believe all that?” asked Angelica, laughing out loud.

“Belie… What the hell is going on here?!” asked Lee, changing his mood drastically.

“We saw what you wrote on that forum… Well, I found it”

“Who is that talking?”

“Laurens. And well, I showed the others…”

“But who gave you my private number?”

“You, man, you wrote it on the forum. It’s basically public now…” explained Laurens, after trading shocked looks with his friends.

“And whom have I been talking to?”

“To a common friend. You don’t know him” said Hercules.

“And I don’t have intentions to” said Alfred.

“Good option” agreed Hamilton, nodding.

“What’s this? The radio or something?” kept interrogating Lee, his rage not coming to an end.

“No, no” hurried to explain Peggy, between giggles. “Nobody’s gonna come to say ‘hello’ to you or any of the sorts…”

“This is just something…” tried to explain Lafayette, calmly.

“I don’t fucking care. I’ll fucking bump you off” he swore.

Alexander laughed cruelly. “Yeah… And who’re you gonna call this time, Mr ‘I work in a law firm, I snap my fingers and have three lawyers prepared to obey my orders’?!”

“Listen, creole, in the next meeting, I…”

“Yes, yes, come to the next meeting” interrupted Angelica, a hint of seriousness in her jocose tone.

“Washington, Angel and I are super eager to talk to you in person, Mr Lee” said Alexander, mocking the last two words.
They waited for some response, but the man simply hung up and the living room erupted into laughter once again.

“Oh, gee, now he’d never come back to the office” said Maria, with a nervous smile.

“We’ll take care of that later” promised Alexander.

“Yes, right now, we’ve gotta put this on-line” said Angelica, ending the recording and looking for it in her phone.

“Angelica, we agreed…” began to reprimand Lafayette.

“Leave them” interrupted Laurens, strangely serious. “He deserves no better”

“Amen to that” nodded Alexander, smirking.

“I feel so alone in this group of fiends…” lamented the Frenchman.

Hercules tapped him on the back. “You love us, nonetheless”

“So, I was sent a link to a video the other day. By a text from Lee”

Washington waited until his plastic cup was full of his morning coffee, before turning around to face Alexander and Angelica, both with innocence plastered across their faces.

“I hope you understand I cannot let that happen in my law firm” he admonished.

“Yes, sir” both siblings-in-law said, lowering a bit their glares.

“I’ll let this one slide” conceded George, not changing his stern tone of voice. “But next time, you must let me know”

“We didn’t know you’d want to have anything to do with it” excused Alexander.

“The doubt hurts, son. A lot”

“We’re sorry”

“I don’t think there’ll be next time, anyways. He already knows Alfred’s voice” commented Angelica, shrugging.

George took a sip from his coffee, thoughtful. “I read the text he wrote. I don’t think it’d be that difficult to fool him again with the same person if they changed their voice a bit”
The three laughed whole-heartedly at that.

Chapter End Notes

No hamsters were harmed during or after this prank call.
The meeting room where it happened

Chapter Summary

Just a silly filler chapter before I bitter your mood when the next angsty episode is up :)

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, me being a horoscope signs-nerd.  
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

I was about to split it up, but it's not that long... I mean, compared to previous episodes...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The uncommon quietness of the breakroom was interrupted when Laurens entered, a huge book in his hands and an even bigger smile on his face.

“Here it is! It finally arrived!” he declared, dropping the book with a thump on the table where his workmates where gathered.

“Here is what?” asked Maria, raising an eyebrow in curiosity and forgetting about her own writings.

Lafayette and Hercules came in, right behind his friend and flatmate, the first one with a shy smile on his lips and the second, with a face of boredom. Hercules dropped himself beside Laurens, who skimmed through the pages with an enthusiasm proper of a kid.

“He bought a horoscope book or something like that” he explained.

Thomas half-closed his eyes. “Those things again?”

“Yep, it’s one of his obsessions”

“Shut up, I saw you reading yours while Jackie was taking a shower” said Lafayette, teasingly, as he served himself a mug of coffee.

Hercules frowned and blushed at the same time. “Betrayed by my own other half”

Aaron sneezed and coughed against a handkerchief, interrupting the small and not serious quarrel. Lafayette frowned in his direction.
“Oh, are you okay, Burr?” he asked, concerned.

Aaron nodded, taking a sip of his tea. “Yeah, it’s just a cold I’m still recovering from”

“Take care, mon ami”

“I will, thanks”

“And cough and sneeze facing the opposite side” reprimanded Maria. “I can’t fall sick this week”

“Why not?” asked Peggy.

“It’s my birthday this Friday”

“Oooh, I’ll write it down. I’m horrible with dates!” said Peggy, looking for some paper.

“I have them all on my phone calendar” said Angelica, finishing her cereal bar.

“What would become of you if you ever lose that thing?” asked Thomas, half-jokingly.

“I’d stop existing” replied Angelica, disturbingly serious.

“If you’ve finished with your chit-chats…” began Laurens, alternating his glare at the almost whole staff. “Who wanna go first?”

“Me, me!” said Peggy, raising her hand. “C’mom, me, me, me!”

“Why so eager?” asked Madison.

“She was never chosen first back at school. Childhood trauma detected” explained Angelica, in a whisper.

Thomas huffed. “Well, welcome to the club”

“Alright, Peggy” decided Laurens.

“Yes! Take that!” she celebrated, childishly.

“When’s your birthday?”

“On… Em… Oh, shit…”

“You don’t remember your own birthday?” asked Maria.

“She just told you she’s horrible at dates” defended Madison, with a shrug.

“Even though…”

“Well, let’s look for Maria’s” declared Laurens, impatiently. “At least, she remembers hers is this week”

“No, no, wait! Dang it!” complained Peggy, kicking the floor and folding both arms upon her chest.

Angelica tapped her on the head. “There, there, little one”
“March 30th” replied the receptionist.

Laurens passed a few pages until he landed on one. “You’re an Aries” he explained.

“Oh, look, just like Thomas” commented Madison.

Maria frowned in disgust. “Can’t I change it?” she asked Laurens.

“I’m just as thrilled as you are, Betty Boop” spat Thomas.

“Aries is the ram” kept explaining Laurens, focused only on the book.

“Wasn’t Alexander the ram?” asked Hercules, a bit lost.

“No, Alex is a Capricorn. That was one of the first things I asked him when we met” replied Laurens, dismissively.

“Capricorns are goats” explained Lafayette, drinking his coffee slowly.

“Aha! You read it as well!” said Hercules, triumphally.

“I never denied it” said Laf, shrugging.

“That’s messy” commented Peggy. “The two signs with so similar animals…”

“Nah, ram are male sheep” said Angelica.

“It’s still a bit confusing”

Aaron then had a fit of laughter as he drank, slipping his tea back on the cup. He coughed a couple of times. Madison passed him some tissues which Aaron used to clean his hand and a part of his coat. He never stopped laughing.

“What happens?” asked Maria, smiling a bit as she was contaminated by his good mood.

“Nothing, I…” Aaron coughed a couple of times more and then answered as best as he could. “It’s just that, as we were talking about goats and all that, I suddenly imagined Alexander as one and Jefferson as a ram, butting each other’s heads”

“That’s them in every meeting” joked Angelica.

The whole room laughed loudly then, except from Thomas, who rolled his eyes and waited impatiently until his workmates calmed down.

“That’s just what I thought in the end” admitted Aaron, taking a deep breath. “Gosh, it’s so clear I’m sick and at the doors of death. My imagination is wild”

“Drama king” commented Maria, rolling her eyes.
“September 19th!” exclaimed Peggy, folding her arms and smiling. “That’s my birthday!”

Angelica patted her back pocket. “Peggy, did you take my phone?”

“… No”

The two sisters struggled a bit, while Laurens looked for the girl’s date. Angelica finally could grab what her sister was hiding in one of her hands. She frowned at the sight of her phone, the screen showing her personal calendar.

“Really, Peggy?” she asked, eyes half-closed.

“Girl, you’ve got a problem” commented Hercules, with one eyebrow cocked.

“Let me be, I’ve got too many things to worry over inside my head to remember trivial dates” complained Peggy.

“Trivial dates? Your birthday?” asked Madison.

“Like she had anyone to celebrate it with” commented Thomas, receiving a reprehensive nudge from his friend. “What? It’s true”

“Yep, they once let her sleep all alone in our former office” agreed Hercules.

Angelica turned to her sister, eyes wide. “Did you sleep in there, with that dangerous hole Burr made?”

“Now you worry?” asked Peggy, a bit resentful.

Aaron half-closed his eyes. “Will you ever stop teasing me about that?”

“Nope” the whole group said in unison.

“I hate you all in here”

“You’re a Virgo, Pegs” explained Laurens. “Just like Laf”

“He was the only one I liked for a reason” said Peggy.

“Same” nodded Lafayette.

“Hey!” complained Hercules and Angelica.

Maria inclined a bit in her seat, looking at Aaron over her shoulder. “When was your birthday, Ronnie?”

Aaron made a face. “Told you not to call me that. It makes me look like an abandoned old dog”

“But today your face matches that description” laughed Angelica.

Aaron rolled his eyes, but responded, nonetheless. “February 6th”
“An Aquarius” responded Laurens, after a short search. “Rebel with or without cause”

“Yeah, that’s me”

“Since when?” asked Thomas.

“Since always” retorted Aaron, defensively. “But I know when to let it show…”

“Sure…”

“And you, Herc?” asked Maria, still swinging on her seat.

“Libra” responded the CIO.

“So my little namesake is a Libra as well?” commented Angelica. “They were born on the same day”

“What namesake?” asked Thomas.

“Alexander’s daughter” responded James. “And that’s truly a coincidence”

“Yep” nodded Angelica.

“What about you, Angie?” asked Maria.

“Are you writing all that down, as well?” asked Thomas, throwing a judgemental glare to her spread papers.

“I write everything down. So, be careful” she warned, raising her pen, and nobody knew how serious she actually was.

“I was born on February 20th” replied Angelica.

“An Aquarius like Aaron, then” guessed Peggy.

“No, she’s a Pisces” argued Lafayette.

“She’s a cusp” answered Laurens, with a foreign teacher-tone.

“What’s that?” asked Maria, confused.

“Cupid’s girlfriend?” asked Peggy, scratching the back of her head.

“What does that have to do with our current conversation?” asked Madison.

“Like this conversation has any sense at all, in a law firm” half-admonished Thomas.

Angelica gave him a bored look. “Thomas, let us have little moments of peace”

“A cusp is when somebody is born in between when a sign is about to end, and another one to start” explained Laurens.

“This is the first time I see him so serious” pointed out Hercules. Then, with a saddened face, he added. “Pity it’s for such a dumb thing”

“Your face is dumb” retorted Laurens, childishly.

“Let him be, man” reprehended Maria. “We all need hobbies”
“Could you let him explain what I am, please?” asked Angelica, upset.

“You’re an Aquarius-Pisces cusp” Laurens explained to her.

“And what does that mean?”

“It means you’ve got a bit of the two. The Cusp of Sensitivity. You’re full of compassion and creativity”

“Hehe, yeah, that’s totally me” admitted Angelica, with a cocky smile.

“Wait, does that mean I’m a cusp as well?” asked Peggy.

“Yep, a Virgo-Libra cusp” nodded Laurens.

Angelica made a face at her sister. “She always needs to steal my spotlight”

“Because you spend too much time below it” retorted the youngest.

“What’s Peggy’s cusp about?” asked Maria, curious.

“The Cusp of Beauty” answered Laurens. Looking at the youngest Schuyler sister, he added. “You’re super charismatic, creative, sensitive, intelligent, and kind”

“I didn’t say it, it was my birthday” Peggy showed off, slightly blushing.

“And Eliza?” asked Lafayette.

“August 9th” Angelica told Laurens, who immediately looked for the page.

Peggy frowned. “You knew her birthday by heart. What about mine?”

“Don’t start with your conspiracy theories” complained Angelica, after a groan.

“She’s a Leo” read Laurens. “Creative, passionate, generous, warm-hearted, cheerful, humorous”

“A trio of angels” concluded Madison.

“That’s totally us” Angelica agreed, winking at him.

Lafayette smiled. “A lioness for the petit lion” he commented.

“What a sixth sense you had with that nickname!” commented Aaron, impressed.

“The world has a funny way to work” nodded Laurens, his eyes fixated on the book. “Call it God, call it energy…”

“There he goes again…” complained Hercules, rolling his eyes.

“And you, Jemmy?” asked Maria.

“Pisces” answered the man, right away.

“Like Washington” added Lafayette.

“And like half-me” joked Angelica.
“Too many fishes in the same water” commented Peggy, wrinkling a bit her nose.

“What about you, Jackie?” kept questioning Maria.

“I’m a Scorpio” responded Laurens. He raised his head a bit, to wiggle his eyebrows. “The best sign of all”

“Yeah, sure” huffed Hercules.

“Adams is a Scorpio” said James.

Laurens’ smile dropped and dedicated a hateful glare to the accountant. “And this is why I hate you”

“What have I done???” asked James, a bit startled by the man’s commentary.

A couple of knocks on the door shifted their attention to the entrance of the room, where Alexander stood.

“I knew I’d find you all in here” he commented, scanning the room. “Adams?” he asked, simply.

“In his office” assured Maria. “I saw him coming in this morning and nobody had gotten out today”

Alexander nodded. “Good. Listen, Washington can’t come today; he’s sick and needs the rest”

“Aw, give him our regards” commented Peggy, worried.

“I’ll call him later” promised Angelica.

Thomas was the only one who narrowed his eyes in suspicion. “But today is Wednesday”

Alexander ignored him right away. “Today’s a Wednesday and we have a meeting, and I’ll take care of it”

There was a slight and shared groan.

“I’m just as excited” assured Alexander, with a stoic expression. “We’ll do it exactly as last time I had to take care of it, alright? At 3.30 sharp”

“Alriiight…” they all said, suddenly subdued.

“I’m going to look for Lee, I want everybody in here” he explained, relaxing a bit his posture. “I’ll lock the doors” he warned, when he saw the phantom of smiles on everyone’s faces. They disappeared as soon as he said that. “And I want you to give me all your work of February and this month for this afternoon, alright?”

This time, the whole staff had their energy back, and began to protest loudly. Alexander took a surprised step back and raised one hand.
“Alright, alright… People…” he tried to say, his voice being, for once, the lowest in the building…

“ALRIGHT, CALM DOWN!” …For a mere moment, at least…

“But that’s too much, Alex!” complained Laurens, with a frown.

“People, it’s March 28th!” he reminded, in a reprimand. “You should have all this month covered already! As well as the previous one, which Washington has been asking for you since we came in here. And he’s been given nothing!”

“But…!” a few tried to say.

Alexander shut them up with a hard glare. “I want all you’ve got of February this afternoon. But start making sure you have March covered, because I’ll make sure to ask for it next Wednesday, not matter if Washington is back or not, got it?”

“Yeees” they said, in unison.

“Thank you, Alex!” said Peggy.

“I’ll go for Lee” he reminded again, half turned. “Behave and work, I’ll try to be back soon”

“Wait, wait” Maria raised her hand, suddenly. “Then, we’ve got to give you this month only?”

“No. I’ll take your March reports in the next meeting” explained Alexander.

“Today??” asked Laurens, again with eyes wide.

“No, no…”

“But you said…!”

“Let me talk!” demanded Alexander, frowning. “The next meeting is next week”

“Ah, so we don’t have one today?” asked Aaron, confused.

“Yeeeeeaaah!” celebrated Peggy, dancing a bit with happiness.

“No! We’re going to have one this afternoon, at 15:30!” clarified Alexander.

Peggy stopped abruptly. “But you just said…!”

“This afternoon, a meeting, 15:30. As all Wednesdays”

“We usually have them at 8:30” pointed out Lafayette.

“I know, but I like it better this way”

“Alright, but then it’s not like all Wednesdays”

Alexander clicked his tongue in annoyance. “Do you want me to have it at 8:30? ‘Cause I won’t mind”

“No, no, I was just saying…” said Lafayette, with a lower voice.

“I’ll still ask for the same reports. And person who doesn’t have them, person who will have a pay
“cut” he informed.

“But what reports?” asked Hercules, starting to be lost.

“The ones of this month” explained Madison.

Alexander frowned at the accountant. “No! The reports of February, people!”

“And January?” asked Laurens.

“You all gave me those in the last meeting I took care of” Alexander told him.

“But I wasn’t there. You kicked me out”

“I kicked you out for irresponsible” Alexander reminded him.

“Yeah, sure…”

“Then, February and March” said Aaron, wanting to confirm.

“No. Just February, because March is ‘too much’” repeated Alexander, with clear mockery, and finger-quoting the last two words.

“And January” insisted Laurens.

“John, you all gave me January back at February”

Madison passed a hand through his face, overwhelmed. “Bf, this is getting too confusing…”

“What confusing?” asked Alexander, dumbfounded. “This afternoon, 15.30 sharp, the meeting room, reports of February. That’s it. What’s confusing there?”

“And January??” kept questioning Laurens.

Alexander kicked the floor, enraged. “Damnit, John, shut up, you’re messing things!”

“But I…”

“You all already gave me…”

“I did not”

“You did not?”

“No, I told you I wasn’t in that meeting”

“In that case you must give me January as well” decided Alexander.

Laurens got angry at that. “What? I have to do from January to March for this afternoon? Are you nuts?!”

“Jackie…” said Lafayette, trying to calm him down.

“Ah, but March as well?” asked Hercules.

“We should have March done already, actually” commented Jefferson.
“But March is a yes or a no?” asked Maria.

“Eh?” said Aaron, confused.

“I mean, we have to have to have… No, wait… To have to have… To have having… How do you say that?” asked the receptionist, frowning at the whole staff.

“Say what?” asked Madison.

“Wait a moment” said Angelica. “January, February and March?”

Peggy shook her head. “We’ve got January given already”

“February and March” said Angelica, sure of herself.

“No! February…” tried to explain Alexander, feeling exhausted all of a sudden.

“March is for the next meeting” clarified Jefferson.

“This one?” asked Angelica.

“No, the one on next week” explained Thomas.

“But next meeting is this afternoon, the one we have to…”

“We’ve gotta have those done” Maria struggled to say. She clapped in satisfaction. “Now, dang it. For a moment I couldn’t speak!”

“But what is she talking about?” asked Madison.

“About that grammar is a bitch” answered Maria.

“Ah, yes, I agree” nodded Madison.

“For the love of God…” muttered Alexander, being ignored at the doorframe.

“Next meeting is next week” kept explaining Thomas to Angelica and Peggy, who looked confusedly at him.

“No, next is next. The one that comes after the previous one” said Peggy.

“And the previous one was last week” stated Angelica.

“Yes, but today we’re having that one” insisted Thomas. “So, the next one is the one on next week”

“That has no sense” concluded Angelica.

“Yes, it does. It…”

“Then, call it the meeting on next week” proposed Peggy.

“Why? You’re making it unnecessarily longer”

“No, I’m making it easier to understand”

“It’s already easy to understand”
“No, because I didn’t get it” said Angelica.

“That’s your problem”

“No, no, because I’ve never heard anyone saying it like that”

“Well, I’ve heard everybody saying it that way”

“But, then, what is for this meeting and for the next one?” asked Aaron, walking closer to the group.

“January and February for today’s meeting, March for next week” explained Maria.

“No, no, we’ve already given Hamilton the January paperwork last meeting” said Thomas.

“But last meeting I didn’t give anything to anyone” said Hercules, getting in the conversation as well.

“Last meeting, we only screamed” reminded Madison.

“Like usual” commented Laf, with a resigned shrug.

“I’m talking about the last meeting Hamilton took care of” clarified Jefferson. “We gave him all our paperwork of January, and a few months prior”

“That happened on February” said Madison, trying to place the dates correctly inside his head.

“So, February is all covered” said Angelica.

“March for this afternoon” chimed in Maria.

“Only March?” asked Aaron.

“And January?” asked Laurens.

Thomas frowned in his direction. “I told you we all gave those already on February”

“But I wasn’t there when that happened”

“That’s your problem”

“Thank you, workmate” spat Laurens, resentfully.

“Then, March paperwork for this afternoon?” asked Maria.

“No, no” hurried to say Madison. “For this afternoon February. And Laurens, you must give Hamilton both January and February”

“That’s not fair” whined Laurens.

“That’s what you get for irresponsible” admonished Hercules.

“For this afternoon February and March” insisted Maria, looking at Madison.

“No, em…”

“It is, isn’t it?” asked Jefferson.

“It’s March already” said Peggy.
“About to end” added Aaron.

“But… But wait…” said Laurens. “I don’t understand. I have to get three months of paperwork done for next week?”

“For this afternoon” said Lafayette.

“This afternoon?”

“And what about next week?” asked Hercules.

They all began to talk over the other, raising their voices considerably and growing more and more indignant at the hypothetical thought of doing ‘so much paperwork in so little time’. Alexander stood by the door, his glare low, hand over his mouth and a thoughtful expression.

The elevator dinged in the distance, and footsteps came in his direction. Alexander looked with his peripheral, seeing John Adams standing there, eyes puffed up for sleeping and his hair dishevelled.

“Hasn’t the meeting started yet?” he asked, yawning and rubbing one sleepy eye.

That made something inside Alexander’s brain to click. He inhaled through his nostrils and screamed at the top of his lungs.

“ALRIGHT, THAT’S ENOUGH EVERYBODY!”

The staff shut their mouths simultaneously and looked back at him. Adams took a careful step backwards, not understanding what was happening, but fearing the red face Alexander had now.

“Listen and pay attention! And stop messing things up!” he ordered, looking at them all, even Adams, over his shoulder. “Today’s meeting will be at 15:30. Sharp. In the meeting room at the last floor. As always. For this afternoon, day 28, I want all your paperwork of February. Only February. Alright?”

They all nodded, serious.

“Good. And for next week…” Alexander took a moment to count in his mind. “For next week, on April 4th, I want your paperwork of March. Got it?”
Again, the staff nodded, slowly.

“Good” Alexander looked directly at Laurens’ eyes. “John. You must be give me this afternoon February, as the rest of our workmates, as well as January. Because you couldn’t be at the last meeting I took care of. Understood?”

“Yes” nodded Laurens, though not very satisfied with the news.

“What do you have to give me this afternoon?”

“My paperwork of January and February” answered John.

“Good” He looked at the other employees. “What does the rest have to give me this afternoon?” he repeated the question, as if he were talking with little children. Which, Alexander feared, was his actual case.

“My paperwork of February” they all said, almost in unison.

“Correct. And when do you have to give me your paperwork of March?”

“Next week”

“Correct” Alexander turned around, giving Adams an up and down look. “Adams, what do you have to have done for today’s meeting?” he repeated, tediously.

“My… My paperwork of… February?” replied Adams, hesitantly.

“Good. And for next week?”

“My paperwork of March” he answered, more secure than before.

“Perfect” nodded Alexander. He turned to be able to look at both Adams and the rest. “At what hour you all must be in the meeting room today?”

“At 15:30” they all said.

“I’ll lock the doors after half past three” warned Alexander, eyeing them all slowly. “I won’t cry if some of you don’t make it. And if you don’t make it, you won’t be able to give me your paperwork. And what happens if someone doesn’t give me their paperwork today?”

“Pay cut”

“Good” Alexander heaved a sigh. “I’ll write it all down on a sheet I’ll hang on the notice board” he informed.

“Alright”

“I’ll go to look for Lee. I’ll try to come as soon as I can” he repeated again, prepared to leave the building and clear his mind a bit.

“And April?” asked Peggy.
Alexander stopped dead in his tracks. He turned on his heels slowly, looking directly at his youngest sister-in-law.

“What’s wrong with April?” he asked, trying to keep an even tone.

“Our paperwork of April” she clarified.

Alexander moved the tongue inside his mouth and exhaled. “Peggy, what paperwork you want to have done of April on April 4th? Care to explain?” he talked, raising a bit his voice in the end.

“Hm… From the 1st to the 4th, I guess” she answered, shrugging.

Alexander felt a tic in his right eye. “Go to work, all of you” he ordered, turning around completely and heading towards the front doors without looking back. “Jesus Christ, ten minutes for such a stupid thing… We’re gonna have one hell of a meeting…” he lamented, under his breath.

By the time Alexander was back (with a sulking Lee by his side. Hey, at least, he didn’t have to drag him out of his house, as he had to do with Adams last time. Alexander would give the guy that much), screams could be heard all throughout the building.

Lee frowned in his direction and threw him what he tried it to be a sad look, wanting to gain the CFO’s pity. Alexander simply ignored him, closing the glass doors with a bit more force than necessary and locking them.

“Go to your office, Lee, and be sure you’ve got all February covered for this afternoon” he commanded, receiving an irritated nod. Alexander sighed, exhausted. “Someone’s gonna lose their head today…” he muttered.

Alexander turned to his right and went directly to the break room, finding Peggy and Maria, writing hurriedly.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, startling the two girls.

“About?” asked Peggy.

“With all this noise”
“Ah, Adams is blaming Jefferson for something that went missing” answered Maria.

“How do you know?” asked Peggy, with a cocked eyebrow.

Maria showed her her phone. “Angelica”

“Ah, true”

“Adams again?” asked Alexander, with clear boredom in his voice. “Will that man ever learn?” he complained, turning on his heels.

“Are you going to destroy him?” asked Maria.

“I’m just gonna talk to him”

Maria and Peggy jumped from their seats and followed him. Alexander rolled his eyes and went upstairs.

“We’ve got an elevator now” Peggy reminded him.

“I’m more of a stairs guy” wanted to joke Alexander, but his bitter tone spoiled his try.

He walked until he reached the second floor, where the lawyers offices were. He saw a group of the almost whole staff there, watching the quarrel as a show from TV. Alexander rolled his eyes and went straight to Adams’ office. The doors of the elevator dinged opened as he passed them by, and Maria and Peggy followed him, excited as children.

Aaron and Lafayette were the first ones who noticed him. They stood aside, letting him go through. Alexander nodded in their direction, as a silent ‘thank you’, and kept going, leaving the two girls behind, who started to talk to the two men in whispers. Alexander stood in the doorframe, seeing Madison was also there, watching the scene first in line.

Inside the office, Adams was watching Thomas closely as he leafed through some papers scattered all over the lawyer’s desk. Alexander threw a glare to Madison, who finally noticed him. The shorter man shrugged, with resignation, and kept watching the fight.

“I told you I don’t know. I have not…!” argued Thomas, looking for something anxiously.

“How could you not know?! I gave them to you!” hollered Adams, hitting the desk with one hand.

“I gave them back to you!” insisted Thomas.

“No, you did not. I don’t have them”
“How do you know you didn’t lose them?”

“’Cause I know so’

“Like that’s enough for your statement to be true” chimed in Alexander, walking closer to the two former friends. “What’s going on?” he asked, taking glimpses of the papers.

“Jefferson lost part of my paperwork” accused Adams, right away.

“No, I didn’t” hurried to say Thomas, looking at Alexander nervously. “I gave them back to him, I know. I finished them and…”

“You finished them?” interrupted Alexander, arching one eyebrow at Thomas. The man didn’t reply, clearly having a hard time already by putting his anxiety under control. Alexander simply turned to Adams, who looked at him with the same rage. “You go from Ernie to Bert, and let go over, right?”

“Eh?” spat the lawyer, angry.

Alexander looked at Thomas again. “You don’t know where you put them?”

“I gave them to…”

“No, you didn’t!” interrupted Adams, in a scream. “Now, I’ve got this incomplete for your incompetence!”

“For his incompetence?” repeated Madison, getting into the conversation. “He helped you out and this…”

“Shut up and mind your own business!” spat Adams.

Madison blinked a couple of times, perplexed, before matching the lawyer’s ire. “I don’t want to. I’ve been standing into silence, hearing your nonsense for almost an hour…”

“One hour lost for idiocies. Nice” commented Alexander, nodding.

“…and now I want to talk. If you don’t like it, get over it” James looked at Alexander. “Thomas gave this man his paperwork, because it’s nowhere in his office, or back at home”

“And where is it, then?” inquired Adams, both hands on his hips.

“Ask yourself that” concluded Madison, crossing his arms.

“No. I ask your friend because he was the one who made them and lost them” retorted Adams.

“He should have done nothing to you” Alexander talked before James had the chance to. “That’s for starters”

“It was on the week…” Adams tried to excuse himself.

Alexander shook his head. “You must do your work. Nobody else. I think I let that very clear to you in the last meeting” he explained, as calmly as he could.

“But it was…” the lawyer tried once again.

“I don’t care” assured Alexander, very serious. “I told you, I made myself very clear, that…”
“But it was on the days I was substituting Washington” explained Adams, talking over the immigrant when he saw Hamilton wasn’t going to let him speak.

“So?” asked Alexander, shrugging.

“So, I asked the secretary to fill some papers for me while I worked on the ones Washington gave me” explained Adams.

Madison frowned and walked closer. “No, that’s not true. You gave him all of them. You did nothing”

“That’s true, we all heard that” nodded Lafayette, from the door.

Alexander alternated his glare between the accountant and his friend. Lafayette entered the office as well, and walked directly to Thomas, who had been silent since Madison got in between the argument, to make sure he was alright. Alexander threw a glare to the secretary, seeing him paler.

He sighed. He was still angry at the man, but today all of them were his responsibility, even the ones he couldn’t stand sharing his air with.

“Alright, Adams, you’ll simply do the work you’ve got missing” he decided. “As you should’ve done in the first place”

“But why do you punish only me? He was the one who…!” tried to fight Adams, pointing accusatorily at Jefferson.

“I am not punishing anyone” clarified Alexander. “He did something that was not his responsibility. It was a favour. Or so I want to call it. I don’t mind about your or his life. At all” he promised, very indifferent. “This was your…”

Adams huffed. “Huh, if you really don’t mind about our lives at all, why do you always comment and discuss our personal matters, in and out the meetings?” he questioned.

Alexander was silent for a few seconds, before he snapped. “Because I care, alright? I care and I worry, though most of you don’t believe it” He threw a not-very-discreet glare to Thomas, who was still a bit dazed but flinched at his words and sharp glaze. “Though maybe you’re right” he admitted, after a brief moment of silence. “Maybe I must start to mind my own work, and the days I have to take care of a meeting, I’d simply discuss the professional issues and ignore all the shady shit that’s happening between co-workers”

“It’s not that, Alex…” said Peggy, under her breath and a bit saddened.

“What shady shit?” repeated Adams, defensively.

“Things like this” answered Alexander, immediately, pointing at Adams and Jefferson repeatedly. “You made the poor man turn as white as a sheet. Thank goodness I arrived here now and not five minutes later. What did you intend? To this law firm to have its own Michael Jackson?”
A few contained their giggles, looking at anywhere but inside the room. Even Thomas let out a shaky laugh. Lafayette and Madison could breathe properly after hearing that reaction from their friend.

“No, I was only…” Adams tried to defend his action again.

“Hush” ordered Alexander, deadly serious. “Do your work as you were supposed to and stop making other people do your things”

“And what about him?” insisted the lawyer.

Alexander dedicated the secretary another disregarding look, fully aware of Thomas’ evasive demeanour, before shrugging.

“I’d recommend a glass of water, a little break and then he’d do whatever he hasn’t done yet. He’ll know” he decided, looking directly at Lafayette, who nodded and walked out of the room. “And you, Adams, hurry up and stop losing time. The hands of the clock don’t wait for anybody, less for you” he ordered, snapping his fingers to emphasize his point.

Adams frowned, quite childishly. “You’re being very unfair”

Alexander stopped midway to the door, his expression not changing one bit, but making the staff gathered at the hallway to tremble in their spots. The CFO exhaled slowly and then looked at everybody.

“Stop using the word ‘unfair’ so slightly, people” he admonished. “Here, the first unfair ones are you”

“Us?” repeated Laurens, getting offended as the rest of the staff.

“The great majority” nodded Alexander.

“Yeah, with whom?” inquired Angelica, folding her arms upon her chest.

“Basically, with me” responded Alexander, with no hesitation. “And with one or two other workmates. But I’ll talk about that with you all this afternoon, as we’ll have two hours to expound. I’ll make sure to bring two jugs full of tilleul, so none of you can put me on my nerves on purpose to lose time and go straight to the points. Of which I like none, I’m warning you”

Lafayette had come back in the middle of his speech, with the glass of water for Thomas, throwing a worried glare to his workmates, who returned the expression. Adams was the only one who was still scowling. He clicked his tongue.
“Tsk, yeah, right… What have we done now?” he asked.

“I just said it” responded Alexander.

“I did nothing”

“Maybe that’s one of your big deals, Adams: that you never do anything” retorted Alexander, starting to lose his patience.

“Well, I don’t understand. You’re being incoherent” declared Adams.

“You’re the one acting incoherently” talked back Alexander, now facing him completely. “Always growling and complaining and tired, though you’re only forty-four; except for bothering people around you, for that you always have the batteries full”

“I don’t bother anyone” denied Adams, with a genuinely surprised expression.

“You don’t?” questioned Alexander, frowning. “And what about what just happened?”

“What happened?”

“That I had to walk in here and see a workmate at the verge of fainting”

Thomas frowned and looked at him for the first time since he arrived. “I was not”

“Tell that to Lafayette, who’s been supporting you as if he were a pillar” spat Alexander, giving him a rapid glare of disdain.

Adams laughed derisively. “Yeah, now those migraines he alleges to have over the most stupid things are gonna be my fault”

Thomas looked irritated at the lawyer. “I’m not alleging, I’m…”

“The stupidest” corrected Alexander, not minding the secretary’s words at all.

“Whatever” dismissed Adams.

“And let’s not open a debate about suspicious illness and malaises, because something tells me you could lose” warned Alex.

“I…”

“Now, do this company a favour and work, work, and work”

“I don’t know what I’ve gotta do”

“Your paperwork”

“It’s been so long since he’s done one of those himself, you can’t blame him for not understanding” spat Madison, starting to match the CFO’s anger.

Adams frowned at the accountant. “Dobby, what are you sick of today? I’m feeling you more unbearable than usual”

“I’m sick of your nonsense, that’s what I’m sick of today”

“Alright, enough” Hamilton stopped immediately. He raised one hand when he saw Adams opening
“Enough” he repeated, dedicating the lawyer a deadly serious glare. “I said we’ll discuss all this this afternoon”

“But…” Adams wanted to complain.

“Right now…” interrupted Alexander, with a sharp tone. “The only thing you have to do is your paperwork. Got it?”

“But I don’t know how!” complained the lawyer, moving a few sheets, distressingly.

“Mmmh, Adams, what’s your problem, dear?” asked Alexander, taking a few steps closer to the desk. “Do you need someone to hold your hand while you work?”

Adams frowned darkly. “No, I need people stop messing my things up”

“Then, stop making other people do your work. See how easy the solution is?” asked Alexander, with a faked innocent tone.

“Alright, whatever you say as usual” decided Adams, tossing a few papers aside, containing a tantrum.

Alexander looked at him, seriously. “Really, Adams, do you think I or Washington, when the poor man is here the rest of the days, deserve this kind of behaviour?”

“What behaviouuur?” shouted Adams, with a raspy voice.

“This oonenee” replied Alexander, imitating his tone.

Maria and the Schuylers failed at containing their laughter, contaminating the rest of the staff. They were glad Alexander was too busy with Adams to pay them any attention.

“This one proper of a spoiled three-years-old” responded Alexander, more soberly. He looked around, now directing his reprimand to the rest of the team. “And this is not only about Adams. You all have been… Mmmh… I don’t want to say anything, because you’re losing time of work, but let me just say you’ve been intolerable lately. I’ve seen classrooms of first graders tidier and calmer than this law firm”

“But we didn’t do anything!” complained Laurens, once again.

“He’s making things up” muttered Adams, ill-manneredly.

“I’m not making anything up. Put on other people’s shoes from time to time. Would you like to live scenes like the ones Washington or I must live six days a week?”

“What scenes?” asked Hercules.

“This one, without going any further” replied Alexander. “And the scariest part is that you’re not even realising because you’ve normalised this behaviour!”

“But we…” Maria began to talk.

“Tell me you did nothing” challenged Hamilton. “I dare any of you to tell me you did nothing”
“But we truly don’t know what you’re talking about now” admitted Madison, on the quiet.

“Worry not, Madison, I’ll make sure to make you all a very beautiful PowerPoint for this afternoon” promised Alexander, and no one knew if he was serious or not.

“Remember to put a slide about our version of the story” said Adams, bitterly.

Alexander looked at him. “I’ve never said you could not complain. I’m saying what I’m saying because of a few persons around here, and just as I can rebuke them, you all can also let me or Washington, when he comes back, know about the problems you see in the office”

“Really?” asked Laurens, a bit impressed.

“Of course. Not only the heads of the company can complain. We all are persons in here. If some of you feels something is not going well or is feeling bad because of something, you’ve got your right to tell and have a solution” explained Alexander.

“Good” nodded Adams. “I’ll talk to you this afternoon, then”

“Seems right to me” agreed Alexander.

“To me as well”

“I’m glad to see that, despite our personal problems, we can be civil”

“Me too”

“And now, work”

“Nope”

“Nope?” echoed Hamilton, wrinkling his nose in disgust.

“Nope” repeated Adams, exaggerating the sound of the P.

“Hm… Adams…”

“I can’t do this, so unorganised”

“That’s not my problem”

“True. It’s his”

Thomas clenched his teeth when he saw Adams pointing at him. “I gave everything back to you!” he repeated, having regained his strengths.

“I don’t fucking care who did or who lost what!” declared Alexander in a shout, reaching the limit of his patience. “Each of you have to have your part of paperwork done, your petty excuses of high schoolers be damned, got it??”

They all nodded, except from Adams. Alexander noticed immediately.

“Did you understand, Adams?” he pressed.
“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say” retorted Adams, waving one hand coarsely.

“… … Mmmh…”

Alexander exhaled, as Lafayette guided Thomas and Madison to the door, the three men watching the immigrant with a bit of fear in their irises. The rest came back slowly on their steps to look at the scene. They heard Hamilton muttering something under his breath, trying to calm his nerves.

“Adams, I want you to come punctually to the meeting this afternoon” he decided to say, in the end.

“Yeah”

“I’m serious”

“Yes, yes!” spat Adams, upset.

“Don’t try to play the card of coming late, so I won’t unlock the doors and leave you out. I know you all in here, and your little tricks”

“I’ll go to the meeemeetiiing…” assured Adams, boringly.

“Words are gone with the wind. I want facts”

“Fuck, Hamilton, what do you want me to do? To go forwards in time and go seat in the meeting room or what?”

“I want to you there at 15.30, or a bit before. That’d be alright as well”

“Yes, yes”

“Good”

“Fucking nuisance” complained Adams, under his breath.

Alexander dedicated him one last glare before exiting the room. “And with all that paperwork done by your own handwriting, thank you very much”

Whatever response Adams had prepared was muted by Alexander slamming the door shut at his backs. Alex sighed exhaustedly and looked at the rest, still there, looking directly at him.

“Are you waiting for the bus to come or what?” he spat, grumpily. “Go to work, come on!”

They groaned in disagreement, but obeyed. Aaron waited a bit to be able to walk directly to his office without bumping into anyone. Alexander dedicated him a concerned glare.
“Are you still feeling bad, Aaron?”

The man took a bit more of time than usual to process the question. “Uh, yes…”

“Have you taken anything?”

“This morning, before coming”

“So, around… seven?”

“No, no, around six… I couldn’t sleep well, it was about the time to take it again and…” He took in a breath and sniffed.

“At six” concluded Alexander.

“Yes”

Aaron coughed against his elbow as Alexander counted inside his brain.

“You still can’t take one until lunchbreak, at much” commented Alex, under his breath.

Aaron heard him. “There’s nothing in the cabinets, anyway…”

“Nothing?” repeated Alex, receiving a nod. “Alright, in that case…”

“Alex” Lafayette interrupted their conversation. He looked at his friend with an anguished look, with his breathing a bit quickened, as he had come upstairs in a hurry.

“What’s wrong? Are you okay?” asked Alexander, worrying again.

“Yes, I am, but Thomas… Hm, he fainted…” he struggled to explain, his accent becoming thicker.

“He fainted where?” asked Alexander, ready to go downstairs to take a look himself.

“He’s… He’s not sleeping right now… He just… Like he stumbled a bit and then…”

“He had a black-out” Aaron helped.

“Yes, that, thank you” said Lafayette, sighing with relief.

“Ah, well…” breathed out Alexander, calmer.

“He got too nervous, maybe” commented Aaron, looking for a handkerchief in one of his pockets.

“Yes, his head’s bothering him too much”

“Where’s he now?” asked Alex.

“He’s in his office with Madison”

“But he’s awake and aware of his surroundings” he wanted to be sure.

“Yes, yes”
“Tell him to take an ibuprofen or something. And water” he decided, turning to Aaron again.

“We ran out of it” said Lafayette, scratching the back of his neck.

“There’s no ibuprofen either?” asked Alexander, half-closing his eyes.

“When I told you ‘there’s nothing’, I meant absolutely nothing” said Aaron, coughing the last two words.

“No natural remedies either, then?”

“Nope”

Alexander sighed. “Perfect. Drug addicts, I work with a bunch of drug addicts…” he complained, under his breath. “Aaron, dear, go to your office and do what you can. I’ll come back later”

“Alright. But I’m fine” said Aaron, going to his office.

“Laf, you as well. I’ll make sure to send Maria to buy all you might need”

“D’accord… But can I stay with Thomas for a bit?”

Alexander shrugged. “Do whatever you want. You all are adults” he said, going downstairs with the Frenchman following close behind.

“Alex…” a subdued Peggy called, appearing at the feet of the stairs.

“What’s wrong?” asked the CFO, trotting to where she was, his worry coming back to him at full force.

“I have acidity” she explained, extending her arms, in search for a hug.

Alexander embraced her right away. “Acidity, you’ll mean” he corrected.

“Yeah, that” she replied, her voice muffled as she buried her face against his shoulder.

“The doctor told us it’d be normal around this time of the pregnancy” said Lafayette, tapping the girl on the shoulder, reassuringly.

Maria came their way. “Ah, Alex I wanted to tell you there’s nothing in…”

“I know” Alex interrupted her, maybe sharper than he intended. “I was about to ask you to go buy what we need”

“Maria’s throat hurts” Peggy explained, lingering to Alex, though the man had stopped the hug already.

Alex looked at the girl, a bit sceptic. “You’re ill too?”

“It bothers me when I swallow” explained the receptionist, shrugging. “But I don’t feel ill”

“You got cold” said Lafayette.

Alex sighed again. “Alright, then. Ibuprofen, paracetamols, tea and honey for your throat… What do you prefer, Pegs? A chamomile tea or an antacid?” he asked, rubbing her back gently.

“The tea…” she decided.
“Alright”

“Ah, and something for Herc’s allergies” Lafayette said suddenly.

“Okay” nodded Alex.

Lee got out of the break room and walked directly to the group.

“Hamilton, there’s nothing in the cabinet of the meds” he informed.

“He was about to write the list already” said Lafayette.

Alexander narrowed his eyes at the manager. “Well, what’s going on in here? You come here to take the meds for free instead of doing that back at home?”

Lee was taken aback at first for the sudden reprimand. “I didn’t want to come here, in the first place” he retorted, with rancour.

“Lee, go to your office. We…”

“I’ve got a gumboil” interrupted Lee.

“Go to see a dentist, I don’t care!” shouted Alexander, kicking the floor. “God, I think it’s enough with this Almost Dead Lawyers Society, people!”

They heard a laugh at their backs, and they turned, seeing Laurens going downstairs by jumping one step at a time. Alexander half-closed his eyes.

“John, do you mind going downstairs as a normal adult?”

“Yes, I do mind” replied the freckled man.

“Why are you here, anyways?”

“If I miss work, I’m irresponsible; if I come, you get annoyed. Really, Alex, you’re…”

“I’m not annoyed at the fact that you came into work today! I’m annoyed at the fact that you’re here, jumping steps as a little child, instead of working…!”

“I just wanted a snack”

“You ate almost the whole table this morning before coming!” said Lafayette, impressed.

“So? I’m hungry again”

“There’s barely food, anyways” Maria told him.

“There’s always nothing in this shitty law firm…” complained Laurens, changing his mood in a millisecond.
“I was already about to send someone to buy meds and now food as well, for what it seems!” Alex informed him, tiredly. “Now, could you all please go back to your offices? You’re overwhelming”

“Jesus! Alright, alright!” said Laurens, grunting and turning around. He bumped into Hercules, on his way down. “Get out of the way!” he shouted.

Hercules frowned at him, after the initial shock. “Go to hell!” he shouted back.

Lafayette frowned. “Can’t you stop bickering for five minutes in a row?” he asked, annoyed.

“It was him!”

“Herc, what’s wrong?” asked Maria, arching one eyebrow at the tissue he had under his nose.

“Nosebleed?” asked Lafayette, softening his tone.

“Yep”

“Marvellous!” exclaimed Alexander, sarcastically. “Hercules, there’s nothing you can take yet. Go to the restroom if you want, but you’ll have to wait” he explained, with the little patience he had left.

“Agh, alright” nodded the CIO, coming back on his steps reluctantly.

“Wait, let me help you” said Lafayette, following his boyfriend.

When they disappeared from eyeshot, Alexander looked at the rest. “Now, the rest of you, go to work. I’ll send someone to buy what you need”

“Hurry” spat Lee, before storming in the elevator.

Alexander looked enraged at the now closed doors. “He’s gonna remember this meeting, I swear” He looked softly at Peggy and made her got separated from him. “Dear, go rest somewhere” he instructed, lowering his tone. “Maria, do you mind staying with her?”

“No, no. Come here” she said, taking Peggy’s hand and guiding her to the break room.

“I miss my bed” whined Peggy. “I’m gonna buy another one when I get paid” she promised.

Alexander sighed for the third time. “This people are a lost cause” he lamented.

One door opened at the end of the hall. Maria and Peggy greeted Madison, who stepped out of the secretary’s office, closing the door gently behind his backs, and walked directly to the elevator.

“There’s nothing in the cabinets, Madison” Alexander told him, almost automatically.

“I know” said the accountant, tapping his foot impatiently at the time the lift was taking.

“I’m about to send someone to buy. Do you need something?”

“No, no, I’m not ill” replied Madison.

Alexander looked at him up and down. “Huh, little Desperaux won the war in the end” he commented, in a whisper.
“What?”

“Nothing”

Madison finally looked back at him. “Ah, could you remember to write mint tea? It helps Thomas’ migraines to be bearable”

“Alright. Are you sure he doesn’t need to take anything else?”

“No, he doesn’t like it” he explained, though clearly disagreeing.

“Did he try lavender oil?” asked Alexander, all of a sudden.

James frowned in his direction. “No. Why?”

“It’s very good for the migraines. You inhale it or apply it on the temples” he explained.

“I didn’t know that, honestly”

“I’ll write it down as well, and he can try it if he wants. It’s natural”

“Yes. Thank you” said James, smiling a bit.

The elevator opened in that moment, and Angelica almost bumped into Madison. She stepped aside, the man entered, and she walked out, after a courteous greeting. Then, she proceeded to go straight to the break room.

“And what’s troubling you?” asked Alexander, starting to suspect this was all an elaborate joke.

“Uh?” asked the vice president, looking over her shoulder. “I don’t know… The world hunger or something like that”

“… Angelica, don’t laugh at me today. Really”

“Bah? It was you the one asking that out-of-the-blue question”

“Because I’m seeing you going into the break room as well” Alexander explained. “And as I see today is the day of the ill, I wanted to ask”

“Nah, I’ve got a robust health” she showed off. “I just wanted to hang out for a bit”

“Perfect. In that case, you’ll go buying what the others need”

“Eeeeee??” she exclaimed, now turning completely. “Why me?”

“Because you’re the only one healthy enough to go out and do it in our behalf”

“And what about you?”

“I’ve got a lot of things to prepare today”

“So do I!”
“Yes, you’re so busy you came here to ‘hang out’”

“…Gee, Alex, this is not fair” she pouted.

“That only works for Peggy. Now, come with me so I can give you the list”

“Not one of your lists, please” she complained.

“Yes. And make sure to check it at least thrice before coming back. I know you”

Alexander made a gesture with his head and Angelica followed him, unwillingly.

The alarm went off at 12, Eliza’s reminder that he needed to eat. Alexander decided to ignore it for today, reading and writing countless piles of paperwork. His blood pressure dangerously high, thanks to all he was working on. He didn’t raise his glare from his desk until he found out he had let some of the documents back at home. He groaned and threw a look at his watch.

“14.45, already?!” he said, clearly surprised. “Betsey is gonna kill me today…”

Knock, knock.

“Who is it?” he asked, as he kept a few things inside his briefcase and prepared to leave.

“Me” said Angelica’s voice.

“Come in, Me” he joked.

Angelica opened the door, serious lips and amusing glare. “Not funny”

“I love you just the same”

“Ha ha… Where are you going?” she asked, seeing him putting on his jacket.

“I forgot one of the important papers back at home” he answered, heading to the door.

Angelica took a step aside to let his brother-in-law lock his office door and then followed him to the staircase.
“Did you want something?” he asked.

“Hm?”

“You knocked on my door. Did you need something?”

“Ah, no… It wasn’t that important”

“Alright” he said, not very convinced. “Where are the rest?”

“Except from Madison and Jefferson, the others are in the break room”

“Really?” he asked, eyes half-closed.

“It’s lunchbreak”

“Lunchbreak was two hours ago” reprimanded Alexander. He shook his head. “Just… Never mind”

He accelerated the pace and went directly to the break room, where the whole staff was, with the exception of the accountant and the secretary.

“Guys” he called, knocking twice. The chattering died down and all eyes were on him. “I need to leave for a moment. Behave. And when it’s 15.30, went to the meeting room, alright? I’ll try to be back as soon as possible”

“Drive safely” said Maria.

“Thanks. And remember, be there at the correct hour” he insisted.

“Yes, yes, yes”

It was 15.48 and Alexander wasn’t back. The staff made turns to watch the doors and see if the immigrant was coming back or not. Peggy’s was about to end when she returned to the break room and said:

“I think we should really get going, I feel bad for Alex”

They shrugged and agreed. Though not hurrying much to arrive at the place. When they were on the last floor, they found the ones that were missing on the break room. They sat on the ground across the meeting room blinded glass windows. They kept chattering about everything and nothing, waiting for the CFO to arrive.
The silence reigned when they heard rapid footsteps from the staircase. John Laurens came into view, red face and breathing quickly, with a folder in his hands. He looked around.

“Alex isn’t here yet?” he asked, a bit of hope in his voice.

“Nah, it’s safe, Jackie” said Maria, her head resting on Peggy’s lap as the girl braided her long hair. John heaved a sigh of pure relief and threw the folder to the floor before taking a seat himself.

“Miracles exist, after all”

Another set of footsteps were heard not two minutes later, and this time Alexander appeared.

“I’m sorry, guys, I…” he stopped and scanned the whole staff, on the floor looking at him. “What are you doing?” he asked, with a cutting tone.

“Waiting for you” answered Adams, with a bit of bitterness.

“On the hallway floor?”

“You told us to be here at 15.30” said Hercules, trying to hide his mischievous smile.

“Yes, I told you to be in the meeting room, not in the middle of the hallway, on the floor”

Alexander made his way among them as well as he could. He turned the knob, opening the door, and threw a glare to the team.

“Ooooh” they all exclaimed, in awe.

“We thought it was locked” said Madison.

“Did you try to open it?” asked Alexander, crossing his arms as well as he could with the briefcase in one hand and a stack of papers in the other.

“No, not me, but…”

“But there were already people in here, and as we saw them in here…” elaborated Peggy.

“Who was here?”

Burr, Adams and Lee raised their hands.
“And didn’t you try to open the door either?”

They shrugged, uninterested. Alexander alternated his glare and then made a face.

“We’re having a strong start, huh?” he commented. “Get inside, come on. Don’t lose time”

They all got up from the floor, except Laurens, who frowned in the immigrant’s direction.

“Seems like I ran out of luck for the rest of the year…” he complained, getting up with greater effort.

Alexander opened the blinds and turned on the lights as the rest took their respective seats.

“Alex, can I sit down?” asked Maria.

“Of course. And I think you should in every meeting, I’ll make sure to bring more chairs. We need to increase the staff, anyways” said Alexander, with a frown of concentration.

“Thanks” said the girl, going directly to the chair by Alexander’s one’s left.

“How are you feeling of the throat?” he asked, looking over his shoulder

“Better”

“Okay. Good”

“Alex” said Peggy.

“And you, Pegs?”

“What?”

“Are you feeling better?”

“Ah, yes, the tea helped a lot”

“Good. What do you need?”

“The loo”

“… … … Alright, go”

“Really?”

“Yes, but hurry, we’ve got no more time to lose”
“Thanks!” said the girl, running out of the room.

Alexander sighed and shook his head. He opened a few windows and went straight to his seat. He took one paper from his briefcase and passed it to the secretary, who was talking about something with Madison.

“Jefferson, make photocopies of this, please” he instructed, barely looking at him.

The conversation between the two friends died down abruptly. Thomas took the paper from Hamilton’s hands and got up.

“What for?” he asked, when he was about to get out.

Alexander looked directly at him at that. “I don’t know, Mr Jefferson” he said, with fake confusion. “What do you think I would want the secretary to photocopy right before a meeting BUT SOMETHING IMPORTANT?” he asked, raising his voice in the end and sinking the whole room in silence.

Thomas stood there for a few moments. “Alright, alright…” he sighed, exiting the place.

“What’s he gonna photocopy?” asked Adams, suspicious.

Alexander turned to Madison. “Is he feeling better?” he asked, in a low voice.

“Hello?” asked Adams, from the other side of the table.

Madison was shocked at first. He nodded. “Yes, it calmed down already”

“Did he use the lavender?”

“Is he ignoring me…?” wondered Adams, indignantly.

“Yes, it was very useful” said Madison. “Thank you”

“It’s nothing” dismissed Alexander. “If he needs water at some point…”

“He already has a bottle” assured James.

“Alright, good” nodded Alex, returning his attention to the rest of his papers.

“Hamilton” called Adams.

“Adams, shut up. I gave you no permission to talk” admonished Alex, without even looking in his direction.

“But I only want to know what’s Jefferson photocopying”

“You’ll know when he’s back” Alexander finished the argument rapidly.
“Alex” said Laurens, raising one hand.

“Yes?”

“Can I go to the loo?”

“Mnh, people, couldn’t you leverage the time it took me to arrive to go there?” asked Alexander, upset. He sighed. “You’ll go when the workmate comes back”

“What workmate?”

“Peggy”

“Okaaay…” said Laurens, dropping his head. “Tsk, it’s not like I’m planning to assault her or anything…” he complained.

“I don’t want more than one out of the meeting room, alright?” snapped Alexander, who somehow had heard him from across the table. “Knowing you, that’s a lethal decision”

“Jefferson’s not here” argued Laurens.

“Because I sent him to do something. Wait for a couple of minutes, John, I’m not asking for too much!”

John complained under his breath as Alexander took one pen. He looked around the table.

“Alright, how many soldiers survived the war?”

“We’re all here” answered Lafayette.

Alexander pointed at the vacant chair of his right. “And this empty seat?”

“That’s Angelica’s” said Maria.

“I know, dear, but I want to know why she’s not here”

“She went out to buy some pills”

Alexander turned slowly to the receptionist. “Went out to buy some pills?” he repeated.

“Yeah. Her head was bothering her”

“Her head was bothering her?”

“… Yes?” she answered, feeling uneasy.

Alexander nodded slowly. “Alright. So that’s the way it is…”

“Eh?”

“Nothing that concerns you. Thanks, dear”

“You’re welcome, I guess”
Jefferson returned then, knocking on the door. Alexander gestured him to enter without stopping reading. The secretary was about to leave the photocopies beside Hamilton, when he stopped abruptly.

“Shall I hand them out?”

He received no answer. Thomas shrugged, let the papers there and took a seat.

“Jefferson, please, hand those photocopies out” demanded Alexander, as soon as he was sat.

Thomas narrowed his eyes but did as he was told, containing a sharp response. Peggy came back then, knocking on the door (and sighing in relief when she found it opened) and got in when Alexander nodded in affirmation.

“Now that we’re all in here, let’s begin” he decided, getting up to close the door.

Laurens raised his hand. “Alex, can I go to the loo now??”

Alexander gave him an angry look. “Yeah, I don’t have better things to do than letting you all dance throughout the hallways on a meeting afternoon” he spat.

Laurens looked at his friend dumbfounded. “Bah… But you said…”

“Shut up, let’s lose no more time. Please, get your…”

“But I really wanna go” wanted to insist Laurens.

“PLEASE, GET YOUR PAPERWORK READY, ALL OF YOU, I’M GOING TO TAKE ATTENDANCE” shouted Alexander, punching the table in the middle of the scream.

Laurens blinked a couple of times and took his sheet, throwing sideways scared glares to Alex.

“Alright. Adams” he called out.

“I don’t have February, just March” said the lawyer, organising his papers as he made his way to the CFO.

“… … …”

“I just have a bit of February and March until today” chimed in Hercules.
“I just have March as well” said Peggy. “That was what we had to have done today, right?”

“And January?” asked Laurens, paling.

“… … …” Alexander took off his glasses and rubbed his temples, ignoring Adams, handing him his paperwork.

Madison raised his hand timidly, a frown adorning his and Thomas’ features. “Alexander?”

“What” asked the CFO, dryly.

“Thomas and I only did February” explained the accountant.

“Me too” nodded Laf, also with a worried expression.

Alexander looked at the three men, very serious. They moved uncomfortably in their chairs.

“We can stay later” proposed Thomas, not wanting to make the tension any worse.

“We’re sorry” added Madison and Lafayette, almost at the same time.

Alex kept looking at them, a sad smile making its way slowly onto his face. He threw his pen aside as he shook his head.

“The only ones that do things right and as I asked for them to be, and the only ones who doubt themselves and apologise to me” he commented, with genuine incredulity in his voice. He buried his face in his hands, muffling his words. “God, what shall I do?” he half-sobbed, half-laughed.

The door was swung open, then. Alexander unburied his face to see Angelica walking in and going directly to her chair.

“What do you think you’re doing?” asked Alexander.

Angelica stopped, about to sit down. “… Going to my seat?”

“And that’s it, right?” inquired Alex, clearly upset. “You’re the queen of the meeting room, right?”

“… Good afternoon?”

“Don’t ‘good afternoon’ me. Get out”

“Why!” Angelica hollered. “I didn’t do anything now!”

“Yes, you did. You’re late”
“But it’s justified!”

“It is?” questioned Alexander, sceptically.

“Yes! I had to get out to buy myself a pill!”

“I thought you already bought everything that could be needed before that”

“But I bought ones that I don’t like because they make me nauseous” explained Angelica, without hesitation in her voice.

“And why didn’t you buy those in the first place?”

“Because they weren’t for me. They were for the rest”

“But you work in here as well. You could’ve easily bought those the first time you left, just in case”

“But I wasn’t expecting my head to hurt today”

“And Maria maybe wasn’t expecting her throat to hurt today, and yet she knows what she needs and buys it when she’s the one doing the task, the other days she’s been healthy”

“Hey, leave me out of this” said the receptionist, holding both hands up.

“Good for her” countered Angelica, not minding the girl too much. “She’s she. I’m me”

“She’s her” corrected Alexander.

“Yeah, that”

“Angelica, please, give me your paperwork and get out. We’ve got a lot to discuss today”

“I won’t get out”

“You will”

“No”

“Yes”

“No”

“Yes”

“No”

“Yes”

“No”

“I don’t want to play this stupid game again, alright?” said Alexander, starting to get angry.

“I’m not playing any games”

“No, that’s the saddest part, that you’re not. You’re just like this…”

“Alexander, I will not miss the meeting because you want to”
“Not because I want to; because you’re late. At what hour did you leave to buy that?”

“I don’t know. Around three?” she responded, unsure.

“So, you’ve been looking for a pill for almost an hour?” concluded Alexander.

“It’s not my fault I couldn’t find it in any near pharmacies” she all but pouted.

Alexander gave her a fake gesture of consideration. “True. You’ve got pretty bad luck, suffering from a headache and needing a pill when it’s not pill season yet”

“Yep”

 “… … Are you going to pull my leg as well?”

“I’m not pulling anything”

“I mean that if you want to keep laughing at me”

“I’m not laughing. All the contrary. I’m very angry because you’re kicking me out for no reason”

“I already gave you my reasons”

“But I don’t agree with them”

“That’s not my problem. I told you to get out, and you have to get out”

“I won’t get out”

“Why do some of you always have to act like this and make me and the rest of the staff that’s responsible lose our precious time?”

“I’m making my workmates lose time? You’re the one making a fuss…”

“If I were making a fuss, believe me you’d be already gone”

“What are you? Threatening me?”

“I’m asking you, in the politest way I can manage while being so angry, to leave”

“Alexander, you can’t do this to me just because my head hurt. It’s not fair”

“I told you this morning to stop using the word ‘fair’ with such an ease. You’re the ones who are acting always unfair towards people that try to help you and sacrifice a lot…”

“Jesus, I just wanted a pill for the head!” interrupted Angelica, enraged.

Alexander matched her mood quickly. “Alright, woman, I never said I didn’t believe your head hurt, though it sounds very sketchy, I’m just saying that I can’t believe you couldn’t find what you needed in a freaking hour!”

“You know I had to take a special pill to…!”

“And you’ve bought that before! Now you forgot where to buy it, or what?!”

“The pharmacy that sells them ran out of them”
“Sure”

“Yeah, sure! It happened! And I had to look for it…!”

“So, in summary, you could’ve spent almost the whole afternoon just looking for a special bottle of aspirins”

“But I needed the aspirin” insisted Angelica.

“Dear, I understand that you needed the aspirin” said Alexander, sounding almost comprehensive.

“But you must understand that this cannot be”

“But I needed the aspirin”

“But you can’t spend a whole afternoon walking around the world in search of a sad aspirin. If you couldn’t bear with the headache, you should’ve just gone home”

“But I needed the aspirin”

“Yes, I know that. But if you were feeling that bad, you should’ve gone home and rest there” insisted Alex, his tone turning sharper. “Don’t you see it’s a nonsense to do that instead of resting as you have to do in order to calm the pain?”

“But I needed the aspirin”

“My God…” muttered Thomas, feeling fed up with the woman’s attitude.

“Are you going to make me play that annoying game I told you all I hate with all my being?” asked Alex, boringly.

“What game?” asked Angelica, clearly confused.

“Please, stop it”

“… … But I just needed an aspirin!”


“And what did you want me to do?” inquired Angelica, barely perturbed by the scream.

“You could’ve asked for somebody’s help, for example, as the rest did!”

“I don’t like to bother people with my problems, you know that”

“You don’t like to bother people, but you’re making them lose their time?”

“You’re the one making them lose their time with this show”

“I’m not making a show, I’m just sick of…”

“But, Alex, I just needed an aspirin” she repeated.
“For fuck’s sake, Angelica…”

“I just needed an aspirin. I don’t see how that’s a problem”

“The problem is not that you needed an aspirin. The problem is that, at first, you maybe needed the aspirin, but as time went by, you realised it was the perfect alibi to lose time doing other things and came in whenever the hell you wanted”

Angelica huffed. “Yeah, I don’t have better things to do than planning so much shit…”

“Look…” Alexander sighed, and passed a hand through his hair. “Sit down. I’ll let it slide for today. Let’s talk and discuss and fix something today”

Angelica shrugged and took a seat. “Thanks. Was that so difficult? Tsk”

Alexander looked at her, very serious. He took his pen and pointed at the end of the room with his free hand.

“Angelica, go stand in that corner”

The vice president blinked, bewildered. “I’m sorry, what?”

“Go stand in that corner”

“… But…”

“If you insist on behaving like toddlers, I’ll treat you as such. To the corner”

Angelica stared at her brother-in-law, thinking this was some kind of bad joke. When she saw Alexander’s serious expression and how he was ignoring her, going back to read and write something down on some paper, she got up vehemently and hoofed over the end of the room. She rested her back on the wall, crossed her arms and looked directly at Alexander from across the room, a deadly glare that sent chills down everybody else’s spines but the addressee’s.

“With your back turned on us, Angelica” instructed Alexander, once his glare was up. “You’re not going to be part of this meeting”

Angelica groaned and cursed him under her breath, but did as she was told. Everyone looked at her, worried, and then at Alexander, a bit afraid.

“Alright, what were we doing…?” Alex tapped his pen a couple of times.

“The paperwork” Hercules reminded him.
“Ah, true. The last of your incompetence” nodded Alexander. “Who were the ones who had February paperwork done?”

Lafayette, Laurens, Madison and Jefferson raised their hands. Alexander looked at them with an unreadable expression. Aaron hesitated with his own hand. Alex threw a sideways glare to him.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I have it, but not all” explained Aaron. He lowered a bit his tone, feeling embarrassed. “I wasn’t feeling very good until after lunch, and I didn’t have enough time to…”

Alex raised one hand, silencing him. “I know you would’ve done it if you’d felt right. Don’t worry”

“Alex” Laurens called from the other end of the table.

“Yes, John?”

“I don’t have March”

“That’s alright. March wasn’t for today, but for next week”

Adams frowned at that. “No, it was not”

Alexander threw a tedious glare in his direction. “Yes, it was. I repeated it almost ten times this morning” he reminded the whole staff. “I got bored of hearing my own voice, and that’s saying something”

“But it’s March” argued Adams.

“Yes, but you’re lazy and behind schedule. Both in a very shameful way”

“Uh, I don’t have anything to do with that” said Adams.

“You don’t have anything to do with it? With what happens in your law firm?”

“I’m not the boss here. I do my work and whatever else that happens, I don’t care”

“… … Keep going on with that attitude. Really, it’ll do you very good”

“Okay”

“…” Alexander sighed and made a face. “Gosh, I can’t wait till Summer comes and I can get my well-earned vacation, so I can be able to work at home and not see any of you for a whole month. What a dream…” whispered Alexander, with a hopeful tone for the first time since the meeting started. He looked at his watch. “Almost twenty past four and we haven’t talked about one single problem. Awesome”

He got up, holding a sheet, and walked to the whiteboard, marker in hand. He began to copy something, as the rest started to mutter, leveraging the fact that he wasn’t looking at them.
“I’m hearing voices” commented Alexander, casually, not stopping his writing.

“Go to see a shrink, then” snapped Lee.

“Mr Lee, I think Angelica is feeling very alone, standing in that corner. Go accompany her” he instructed, still not turning around.

There was silence for a moment. Then, a growl. Then, a chair being dragged across the floor. Alexander turned, the hand holding the sheet on his hip. He clicked his tongue when he saw Lee dragging the chair to the other corner and sitting there, his head lowered.

“Lee, standing” clarified Alex.

“I’ll get tired” complained the manager.

“Not my problem. And leave your phone on the table, you’re not on a break, you’re in a meeting” he ordered, turning to the board again.

“Feels more like a jail” he heard the man complaining, right before a thump of two things being thrown.

Alexander looked behind again, seeing the chair and the phone on their rightful places. Lee was turned to the wall, whispering curses, surely directed at him. The CFO sighed and decided to keep writing what was on the sheet down. He came back to his seat when he was finished.

“Take the sheet Jefferson gave to you earlier, please” he said. “This is the calendar you must follow when it comes to deliver your paperwork, alright?”

“And if we’re on vacation during that month?” asked Hercules.

“If you were on vacation that month, you won’t have anything to give that month”

“Ah, true” said the CIO, blushing slightly.

“And if you fall sick on the deliver day?” asked Adams.

“That would mostly depend on who has fallen ill” emphasized Alexander.

“What does that mean?”

“You know pretty well what I mean”

Adams frowned in the CFO’s direction, being completely ignored.
“What will happen with the ones that don’t have February for today?” asked Peggy, worried.

“I was going to let you until 5.30 to finish it”

There was a sigh of relief.

“Thanks, Alex” said the therapist, with total honesty.

“Nothing, dear”

“And the ones who have them already?” asked Lafayette.

“What about them?”

“What will we do?”

“Can we go home?” asked Laurens, hopeful.

Alexander gave him a look. “Go home? And what about the meeting?”

“Uh… But you said you’d let us work” said Peggy, stopping her writing abruptly.

“The ones who don’t have February covered. But we’ve got issues to fix”

“But do we work or listen?” asked Maria.

“The two, dear”

Some blinked, as if they were about to have a stroke. Alexander made a gesture of not understanding what the problem was.

“People, you’re between thirty and fifty years old, I think I’m not asking for too much. In fact, I think I’m being very generous”

“Gee, Alex, but it’s the afternoon and we’re already tired…” complained Hercules.

“I’m tired as well. And here I am, standing a lot of nonsense” he countered. “Angelica, Lee, go back to your seats, please, and do what you’ve gotta do”

“We have until when to have this finished?” asked Lee, obliging along with the vice president.

“Until 5.30, I said”

“But I won’t have time” complained Adams, getting in the conversation.

“You’ve got an hour to do what you’ve got left”

“But I don’t know what I’ve got left”
“I don’t care about your disorganisation. I care about the paperwork you must give to me today. Today is the deadline, as the sheet tells you”

“But…”

“No buts, work”

“Bffff…”

Adams took a pencil he had nearby and started to leaf through some papers he had scattered in his section of the table. Peggy looked at him, with the corner of her eye, and dragged her chair to her right, to be closer to Lafayette than to Adams. In the meantime, Alexander had frowned in the lawyer’s direction.

“Not with the pencil, Adams! Write that with a pen!” he ordered, slamming one hand on the table.

“With a pen??” asked Maria, stopping abruptly.

“Of course!” He looked down, seeing her also holding a pencil. “Get rid of that and take a pen!”

“But Washington doesn’t mind…” tried to say Hercules.

“He does. But he doesn’t say anything because he’s too nice. And he spends his nights passing your writings to pen, so we can pretend we’ve got normal people working in here. Well, I refuse to rewrite something that’s not mine just because you still want to be pre-schoolers”

“Besides, with the pen is cleaner” agreed Laurens.

“No, it’s not. It’s very messy” contradicted Maria, with a frown.

“But we can erase our mistakes more easily. With the Wite-Out is cleaner” explained Laurens.

“The Wite-Out is cleaner?” repeated Alexander, with a sided smile. “Allow me to doubt it, especially after spending my college years seeing your homework. They looked like the scene of a crime. Just change all that Wite-Out for blood and we’ll have a very gore episode of ‘Criminal Minds’”

“So, we can’t use Wite-Out, either?” asked Maria, as Laurens insulted Alexander under his breath.

“No. Scratch the word you wrote wrong” he explained.

“Huh, and that’s not messy and dirty?” commented Laurens, a bit resentful. “All the paper scratched…”

“No! Not all the paper! Just write a single and clean line on the wrod you worte wrong”

The whole team bit their bottom lips at his mispronunciation (which Hamilton hadn’t even realised) as he got up, marker in hand, to make an example of what he was talking about. Maria suffered from a fit of muted laughter that made her shake in her spot. Thomas and Madison were easily contaminated by her. The secretary lowered his head and hid his eyes with his hand as James simply looked forwards. Bad choice as Angelica and Aaron had their eyes red from keeping their
laughter inside.

The accountant let a single giggle escape his lips and he looked to the side. Laurens and Hercules buried their faces in his hands, crying and laughing as silently as they could. Peggy and Lafayette looked at each other with wee smiles and whispered a few things that made the girl contained air to not laugh out loud right there. Lee and Adams, on their behalf, smirked cruelly.

“For example,” talked Alexander, in the meantime, ignoring the struggle of his workmates at his backs. “if I write… I don’t know… Mmh… Pennsylvania worn… Wroooong” he pronounced slowly, cursing in a whisper right after.

Laurens scoffed at that and bent over himself, grabbing his aching stomach. Hercules wiped his tears off, trying to focus on something else. Lafayette shook his head a bit, feeling bad for his friend, as Peggy buried his tear-streaked face against his collar, to muffle her giggles.

“Then, I write a single and very clear line on the top of it”

He crossed the word ‘Pennsylvania’ on the whiteboard. James narrowed his eyes, but waited until he saw what Alexander was about to write next.

“And I write it correctly right beside, as if nothing’d happened”

“Oh, my gosh…” muttered Angelica, seeing what her brother-in-law was doing.

She covered her smiling mouth with her palms, the rest imitating her when they realised that Alexander had crossed the right word, just to write Pensylvania as the correct one. Laurens and Angelica grabbed their phones and took a photo of it.

“Like this” concluded Alexander, finally turning and shocking when he saw the state the rest of the room was in. “What?” he asked, seeing some of them were actually crying from laughter.

Peggy and Hercules were the less discreet of the group, so they called Alexander’s attention first. The immigrant crossed both arms in annoyance and tapped one foot on the floor, waiting impatiently.

“Well?” he urged. “Peggy? Hercules? Care to tell the joke out loud, so then we all can laugh?”
“We all are already laughing, except from you” answered Laurens, with a shaky voice.

That made Peggy and Hercules to burst out laughing. The girl even slammed the table a few times as the man shook in his chair, coughing a bit for such a fit.

“What happens” questioned the CFO, without an iota of humour in his voice.

“You did it wrong, Alexander” explained Madison, starting to feel bad for the man.

“What?”


“What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s…” He cleared his throat, trying to ignore the giggling forms of Thomas and Maria by his right. “It’s the other way around”

He said the last word in a laugh, that made the whole room to erupt in a loud and resounding laughter. Hercules even clapped a couple of times, unable to stop cackling. Alexander was left there, confused and lost.

“What’s the other way around?” he asked, wanting to comprehend. He looked at what he’d written. “First the I and then the Y?” he guessed, prepared to fix it.

“No, no” hurried to say Madison, between laughs.

“Then, what?” he asked, starting to be upset.

“You crossed the correct one” explained Aaron, when he’d calmed down considerably.

“Pardon?” said Alex, still a bit lost, his brain paying more attention to the laughter than to the explanations.

“You… Mh… May I?” asked Aaron, pointing at the marker.

“Yes, of course” said Alex, nodding and passing his workmate the marker.

Aaron got up from his seat and crossed Pensylvania; then, erased the other word and wrote it again, this time leaving it untouched.

“There. It’s with double N” explained Aaron, comprehensively.

“Ah…” said Alexander, reading the two words. He felt his cheeks warming up as the laughter and jokes kept going at his backs. He whirled around, frowning. “What? Haven’t any of you ever made a
“Mistake?” he spat, returning to his seat. “Come on, stop laughing and go to work”

Alexander looked for some paper, his face red from embarrassment and anger (that didn’t help calm down the infectious laughter). By the time he found what he was looking for, the room was almost in complete silence, and most of them were working on what they had to hand out that afternoon.

“Alright, I’m going to see how many of you have come to work” explained Alexander, trying to erase his previous slip. “Because that’s one of the problems I wanted to… Adams, why aren’t you working?” he inquired, raising his voice considerably.

The concentration of the whole staff was now on Adams, who was sitting there, arms fallen at both sides and glare lost as he looked at the nothingness. The lawyer turned his head slowly to the immigrant, who was seething.

“I don’t know” he replied, after a pregnant silence.

Alexander clicked his tongue, fed up. “No one ever knows shit in this office, people. You don’t know why you did one thing; you don’t know why you said another thing… I see you want to win the Guinness of ignorance”

“What’s a Guinness?” asked Maria.

Alexander gave her the thumbs-up as he nodded. “That. That’s the correct path to win it”

“To win what?” asked Peggy.

“To work” he commanded, and the two girls kept writing, with dumbfounded faces. “You too, Adams, come on!” he urged, when he saw the lawyer still not moving one bit.

“Agh, Hamilton, leave me alone” said Adams, waving one hand with weariness.

“… Excuse me?” asked Alexander, leaning dangerously slow on his chair.

“I was here, minding my own business, without bothering anyone, and you have to come and start talking my ear off…”

“Mister, I’m not talking your ear off, I’m trying to help you” said Alex, completely sincere. “After all the headaches you give me, I still want to help you. I want to help everybody in here” he assured, looking at every person.

“Yeah, sure…”

“Adams, please…” tried Hamilton, strangely calm.

“I’ve been working all day, just for you to tell us now that March is for April, what the hell?” complained Adams.
“I didn’t tell you that just now. I did it this morning. Plenty of times…” explained Alexander.

Adams interrupted him coarsely. “The other man loses my work…”

“I did not” reassured Thomas, under his breath.

“…and now I’ve gotta make a double effort? I don’t wanna”

“Adams, please, you’re not a child. There are people in here who has nothing done of that, you only have to…”

“I don’t wanna do this shit today” declared Adams, cutting the immigrant off right away. He threw some papers to the floor, watching them fall slowly.

Alexander punched the table as he got up from his seat, making more noise than necessary with the chair, and trotted to Adams’ spot. He picked up the papers Adams had thrown and put them back on the table, with a thump.

“Do this” he ordered, sharply.

Adams raised his upper lip, in a sign of disgust, as Alexander made his way back to his seat.

“No” he declared, throwing the papers again, along with a couple more.

“Gosh…” complained Lafayette, fearing the reaction his friend would have when he saw that.

Alexander was about to sit down when he saw the vacant space in front of Adams (now with arms crossed, defiantly) and the papers on the floor, again. Alex moved the tongue inside his mouth before an unsettling smile made its way onto his face.

“Heh… This man wants a party” he muttered, almost enjoying the challenge. “Ha!”

Alex moved the chair to be able to get out the spot properly, throwing it to the floor with no truly intention. They all shrunk in their seats as the CFO walked towards Adams, who was watching him with apathy. Alex knelt down, picked up the papers and left them again on the table, with a thump louder and more violent than the previous one.

“Work!” he demanded, harsher.

“No” replied Adams, his chin up with pride.
They looked at each other’s eyes, their rage growing as the seconds passed by. Eventually, Alexander exhaled infuriated through his nostrils.

“I’m fucking sick of you already” he swore, in a guttural voice that made the rest to tremble in their seats. He gritted his teeth as he told Adams: “Pick a blue or black pen and do this”

“No” repeated Adams, with the same indifference.

Alexander’s face grew redder than a tomato. “I told you to pick up a blue or black pen…” he said, in a growl, as he began to look for the item himself in between the papers. Lee passed him one. “Thank you” he said, not changing his cutting tone. He tossed the pen to Adams. “And do this” he continued to order.

“No” was the expected response Adams gave, not even looking at the pen.

Alexander shook from impotence. He pressed the pen against Adams’ chest.

“Adams, write”

“No”

“Adams”

“No”

“Adams, do your work!”

“No”

“Write” repeated Alexander, face to face with the lawyer. He looked down at his hands. “Are you right or left-handed?”

“Dunno…” said the lawyer, shrugging.

Alexander clicked his tongue loudly, in exasperation. “Then, the right one, it’s the most common” he muttered, to himself, as he grabbed said hand forcefully. Adams pulled it, trying to fight back.

“That’s racism towards the left-handed” commented Laurens.

“SHUT UP” shouted Alexander, throwing him a sideways glare of anger.

Laurens waved one hand. “I was only saying…”

The lawyer and the immigrant fought against each other for a moment, until Alexander finally could stretch Adams’ hand in his direction, opened. He placed the pen in his palm, but Adams left his right hand numb, not moving it in the slightest.
“Grab this… Grab the pen…” ordered Alexander, again and again.

Thomas, despite his best efforts, suffered from a fit of laughter because of the situation. Maria and Madison looked at him, then at each other, smiled slowly and giggled under their breaths. It didn’t cost the rest much to imitate them. Alexander kept struggling with Adams, barely aware of their presence right then.

“Grab the pen, Adams!” he screamed, frustrated. “Firmly, mister! CAN’T YOU GRAB A FUCKING PEN NOW OR WHAT?!”

Thomas passed from discreet laughs to cackling in the middle of the meeting room. Maria followed suit, tapping him on the back.

“Lemongrab, I adore you today!” she commented.

Adams frowned enraged at the laughing of his ex-friend, that made the rest of the staff to cackle loudly. He grabbed the pen with fury, throwing daggers in Alexander’s direction. The immigrant simply ignored the rest of the world and gave a satisfactory nod.

“There. Now, write” he ordered, pointing at one random sheet.

Adams tightened the grip on the pen, his knuckles turning white. “No” he repeated, frowning his whole face with hatred.

“Adams…”

“Nooo” he whispered, darkly, as his occupied hand shook with fury.

“Write” said Alexander, simply, returning to his seat.

Adams looked at him, loathing, and threw the pen against the wall, with enough force for it to be heard above their workmates’ laughing (that calmed down a bit after his action) and threw the papers to the floor again, crossing both arms afterwards, pouting like a little child.

Alexander had turned around as soon as he heard the noise. He saw the whole thing with a bit of shock, not believing his eyes. When he recovered from it, he matched the lawyer’s anger and strode back to his seat. He picked up the papers for the third time and put them with a loud thump that made the table to tremble. Peggy and Lafayette, being closer, and Laurens, being across them,
had the worst part for not laughing out loud then.

“And woe betide you if you throw this to the floor again!” swore Alexander, going back to his seat.

He sat down, red as scarlet and with his loose hair dishevelled. He took a hair band to tie it in a messy ponytail, grunting at the sight of Adams still not moving one inch but with his glare fixated on him.

“Adams, for each two seconds you spend doing nothing, I’ll cut 5 bucks off your salary” he declared, not receiving an answer. Alexander waited and then picked up a list and his pen. “Still like a statue? Bye, first 5 dollars” he said, out loud. “Still losing time? Five more… Or well, less” he corrected himself, with a mischievous smile.

Adams gritted his teeth as Alexander kept taunting. His rage was suddenly directed to Thomas, who still couldn’t stop laughing, tears running down his cheeks.

“What the fuck are you laughing at?” he spat.

“He’s laughing because he’s one of the few rational and intelligent people in here, and he knows that, what I’ve just done now with you, it’s totally absurd” explained Alexander, on the secretary’s behalf. “I’d be laughing as well, if I were in his position. But, sadly, today, it’s my turn to suffer” He looked up and down at the irritated lawyer. “You’ll still do nothing?” he rhetorically asked. “Five bucks less, and another five, and another…”

Adams growled like a rabid animal under his breath, his face turning redder and redder as his fury grew.

“Just keep going on like this” faked-advised Hamilton, still subtracting money. “You’re still with that cut off for having made Madison do your work; and if you take this punishment into account, don’t be surprised if, when Washington gives you your check, you have negative 20 dollars”

Adams exploded then. He took some of the papers he still had left, and started to hit the table with them. Angelica burst out laughing, startling the whole room, but the enraged lawyer. The vice president and Thomas were now cackling resonantly, making the whole table to erupt and participate into the noise as well. Alexander simply nodded as he followed the movements of the mistreated paperwork. He half-closed his eyes and looked at Aaron, who was the only one who still managed to stay cool, though he was crying from laughter.
“Do you think I deserve this?” he wondered, shaking his head, in disapproval. He looked at Adams, again. “Keep doing that, keep hitting your hard work, the only one you’ve done since you were born…”

Nobody knew if he had heard Alexander’s words and that ignited the flame, or if he was just already out of control, but Adams jumped from his seat, grabbed the chair and threw it across the room, wounding the wall in the process. The staff then passed to giggle nervously under their breaths. Alexander got up and trotted to where the lawyer was, now kicking the fallen chair and hitting the wall repeatedly.

“Adams, are you out of your goddamned mind or what the hell?!” he screamed, making him turn around by grabbing his shoulder. “Get the hell out of here! Out of the meeting room!” he ordered.

Adams, thankfully, obliged. There were a few persons still controlling their giggles, some others simply trying to comprehend what just happened.

“And I’ll make sure to make you pay for this, both literal and metaphorically, mister!” promised Alexander, as Adams made his way to the door, all his belongings in his hands. “And to tell Washington what kind of people we’ve got working in here!”

Adams ignored the threats and closed the door with a thump that made the walls and windows to shake. Alexander ran to the door, swung it open and looked at the lawyer with the same genuine rage.

“Stay there! Standing there, where I can see you!”

“Didn’t you want me to leave?!” shouted Adams, kicking the floor.

“I wanted you out of the meeting room because you’ve gone too far! But nobody will leave until I say so!” explained Alex. “Stand there, against the wall!” He stopped midway to re-enter the room. “And don’t you dare kick the wall! You’ve mistreated enough things for the rest of the year!”

Alexander closed the door violently and dropped in his chair. Angelica was still trembling beside him, biting her bottom lip to not start laughing again. Thomas had managed to calm down already.

“You’ll think this is funny” commented Alexander, directing his reprimand to the whole remaining staff. “Really, I’m going to start studying the career of Education. So, when this company is gone, what will happen sooner rather than later, seeing your current attitude, I’ll still have something else to
do with my life. Honestly, I doubt there’s a classroom out there worse than this law firm”

He tried to even his breathing as he looked for some paper. He tucked a few loose locks of his hair, deciding to undo his ponytail and re-do it, as best as he could.

“Laws, maths… All that was shit. My true vocation was teaching. Or standing nonsense. You’re preparing me for when the glorious day come, I see it now… The only thing left for me to do is to clean your snots. Babies. I work with a bunch of babies…” He looked up for a brief moment, seeing Adams looking back at him with even more fury than before. “Do some of you really think this is having grounds?!” he asked, in a scream, as he pointed at Adams rapidly.

Alexander kept looking for something, muttering curses under his breath. He heard a creaking sound. He looked around until he finally spotted the noise at his left. He saw Maria swinging on her chair, as she read something on her paperwork and chewed her pencil, in a nervous habit. Alexander looked at her for a moment, a tic in his right eye, before demanding, in the sweetest tone he could perform while feeling so mad:

“Maria, could you stop swinging on your chair, please?”

The girl looked at him, then let herself swing forwards.

“And I told you I want that written with a pen” he admonished, pointing at the pencil she was holding, with disgust.

“But I forgot my pen back at the break room”

“…” Alex took his own case, took one pen out and passed it to her.

“Thanks” she said, still not very happy with the change. Lee raised his hand. “I don’t have a pen either”

“Yours is there” said Lafayette, pointing at the pen Adams had thrown earlier.

Lee frowned. “Do I have to get up?”

Alexander got up, pen in hand, and threw it on the table, near Lee.

“I want them back. I’ve got them counted” he told the two employees.
“Thank youuu” drawled Lee, quite mocking.

Alexander dedicated him a glare of anger as he sat down. “What, Lee? You came here in a jocose mode or something?”

“No, it’s just that it’s almost 5.30 and I’m happy, because we will be leaving soon” he admitted.

“No one will leave” declared Alexander.

“Why not?” asked Peggy, raising her head with a face of fear.

“Because you won’t”

“But it’ll be 5.30 in no time!” complained Lee.

“The clock can say whatever the hell it wants. Here, the meeting and the work day will finish when I say so!” said Alexander, slamming the table for emphasis.

Alexander sighed. He put the papers and pen aside, took out a thermos from his briefcase, untapped it and drank the whole thing in one gulp, being watched by his workmates, all with eyes wide. When he was finished, he exhaled and put the thermos back inside his briefcase.

“Alright. The ones who already have February done, please, give it to me”

Lafayette, Laurens, Thomas and Madison got up to give their paperwork to Hamilton, who took it with a grateful nod.

“I’ve got January as well” said Laurens, sounding hesitant.

Alexander nodded with a smile. “It’s alright, Jackie, that was your work for today”

Laurens sighed. “Good” he said, going back to his seat.

Alexander saw Aaron also giving him some papers. He took them, almost surprised.

“Thought you told me you didn’t have time?” he asked.

“Yeah, but I’ve done what I had left while…” Aaron made a gesture with his hand. “…all that happened”

Alexander nodded. “See what happens when you work without losing time waiting for the grass to grow?” he commented, loud enough to be heard even out of the room. Adams’ frown deepened.

Alexander sighed tiredly. “Alright, whose is this paperwork?” he asked, scanning the document. He looked boringly at the accountant. “Madison, do I still have to remind you to write your name and
sign what you worked on?” he asked, tossing him a few papers.

James took them, with a slight blush. “Ah, sorry”

“Humility is nice, but not that much, son” he advised, taking the papers again after Madison did as he was told. “Did you give Washington the medical certificate for last week, dear?” he asked him, after reading something.

Madison moved uncomfortably in his chair, a faint flashback of his school years coming back to mind. “No, I… I didn’t go to the doctor”

“You didn’t?” said Hamilton, cocking one eyebrow.

“No, it was…”

James never ended his sentence, as he pressed his lips and knitted his brows. Alexander seemed to understand then, and waved one hand, nonchalantly, before writing something down.

“It’s alright, I know you’d have given it had you had the need to see a doctor” he told him.

“Thanks”

Aaron passed him a paper, before Alexander even called him. The CFO nodded again, and stopped abruptly when a sound reached his ears. He looked at the whole table until his eyes met Laurens, chewing gum loudly.

“John, spit out the gum” he ordered.

“Why?” asked the HR manager, confused.

“Because you can’t chew that in here. You’re not in your house” explained Alexander, against his will. “Please, spit it out on the wrapper, and then you keep chewing it back at your house or wherever but here”

“That’s disgusting, Alex”

“And this is irresponsible”

“Chewing gum?”

“In a meeting, yes, it is!” exploded Alexander. “You’re supposed to discuss and talk in here; not chewing gum, less so noisily!”

“Nothing will happen, Alex” assured Laurens, waving one hand. “I’m immortal”

“You’re immortal?” repeated the CFO, clearly disagreeing. “Spit it out” he demanded again, as he lowered his glare to keep reading the paper in front of him. He curved his lips. “Let’s ask him. Damn responsibility” cursed Hamilton, before getting up and opening the door. He shared a glare of hatred
with the lawyer, before asking him. “Adams, do you have a reason why you missed a week and a half of work this month?”

Adams shrugged, his grim face not changing one bit. “Yeah. I was sick”

Alexander half-closed his eyes, not believing him. “You were sick of what?”

“Of an illness”

“What illness?”

“I don’t know, I’m not a doctor”

“Did you go to see one?”

“No”

“Why not?”

“Because I didn’t want to”

“Then, you don’t have a medical certificate?”

“Nope”

Alexander sighed and passed a hand through his face. “And what do I do now?”

“Let it slide, like you just did with your buddy” spat Adams, venomously.

“What buddy?” asked Alex, frowning.

“Madison”

Alexander clicked his tongue and straightened himself. “First of all: he’s not my friend. Second of all: why don’t you ever do things as I asked them to be done if you have such a hearing?”

“Oh, that has nothing to do with this conversation”

“Yes, it does. Because you just used a private conversation to your advantage, to go scot-free of something you did wrong”

“Fallen ill is wrong?”

“Lying about it is” spat Alexander, angry. “Do you realise how disrespectful that is? There are plenty of people who would love to be as healthy as me or you, to be able to do their lives as everybody else and not be quickly prejudged and questioned because of that issue…” he began to reprimand, turning too serious all of a sudden.

“Man, don’t drive me crazy with your talking now!” complained Adams, stressing.

“I will if I have to in order to make you realise what you’re doing!” exclaimed Alexander, indignantly. “Madison, and the rest for that matter, always give me their medical certificates or whatever when they missed work for an illness or a personal problem! Of course if something happens one day and they can’t do it, I will overlook it, because I believe in their word and they have their work done! But you? When it comes to you, Adams, not even a medical certificate is enough. When it comes to you, we must ask you for a note validated by a public notary. ‘Yes, I certify that
Mr John Adams missed work for being sick.”

The group laughed back in the meeting room, and Adams’ cheeks blushed from embarrassment.

“You need to be very shameful” continued Alexander, solemnly. “You need to understand that what you’re doing is wrong for your future and horribly disrespectful towards…”

Adams rolled his eyes. “Agh, yes, whatever you say. You’re absolutely right” he talked over the immigrant, fed up. “Let’s see if with that you’re happy and leave me alone for the next couple of months…”

Alexander was taken aback at first for the outburst. “Mmh, excuse me, mister, but I’m already happy”

“Yeah, yeah, sure…” nodded Adams, sarcastically.

“I am” reassured Alex, annoyed. “But something tells me you’re not gonna be if you keep pushing me”

“Whatsoever. Leave me alone”

“… … Listen, sir, what’s your problem?” asked Alex, sounding genuinely concerned and interested.

“Nothing. It’s just that you hate me”

“I don’t hate you. It’s just that when somebody disrespects me and acts with such cockiness despite my best efforts to help them, I act this way” explained Alexander, with foreign calmness.

“Yeah, well, this is my way of acting with people that don’t treat me as the rest” countered Adams, as serious as ever. “You’ve got favourable treatment, and you know it”

Alexander’s blood boiled at the comment. “That shit again, mister? I do not have…”

“No, no, not you… Well, yes, you do have it…”

“No, I do not…”

“I mean that you also have it with people in here. And not in a discreet way” elaborated Adams.

“Well, you’re very right about that” admitted Hamilton, nodding. “With the ones that are nice and do their work just fine and make efforts I’m the best person they’d ever cross paths with; but with the ones that only focus on bringing workmates down, envying them and spreading rumours about them instead of trying to do better themselves, like you do, I’m the worst demon that ever came out from Satan’s den” concluded Alexander, walking back in and closing the door with a thump. “Asshole” he insulted, in a frustrated whisper. He narrowed his eyes even more when he saw the scene in front of him. “Maria, I told you to stop with the swinging already! You’re going to fall and smash your skull and then your death will be my fault!” he reprehended, raising his voice as he talked.

Maria looked at him, eyes wide with fear and surprise, and stopped swinging on her chair.
She lowered her head as she kept writing, trying to go unnoticed and pretend the scene hadn’t happened in the first place.

Laurens didn’t help to the cause cackling about the incident. Alexander was about to admonish him as well, when the gum got stuck in the man’s throat, making him fight for breathing properly. They all gasped at the sight. Alexander ran immediately to his friend’s aid, doing the Heimlich manoeuvre to help him.

After a few tries, during which the whole room was sunk into tension and distressed silence, Laurens finally spat the gum out. He gasped for air and coughed, as Alexander tapped his back and rubbed circles on it, trying to calm himself as well.

“Are you okay, Jackie?” he asked.

Laurens nodded, in a coughing fit.

“Let me accompany you to the restroom, dear” he said, gently, helping his friend to get up by passing an arm around his shoulder and escorting him out of the room. Alexander looked behind before walking out. “Behave, I’ll try to come back as fast as I can. Show me I can trust you” he instructed.

He nodded in satisfaction as the staff nodded, serious and pale from fright.

The two friends entered the restroom, where Laurens took his time to even his breathing and Alexander wet his face from time to time, when he saw the beads of sweat going down from his forehead.

“You okay?” asked Alexander, worried sick. Laurens nodded, taking a deep breath. “Are you sure?” he insisted.

“Yes, yes, I’m fine already” promised Laurens, with a slight raspy voice.

“Good” nodded Alexander, before smacking him in the back of the head.

“Ow! What was that for?” complained Laurens, rubbing his sore spot.

“For idiot. I told you to spit that shit out” reprimanded Alexander, though there were still tracks of concern in his angry tone.

“You were right” admitted Laurens, seriously. “To be honest, Alex, what happened, or almost
happened… That near-death experience totally made me think…” he rambled, while he opened another wrapper of gum, prepared to chew it.

Alexander frowned and slapped his hands, throwing the pack to the floor. “John, what the hell?! Will you ever learn?!“

Laurens frowned at the useless pack of gum. “You’ll give me what that cost”

“Yeah, don’t hold your breath…”

An alarm turned off, and Alex pressed some button of his watch.

“5.30?” asked Laurens, receiving a nod. “Maybe you shouldn’t have left them alone in there…”

“Don’t worry. Now the meeting room is in the last floor and I left…”

Laurens frowned when he saw his friend freezing. “Alex? What’s wrong?”

“Shit” was the only thing Alex said, before storming out of the restroom.

Laurens followed him, not understanding anything until he saw the hallway and the room completely empty. Alexander cursed as he looked out of the window that faced the street. Laurens took a look, seeing their workmates running to their cars, getting in and driving away, not looking back. The sound of their wires silenced Hamilton’s insults.

“Fucking hell, I forgot to lock the front doors when I came back in a hurry!” he condemned himself. He took in a breath and sighed. “Well, at least I could be given something today… Jackie, do you mind helping…?”

Alexander clicked his jaw shut when he saw himself alone in the meeting room. He looked out when he heard rapid footsteps running away from the building. Alexander saw Laurens’ lips moving and a frown adorning his features. He was cursing Hercules and Lafayette’s names for leaving him behind, for sure.

Alexander sighed and began to clean the whole room all by himself.

Washington had the slight suspicion Alexander was lying when he called that morning,
alleging to have fallen ill and that he’d take a few days off. And if that unusual scenario wasn’t enough proof, when he heard Angelica commenting what happened yesterday with Lafayette, about how they had run away, leaving Alex behind with all the cleaning and without having solved anything at all, Washington didn’t need more to know Alexander had, indeed, lied.

Well, he was not going to admonish Alexander when he came back. The rest would do him good. And, besides, that would be quite hypocritical from his part. Washington simply leaned back on his rocking chair, a schedule in his hand. He would have to make sure he didn’t ask for Alexander to substitute him on meeting days very often, as tempting as that sounded, or then Alexander would be the one suspecting him, if he wasn’t already.

Chapter End Notes

Here you've got this silly filler chapter of another meeting taken care by Alexander. Again, there are some true events that happened in my classes, some not even exaggerated.

*Some webs say Peggy was born on the 19th, others on the 24th; I chose the first one, but I can't be totally sure.
Blood ties (P1)

Chapter Summary

Thomas receives a call from his sister a day before the anniversary of their mother's death.
Eliza struggles.
Laurens gets in another strange situation.
And we get to know how Thomas and James met.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, anxiety attack, bad-parenting, narcissistic mother, emotional blackmail.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Parents wonder why the streams are bitter,
when they themselves have poisoned the fountain.

—John Locke.

March 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2006

Martha read the text message on her husband’s phone for the fourth time. She wasn’t the gossip type, but what else was she supposed to do when her Thomas passed her by without a simple look in her direction? When she saw the phone lying there, the screen still bright, she felt it like an obligation to take a glimpse, so she could know how to act.

Sometimes she didn’t know what could be worst, her fire or his ice.

Martha pressed her lips against her will when she read the text.

Lucy [8:04 am]

She died in her sleep.
Lucy [8:09 am]

We’ll let you know about the date and hour of her funeral.

A sudden sense of protection took over Martha’s whole body, the urge of running upstairs and console her husband growing stronger, despite how doomed to failure that idea was. Thomas adored his solitude, he cherished it more than human warmth sometimes, especially during a hard time. And though his relationship with his mother wasn’t idyllic, Jane was still his mother.

Her plans were postponed when another notification came from the phone. Martha, that time, didn’t hesitate in reading the new text as if it were for her.

Lucy [8:11 am]

Try to visit her this time.

You can bring along Mrs. Wayles with you if she pleases.

Martha did all within her power to not throw and break the phone just there. If her Thomas were there (and not as distressed as she was imagining him) he’d congratulate her. She simply tossed the phone to the counter with a loud and angry thump and turned on her heels.

Six years. She had been married to that woman’s brother for six years and she still called her Mrs Wayles as if the wedding hadn’t occurred at all, as if they hadn’t had a beautiful little girl that carried her mother’s name with pride.

“Mummy?”

Talking about the devil. Martha smiled at the little figure emerging from her bedroom, clinging to her Esmeralda* doll as her frown deepened. Martha’s happiness flattered a bit, but tried to remain calm and smiling for her daughter.

“What is it, darling?” she asked, kneeling on the floor and stretching one arm, welcoming the girl in her embrace.

Patsy walked slowly to her mother, resting her head against her chest. “Daddy locked himself up in his room of work” she explained.
Martha smiled fondly. “Workroom, darling” she corrected.

“Workroom” repeated the infant. “And he slammed the door shut”

Martha sighed as she caressed her daughter’s long and dishevelled hair. “Don’t worry about it, darling. Daddy’s sad today” Or so I want to think…

“Why?”

“We’ll explain to you later” promised the adult, kissing her child in the forehead.

“Do you think he’d want a hug?”

“Sure thing, but let me talk to him first. You wait in the kitchen, I left you your cereal there”

“Okay… Can I have breakfast while watching TV?”

It was a question Patsy always asked and they always declined. But that morning, Martha felt the best was to be more flexible and let things flow as easily as possible.

“Alright, darling” she conceded, enjoying the genuine surprise of the girl’s face. “But don’t make it a habit. It’s a one-day thing”

Not even she believed her words, but was glad to receive an enthusiastic nod from her daughter before the girl ran downstairs, laughing happily.

“Don’t run downstairs!” she admonished. “And be careful with the couch!”

“Yes, Mummy!”

Martha marched to her husband’s workroom, knocking on the wooden door twice for pure formality, as she didn’t wait for an answer to enter.

“I read the text” she simply said, going straight to the point. Neither she or Thomas ever understood or had enough patience for people who beat around the bush. “How are you feeling?”

Another pure formality as a wife and friend. The blinds were already closed, sinking the workroom into darkness and his husband had his head supported by his right hand, as he wrote something with the left hand. Martha never understood how he could do that. Neither did she approve.
“I’m fine” responded Thomas, not looking at her. “As fine as I can be”

She walked to the desk, resolutely and put a hand on the piece of paper he was adorning with his clear writings.

“You’re going to hurt your eyes” she reprehended, as if she was talking to her daughter. Martha sighed. Sometimes she felt as if she had two children instead of one. “Thomas…”

“Reading somebody else’s texts can’t be very good for the sight either” retorted the man, still refusing to look at her.

“You left it there” she excused her actions. “Besides, it wasn’t like you were going to openly tell me what happened”

Thomas tapped his pen nervously on the desk. “Did Lucy send something else?”

Martha considered her options. Thomas was going to have his phone back eventually and would see the last text. Now she was wishing she’d broken that damned thing when she had the chance…

“Only that I could go to the funeral if I wanted to” she admitted, without getting too much into detail. Thomas looked tense enough.

“When will that be?”

“They still don’t know”

The silence that followed her answer spoke volumes.

“You will go, right?” she asked, her voice lowered and full of doubts; doubts that were solved when another silence came. “Thomas, I know she and you never settled your differences, but Jane’s your mother”

“Was” he corrected, coldly.

“Still is” insisted Martha. “Death doesn’t change…”

“It’s not due to her death I’m using past tense”

Finally, their eyes locked. Martha wished they didn’t. That hollowness frightened her each time she’d looked at her mother-in-law; she didn’t want to repeat the experience with her husband now. Martha wasn’t stupid enough to point the other occasions out. She didn’t like to live this
tension every time the phantom of Jane Jefferson came to visit their house. She could only hope that woman wouldn’t appear more often now that she was an actual ghost.

“I don’t have to go if you don’t to” said Martha, comprehensively. “I understand the situation between your siblings and me is… difficult. But you can ask Jemmy or…”

Thomas scoffed at that. “They hate James just the same, if not more”

“Well, then, you can do what you did when…” Martha swallowed, vacillated. “When Jen* passed…”

Thomas made a face. “Jen deserved it. My mother doesn’t”

“But…”

“Look, Martha, I don’t know what I want to do yet” exploded Thomas, barely raising his voice but harshening his tone considerably. “Just… Leave me for a few minutes, I’ll go have breakfast later”

Martha didn’t believe him. Thomas refused to eat when he was upset, claiming he felt not hungry at all. She hadn’t managed to help him with that issue yet, and thought today wasn’t the moment. Despite what he was saying, she knew he was hurt. Or, at least, conflicted.

She couldn’t blame him.

“Alright” she nodded, kissing his forehead and taking his hand in hers, squeezing it. “Patsy and I will wait. Don’t be late, there’s a hug from your daughter waiting for you”

Thomas laughed at that. It was the best sound she had ever heard, not counting her daughter’s. It was all she needed to hear from him then. All needed to convince herself that they’d sort it out and everything would be fine.

As long as they were together.

“Why do you insist on leaving the empty carton of milk inside the fridge? Is this a new trend for today’s teenagers?”

“Ugh, Dad, do you really want to start the day with a fight over milk?”
“My day started thirteen hours ago, young lady”

“And what do you want, a prize?”

“A bit of respect would be nice”

“Gain it first”

“Gal, do you want to start arguing? You just saw me”

“It was you the one who started this… I was relaxing, watching TV”

“Aw, it’s true, the poor girl has done so much this week…”

“Your horrible sense of humour’s gonna sour my milk”

“Don’t eat milk and cereal at 7 pm”

“Gosh, what a nightmare of a man…”

“And why are you eating that on the couch?”

“Where do you want me to eat it?”

“At the table, like all humans do!”

“If I don’t eat things at their proper hour, why should I at the proper place?”

“You sassy brat. Do one of the two right”

“I’ll be careeeefuuuul…”

“Martha, you’re going to spill that all over the couch!”

“I woooooon’t”

“Come on, darling, I cleaned the table for you”

Thomas didn’t like the silence that reigned all of a sudden. He stormed out of the kitchen, hearing a series of rapid steps running away from the dining room. Thomas found the room empty, the TV playing in the background. He plucked up the courage to look at the couch.

There was the bowl of cereal, turned around and staining the whole dark red cushion with spilled milk and spread cereal. Thomas moved his tongue inside his mouth and passed a hand through his face.

“Patsy, come down here!” he hollered, picking up the bowl and the spoon, with a disgusted face. “Patsy!” he called again.

“What happens now?” asked James boringly, as he walked in.
“The idiot of my daughter spilled and made this mess and doesn’t want to clean it”

“I think what she doesn’t want is to get screamed at” guessed James, taking the bowl and spoon and taking them to the kitchen to clean them.

“She shouldn’t have made this mess then!” concluded Thomas. “Pass me the… The… The cloth or something!”

“Coooming” said James in the distance. He came back with a used cloth in his hand.

Thomas frowned at his slowness. “A bit of vigour, James!” he pressured.

“What’s the hurry?” he complained, throwing the cloth to his friend.

“The hurry is that I don’t want this to spread or…” He looked at the cloth he was given with disgust. “A new one, James!”

“Fuck, he’s never happy” complained the accountant, under his breath.

“Because none of you ever do a single thing right” spat Thomas, striding to the kitchen and leaving his friend behind. “Get out of the way, get out” he instructed, throwing the cloth to the trash and looking for a new one himself.

“What’s the hurry?” repeated James, starting to feel angry. “It’s already stained and dirty”

“And if you stain one shirt don’t you try to clean it as soon as possible or what? I don’t want it to leave a mark! Less on the carpet, it’s new!” explained Thomas, striding back to the dining room and kneeling on the floor to clean it. “Now, to waste water and power because I still have babies as daughters. I’m gonna buy her a bib”

Thomas’ phone rang suddenly, interrupting the man’s furious rant.

“Go see who the hell is it!” he commanded. “Do something”

James heaved a sigh of tedium. “Gosh, are you having a bad day or what?”

“No! I’m only…”

“Because if you are, tell me, so I leave somewhere else” interrupted James, walking in the kitchen. “Fucking bitterness of a man…”

Thomas threw daggers in his direction as he got up to take the carpet with him. “Try to get lost and never come back, if you do”

“Then, who would you make to take your calls?” asked James, almost mocking.

The phone kept ringing even after a while had passed and James had already gotten into the kitchen to read the ID. Thomas again had a bad feeling about it. He walked, carpet rolled up under his arm, and saw his friend frowning at his phone. James noticed his presence right away, though he never lifted his glare.
“It’s your sister” he said, before the question could get out of Thomas’ mouth. Thomas stiffened considerably at the response. “Shall I answer?” asked James.

Thomas’ anxiety said ‘Yes, yes’, while his rational part screamed at the same time ‘No, no’. He wanted to listen to the latter, especially because he’d already made the mistake of letting James answer on his behalf, and that hadn’t made it any better. A sudden panic rose up when he asked himself what day was today, fearing he was late to pay her her rent, before it died down at the reminder that Lucy was no longer his landlady, and it was resurrected again when he was reminded that it was Hamilton, who’d barely looked at him in the last month.

“Thomas?” called James again.

“Give it to me, it’s alright” he lied, taking the phone from James’ hands. “Please, could you keep cleaning the couch? I…”

“Yes, alright” he said, giving him some privacy.

Thomas took a deep breath, the phone vibrating and calling for his attention uproariously in his hand. He pressed the green button and cleared his throat before speaking. His eyes landed on the calendar he had hung on the wall, feeling his body turning cold.

It was March 30th.

Patsy thought it was strange how quickly the argument had finished and tried her luck by going downstairs. Polly immediately got out her bedroom, also noticing the same as her and followed her older sister.

They found James taking out the case of the cushion Patsy had spilled the milk on.

“What a work of art, sis” teased Polly.

“Yeah, I think I’ll sell it on-line”

James frowned in their direction. “It’s not funny, girls. This is why you’re not supposed to eat on the couch” he lectured. “And lower your voices, your father’s on the phone with your aunt”
Patsy couldn’t control her groan. “What does Lucy-fer want now?”

“I told you to lower your voice, especially if you’re going to insult her” said James, whispering himself on their behalf. “And I don’t know, he just picked it up”

“Nothing good” guessed Polly.

“Tomorrow’s the day grandma died” Patsy said when she looked something on her phone. She frowned, oddly worried. “James, are you sure everything’s fine? You can tell us”

“I don’t know. I told you he just…” tried to say the man.

“Stop twisting my words, Lucy!” Thomas screamed from the kitchen, clearly agitated. “I didn’t say I’m not gonna go because I say so, but because I need to ask for permission on my work and see who I leave the girls with! […] No, I’m not going to take them with me! […] No, I’m not ashamed of my fami— I’m not trying to take them away from you! I don’t mind them seeing you or the other two…!”

“I do, if my opinion counts at all” complained Patsy, under her breath.

“So do I, honestly” added Polly.

James saw the youngest walking to her older sister and hugged her by the waist, being quickly reciprocated by Patsy, who passed a hand over Polly’s shoulders to keep her close in a half-embrace. He was both moved and worried over the act. They weren’t the typical sisters to show that kind of affection under normal circumstances. For an instant, he wished he’d broken the damned phone as soon as he read who was calling.

_They never contact him for anything good_, he complained, frowning in annoyance.

“No, Lucy, it’s not about that… No! It’s not about your husband, what does he have to do with any of this?” kept arguing Thomas, growing more anxious as the conversation went by. “No, all the contrary, if he were the one welcoming us, I wouldn’t mind about taking the girls with me! I prefer him over you!” he exploded.

“Thomas” called out James, marching directly to the kitchen, where his friend was pacing. “Thomas” he tried once again.

“We’ve never done this in all this time” Thomas kept the conversation going, pointing at the exit when he acknowledged James’ presence. When the man didn’t move, he pushed him out the room.

“Thomas, try to…” James wanted to say, as he walked out unwillingly.

Thomas made a gesture with his hand to tell him to stop talking, and he obeyed, against his best judgement.
“Mmh, look, Lucy… Lucy. Lucy, I’ll see you when I get there, alright?!” promised Thomas, not concealing how bothered he felt about the deal. “When I get there means when I get there! I can’t control the traffic! […] Alright, bye. See you” He hung up angrily and then threw the phone to the table, where it thumped a couple of times, as he sighed, overwhelmed. “Fucking and shameless witch” he cursed, under his breath.

“What happened?” asked James, when his friend had breathed a couple of times and unburied his face from his hands.

“Nothing” responded Thomas automatically, before correcting himself. “Some people are making something in the memory of my mother, and they want me there”

“What for?” asked James, before he could control his tongue.

“For the appearances” concluded Patsy.

“But where?” kept questioning James. “Here?”

“She hasn’t wanted to know anything about me in all this time and now she remembers she has a brother” complained Thomas, taking the cloth and cleaning the table as a nervous habit.

“But is she going to come over here?”

Patsy huffed. “Bf, tell me the day, then, so I can hang out with friends”

“Take me with you” begged Polly.

“She won’t come here, she…”

“I won’t clean” swore James, solemnly.

“I’m not asking you to clean, James, she’s not coming!” explain Thomas, throwing a frown in his direction.

“The, who’s coming?”

“Nobody! I have to go there!”

“There?”

“To their house!”

“Ah, then, nobody’s coming?”

Thomas threw the cloth to the table, infuriatedly. “James, for fuck’s sake! I’ve repeated myself like four times…!”

“Well, explain yourself a bit better, shit!” complained James, matching his friend’s fury. “Lately, you can’t even talk!”

“None of my relatives are coming over!” said Thomas, raising his voice. “I’ve gotta go there!”

“There? Where is there?!”

“There, at… At the fucking house I grew up in! Shadwell, god dammit!” he struggled to talk.
“Aaaah” nodded James. “Well, say it like that since the beginning, you idiot!”

“She even had the poor shame to ask me to take Patsy and Polly with me” kept saying Thomas, red as scarlet.

“Huh, I’m not going anywhere” declared Patsy, deadly serious.

“I know, I refused” said her father. “Shameless bitch. All her life the same selfish song”

“Well, at least they’re not coming” commented James, looking at the girls. “The house is already a mess and I wasn’t about to go and clean it…”

Thomas looked at his friend and sighed exhaustedly. “I can’t. I swear that I can’t do this shit anymore” he admitted, passing a hand through his hair.

“Well, you can’t anymore, but we’re not going to pay for it, alright?!” warned James.

“To be fairs, he’s not making us pay for it, he’s just complaining” Patsy defended her father, quietly.

“Yes, I am, because I’ve got my right to complain!” added Thomas, in a higher voice.

“Not to me!” countered James, taking a couple of steps forwards. “And less about your family; they’ve hurt me enough already!”

“And you hurt me as well!” assured Thomas, out of the blue. “With this attitude, with what you’re saying right now!”

James was silent for a few moments, before saying: “Look, buddy, I’m fed up with your madness…”

“It’s not madness, it’s…!”

Patsy rolled her eyes and turned on her heels. “Gosh, there they go with the Venezuelan soap opera” she complained.

“Wait, wait” called out Polly, following her again, upstairs. “But, in the end, what’ll happen? Do we have to go?” she asked, in a cautious whisper.

“No, no, but Dad has to go and… Bbrrr”

She got into her bedroom, waiting for Polly to come in. The little girl threw herself on the bed and Patsy lay down next to her, taking out her phone to entertain her mind from the arguing that went on downstairs.

“Poor Daddy” concluded Polly, after a moment of relative silence.

“Yeah… We can only pray the fucking joke won’t make Dad’s mood to go worse” complained the teenager, rolling over her tummy.

“Yep…”

“Yep…”
Alexander’d always had a very strong sixth sense, but even the most slaphappy person would know something was off about Eliza’s behaviour. Especially with all those missing calls on the phone.

“Betsey” he called, eyes glued on the flickering green light of the item. “What’s going on with all these calls?”

The accelerated steps that were heard afterwards just made his suspicions grow, and the panicked face of his wife also helped to the cause.

“What missing calls?” she asked, almost slurring.

“The ones…”

“There are not missing calls”

“Yes, there are, because I’m seeing…”

“No, there are not!” argued Eliza, becoming more nervous as the conversation went on. “That… That’s just that the light is wrong”

“But I heard the phone as well, Betsey, and I’ve seen you deleting the voicemails when you thought I wasn’t…”

“You’re voicemail” countered Eliza, acting strangely childish.

“… That doesn’t even have sense, Betsey”

“You’re nonsense”

“Betsey, please, if something’s wrong you can…”

“Why are so obsessed over the phone suddenly?” asked Eliza, accusatorily. “Huh? What’re you hiding?”

Alex blinked a couple of times. “I’m not hiding anything. I was the one that…”

Someone calling on the door interrupted him. Eliza was too happy for Alexander’s likings.

“Doorbell, doorbell!” she celebrated, running to the front door.

Alex looked at the phone as she opened the door. “Fuck, if she’s cheating on me, I’d be breaking some record…” he lamented.
“Alex, look who is it!” Eliza said, as she entered the room again.

Alexander half-closed his eyes at their guest. “What are you doing in here, Dobby?” His eyes landed on the tupper Madison was holding. “And what do you bring there?”

Eliza frowned at him. “Alexander, what did we talk about our guests?”

“That I don’t want any. And you keep opening the door”

“Behave” she admonished, as she were talking to one of their children. “In another room, preferably”

Alexander narrowed his eyes while Eliza fidgeted in spot. Madison watched the scene, taking a step backwards. Eventually, Alex heaved a sigh.

“Come, Madison. Let’s go to my workroom”

“Alright” nodded the man.

“Yes, yes, I’ll prepare something to drink” said Eliza, almost pushing them out of the room.

Madison looked over his shoulder when they exited the room, seeing Eliza sprinting to where the phone was.

“What was all that about?” he dared to ask.

“I don’t know yet. But I’ll figure it out soon” promised Hamilton, more to himself than to anyone else.

“Mr Madison, good afternoon” greeted a childish voice.

When James turned around, he was faced with two children, one smiling up at him, and the other hiding behind her brother and avoiding eye contact at all costs.

“Hello, Philip, long time without seeing each other” he greeted back, kneeling to accept the courteous hug the boy gave him.

“Are you here to work with my Dad?” he asked.

“No, I just want to talk to him” explained James, patting him on the head. “You must be Angelica” He said, now directing his attention to the silent girl. “Nice to meet you” He told her, making sure to not get closer and make her more nervous than what she already seemed.

“Hi…” the girl waved her hand, clinging to her brother.

“She’s shier” Alexander excused his daughter, as he opened the door and went directly to his desk.
“Well, we’ve got something in common already” laughed Madison.

“Daddy, Mummy’s muttering to the phone again” said Angie, in a tiny voice, as she threw cautious glares to the unknown adult.

“It’s nothing, sweetheart… But go and keep an eye on her for me, please?”

“Alright” nodded Philip, immediately. He took his sister’s hand and walked down the hall. “Bye, Mr Madison!” he said, waving goodbye. Angie did the same, more uneasily.

“Bye, Philip, Angelica” James entered the room, closing the door at his backs. “They’re lovely children” he commented, for the sake of good manners.

“I know, I live with them” said Alexander, with his glasses on and reading some paper. “What I don’t understand is what Philip sees in you’

James kept his silence, wanting to keep things cool and calmed.

“And what brings you here? Right after the screaming show I heard a few minutes ago?” asked Alexander, before his silence.

James blushed slightly at the remark. “Well…”

“Is that fruit?” accused Alex, pointing at the tupper the other man was still holding. “What the hell do you want from me now?”

Madison put the tupper down and decided to go straight to the point. “Lucy called”

“Alright?” said Alexander, leaving the word lingering there, as an invitation to go on.

“She… She wants Thomas to go to their childhood home for some event some people are making for his mother”

“Good for him”

“No, not good at all” Madison shook his head quickly. “He needs someone with him and he will not let me or his daughters accompany him”

“Why? Aren’t partners and children allowed?” mocked the financer.

“Alexander, this is serious”

“Sorry, Dobby, I promise that I’m trying to care about this shit, but I just can’t” Alex defended his actions.

“Listen…” James took in a breath. Maybe he should’ve waited till tomorrow to do this. “I’m only asking for you to go with him” he admitted.

“Go with him?” parroted Alexander, as if he’d gone crazy. And, maybe, he had. “I barely stand him in New York, I don’t want to put up with him in his natural habitat”

“He can’t go alone with that people, and as you’re his lawyer…”
“Was” corrected Alex.

“You told me if Lucy ever…”

“Madison, can you count?”

“Of course I can count!” answered James, offended.

“Then, count me out for this”

“Hamilton, you said…”

“Are the girls under any danger?” interrupted Alexander, sharply. “Did Lucy call for something concerning their custody?”

“Well, no. At first, it doesn’t seem like it, but…”

“Then, I think this conversation is over” concluded Alexander, lowering his glare to his paperwork again. “Now, take this…” he tapped the tupper twice with his pen. “…and get out, please”

“But…”

“Take this and get out, please”

Madison frowned and clenched his teeth. “Hamilton, you promised me!” he threw in his face, as last attempt.

It seemed to hit something inside Alexander for a moment, but it quickly disappeared as he hit the table and got up, frustrated.

“I promised you that he would not lose his daughters, and you’re very lucky that I didn’t decide to back down on that promise when your friend tried to badmouth me, Madison” he explained, trying to keep his voice low enough for his children and wife not to hear them. “Now, until something of the sorts happens, I don’t want to know anything more about him. Less if he doesn’t have enough courage to ask me for it in my face” He took a seat again, his face red. “Get out now, this conversation is over”

James sighed and was about to take the tupper. Alexander slapped his hand with the pen.

“No, leave this here”

“You said…”

“You fucked the rest of my day up, I deserve this tupper. Not only the contents, the tupper on its own”

James rolled his eyes. “Alright, keep it then” he said, walking out and slamming the door shut.
Alexander didn’t blink an eye at the slight tremble his office did for the action, and kept working. The door opened slowly, carefully. Alexander looked up, seeing his family sticking their heads out.

“Yes?” he said, tediously as he had an idea of what his wife was about to say.

To his surprise, it was Philip the one who talked first. “Mr Madison just left”

“He seemed angry” added Angie, taking the liberty to get in and walk to her father.

“Angie, honey…”

Eliza tried to reprehend, but Alexander made a vague gesture with his hand, to let her know it was alright, and picked his daughter up, sitting her on his knees. Eliza sighed.

“What happened?” she asked, opening the door completely and so, letting Philip to run to his father as well.

“Nothing, another favour of his” responded Alex, patting Philip’s head as the kid looked with curiosity at the papers his father had on his desk.

“Did you accept?” she asked, a bit sceptic.

“Of course, I didn’t” said Alexander, as if she was mad. “The last time almost cost me my job”

“You’re overreacting there…”

“I’m overreacting? Who were the two sisters who scolded and roasted Jefferson for a week?” questioned Alexander, taking Philip’s hand away gently from his paperwork. “The only thing I did was ignore him”

“That was Mr Jefferson’s mistake” countered Eliza, walking in the room as well. “Madison shouldn’t pay for it. Neither should his daughters”

“Betsey, don’t you dare use that against me again” warned Alexander.

“I’m not” assured Eliza, holding both hands up. “I’m just commenting the issue, like all married couples must do”

“Fair. How about we talk about that strange thing you have with the phone when you’re finished telling me off for my decision?”

Eliza got rigid at that. “You know what? I support you and all your life choices” She gave him the thumbs-up as she walked backwards to exit the room. “I support you endlessly, do whatever you want. I trust you” she kept saying, before closing the door.
“Mum can’t lie” commented Angie.

“At least, we know she won’t burn the dinner today…” said Philip, relieved.

“Don’t be too optimistic, I’m gonna find out what the hell is going on with those missing calls” swore Alexander.

Philip stretched out his hand. “One dollar”

“Pardon?”

“You swore, one dollar”

“Since when?”

“Mum decided this this morning when I said the S word…” admitted Angie, lowering her glare.

Alex frowned. “Well, now I will fucking find out what she’s hiding”

“Two dollars” insisted Philip.

“Kid, take my wallet from my briefcase and take around 50 bucks” instructed Alexander, as the boy did as he was told, looking a bit surprised. “I think you’ll have the next two hours covered with that…”

Lafayette had started going out for a run once a day. Or twice. Or thrice. The case was that he had decided to start going for a run for not killing someone in his house, that was it. When he felt the tension growing too much, or the thing was too silent for it to be good, he put on his tracksuit and ran until he thought it could be enough. He’d lived enough years with both Hercules and Laurens to know when exactly the argument would end. Most of the times, he got it right, but others, like today, he wasn’t that lucky.

In Lafayette’s defence, it wasn’t entirely his fault, nobody was perfect, though he was very near to be.

“Hey, Laf, have you seen the bag of chips I bought yesterday?”

“Um, I think Johnny took it?”

How on Earth was Lafayette going to know that a simple back of chips would create the
second civil war in his living room?

“He what?”

Well, maybe just by remembering who his boyfriend and friend/flatmate were.

“Em… I think I saw John taking it” he repeated, a bit hesitant under the severe glare of his boyfriend. “I think” he emphasised. “Maybe it wasn’t today, maybe…”

Too late. Lafayette groaned in frustration when Hercules sprinted to Laurens’ bedroom, opening the door with a kick.

“Each day, I wish more that I’ve stayed in France…” whispered the immigrant, regretful.

“Hercules, are you fucking crazy?!” shouted Laurens, startled.

“If I hadn’t fixed my papers, now I could call the INS… Why can’t I do one thing right?” he kept lamenting.

Hercules came out Laurens’ bedroom, bag of chips in his hand and screams coming out from his and Laurens’ mouths.

“Look at this, and tell me if this is normal!” he said, throwing the (almost full) bag of chips to the coffee table.

Lafayette took his time to answer, Laurens’ insults filling the house. “It looks the same, just that opened”

“Exactly!” said Hercules, excited to find someone that understood him, though that someone didn’t have a clue about what was happening. “This man left the bag opened all night and took it to his pigsty of a room! And look! It’s not even half empty!”

“I just wanted a few! I wasn’t going to eat the whole bag myself, that’s selfish!” Laurens defended himself, appearing at the doorframe in his pyjamas and with his hair dishevelled.

“And leaving it there, opened, on the floor, in your bedroom all night is not?” asked Hercules, incredulously.

“You’ve got them now, eat them”

“I won’t eat them, because now they got cold”
“Give them a paracetamol, what the hell I’ve gotta do with that”

“Look, John, don’t try to laugh at me after you fucked my snack up!”

“Don’t screeaaaaam…” complained Laf, boringly.

“I’ve done no such a thing! The chips are there and they’re eatable!” argued Laurens. “Just because you’re a fancy fucker means…”

“I’m not!” interrupted Hercules, raising his voice considerably (Lafayette threw a sigh of tedium at it). “But I don’t wanna eat something that spent a night in the cave of darkness”

“What do you mean with that?”

“I mean that your room is a mess, I doubt that level of dirty is legal in any country of the First World”

“You’re overreacting”

“Go buy me another bag of chips” decided Hercules.

Laurens gave him an unamused laugh. “Excuse me?”

“I’ll excuse you when you buy me another bag of chips”

“I won’t waste money on that”

“Come on, you can take it from my wallet” proposed Laf, wanting to end the discussion there.

“No. The bag’s still there, more than half-full. If this fancy prick wants another one, he can get dressed and go himself”

“Come on, Johnny, you’re being very selfish there” said Lafayette, doubting if this was a good idea.

“What?!” exclaimed Laurens, indignant.

“You know Herc loves those chips. And this is not the first time the poor man has to put up with the fact that you took the whole bag to your room” He raised one hand, to silence whatever complaint was about to get out his flatmate’s mouth. “Whether you eat it all or not. Your room is a mess, it’s normal someone that’s not as slaphappy as you gets bothered by the fact of eating a bag of chips that spent the whole night opened on the floor there. Apart from all that, I’ve told you countless times to simply take a few, put them in a bowl, and eat them in your room. You say it yourself, your plan is never to eat them all, so, why do you take the whole bag?” Lafayette straightened a bit in his seat, ignoring the frown on Laurens’ face. “You can not agree with Hercules. To each their own. But you must respect as you demand to be respected” he finished.

Lafayette waited for their responses, and yet he was startled when Hercules raised his two arms, as if thanking some celestial divinity, and knelt on the floor.

“Yes! After eight years, he finally took my side!” he exclaimed, with genuine happiness.

Laurens didn’t share his happiness, though. “Everybody is against me in this house!” he complained, kicking the floor. He turned around and ran down the hall. “Everyone against meeeeee!”
“I never loved you so much as I do today” admitted Hercules, crawling to Laf and looking up at him with admiration.

“I don’t know if I like the sound of that…”

Laurens came out of his bedroom, suitcase in hand, as he muttered curses.

Hercules smiled at the image. “Oh, wait, this day can get even better”

“Johnny, where are you going?” asked Lafayette, getting up in a second.

“I will not stay where I’m not loved!” exclaimed the freckled man.

“Huh, you won’t be able to be anywhere, then…” muttered Hercules.

“Come on, Johnny, it’s not such a big deal. We can talk it out like adults!” tried Laf, clearly hurt.

“No! John Laurens is leaving, and will never return!” declared Laurens, deadly serious, as he opened the door. He stepped out, slamming the door shut.

“What have we done?” lamented Lafayette, looking at his partner with sad eyes.

“Hm, at least this time he didn’t spit…” commented Hercules.

Not a second later, the door opened again. Laurens stuck his head and spat on the floor. He slammed the door shut with more force than before.

Lafayette let out a sob and ran to his bedroom, locking himself up there. Hercules sat on the couch and looked at Godfred, who’d watched the whole thing from his bed.

“… He’s still gone, though” Hercules said, trying to be positive.

———

Laurens was sat on the stairs of his building, fury gone, replaced by self-doubt.

“And where do I go now?” he wondered, as he played with the zip of his suitcase. “Who can I call?” He took out his phone and scrolled down his contacts list. “Alex? Nah, he’s got three children and he’d make me babysit… Angelica? Same problem, besides, her marriage is too passionate for my likings. Don’t know how that kid survives. Peggy? He lives with Alex… Fucking useless…”

“"
An alarm went off, and Laurens almost drop his phone from the scare. He turned it off and cursed when he saw the title.

“Oh, shit! I have to meet with Vince*!”

And then a light bulb ignited inside his brain. His new affair, the one Godfred made him meet that day at the park. He could ask for this favour, and it would be like a little test to see if the man was worth it.

“Huh, Freddy turned out to be a better matchmaker than Pegs…” he commented, under his breath, as he dialled the number of his date and went downstairs, suitcase in hand. “Wonder if I should’ve taken him with me… Nah, now that I’m not there to keep the balance, Laf will need someone to keep his company when that boyfriend of his goes nuts, and Hercules needs someone by his side who’s able to stand his nonsense”

Luck was beginning to change. Laurens thought that was what usually happened when you’re a good person that accumulate good karma. As it turned out, he didn’t have to ask his partner for a place to stay, as soon as Vince heard half of the story and understood his current situation, he offered him his place.

“You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” said Vince, as he unlocked his front door. “I know you’d have done the same for me”

“Yes, that’s totally me” laughed Laurens, a bit nervous when he imagined himself in his partner’s situation.

“It’s a little messy, so excuse me” commented Vince, giggling a bit.

“Don’t worry, you’re doing me a great favour, I won’t complain” promised Laurens.

Vince opened the door and let him pass first. Laurens thanked him once again. Well, finally he met a gentleman.

“About damn time!” a male voice complained from some part of the house. “We’re starving in…”
Laurens was face to face with a man in his fifties, all dressed up in a tracksuit and completely scruffy. He looked up and down at Laurens a few times, completely in shock. Vince closing the front door with a thump at Laurens’ backs seemed to wake him up from his trance.

“And who are you?”

“He’s John, a friend” answered Vince, nonchalantly. “He’s got nowhere to stay, and I invited him over”

“A friend?” repeated the man, unconvinced. “You don’t only cheat on me, but you also bring your affairs to my house?”

“Our house” corrected Vince.

The man looked at John in the eye. “He cheated on me with my brother and he gave him his part of the house so he wouldn’t tattle to his wife. Do you think that’s fair?”

“I…” Laurens blinked a couple of times, clearly lost. “I don’t think or understand anything right now. Who are you?”

“He’s Morgan, the idiot of my husband” answered Vince, as he made his way to the living room.

“Your what?” asked Laurens, feeling his world crumbling to pieces.

Morgan huffed. “Son, run away and never return, you’ve got a chance” he advised.

“But, wait a minute, what?” wanted to ask Laurens, following the man to the living room.

“Always with that sunshine personality” complained Vince. “That’s why I have to go to look for pleasure outside”

“Go look for whatever you want, but don’t bring them here!” growled Morgan, letting himself fall on the couch.

“There! Keep moulding the cushions with the shape of your butt, that’s lovely for visits!”

“We never have guests!”

“And you’re to blame! Gosh, I’ve only been here for three minutes and I want to throw myself out of the fucking window!”

“Make sure you’ve made dinner first”

“I’m hearing screaming”

Laurens turned, still in shock, to where the female voice was coming from, along with a pair of feet. A girl, among Laurens’ age, made her appearance. The girl looked at him up and down, with quite disdain, and then turned to Vince, who had now a hand on his forehead, clearly portraying a fed up housewife of an old sitcom.
“What’s going on?” she asked.

“Nothing, sweetheart. Your father has no shame” said Vince, going to give the girl a peek on the cheek.

“Oh, my God, he’s got children as well” lamented Laurens, burying his face in his hands.

Morgan laughed quite cruelly at his horrified expression. “Haha, you should’ve hired a professional. They’re cheaper on the long run”

“I’ve already tried it, and it didn’t end well” admitted Laurens, not getting into details.

“Huh, well, that’s bad luck” commented the man, passing to simply watch TV.

“Come meet your father’s substitute” instructed Vince, pointing at him with a small smile.

“Don’t call me that in front of then, she’s gonna hate me!” complained Laurens.

“She’s Sonya” introduced Vince, ignoring his words. “Sonya, he’s John. Get to know each other as I make dinner because your father’s a selfish lazy ass”

“And you are boor and a bitch” spat Morgan.

“Daddy” said Sonya, with a reprehensive tone.

Vince strode to Laurens to nudge him twice, offended. “Aren’t you going to defend me or what?”

“Well, you’re acting like a little boor and a bitch” agreed Laurens.

“Excuse me?” exclaimed Vince.

“Such a good catch” laughed Morgan, just to end up coughing loudly.

“Dad, haven’t you taken the meds the doctor told you to?” said Sonya, sounding like a tired mother.

“A quack doesn’t tell me what to take”

“Really, this house is the epitome of a depression” spat Vince, before storming out of the living room. “We’re gonna dine vegetables!” he swore, in the distance.

“If I’d known, I’d have called the pizzeria” lamented Morgan.

“God, what have I gotten myself into?” wondered Laurens, under his breath.

“Ts, you” called Sonya, deadly serious. “If my parents get a divorce because of you, I’ll go after you” she threatened.

“But if he’s done it before, why me?!” asked Laurens, paling.

“You’ve been warned”

“For fuck’s sake… Why bad things happens to good people like me?” wondered Laurens, shaking his head in impotence.
“Are you sure you don’t want me to go with you?”

“Yes, I am”

“Sure?”

“Sure”

“Because I don’t mind”

“I do”

“Have you thought it through?”

“Yes, I have”

“And you’re still sure you want to go alone?”

“Yes, I am very sure” Thomas responded, closing his suitcase with a loudly thump of frustration.

James didn’t move one inch from the doorframe. “If you say so…” he finally conceded. “But if you need me at some point, just call me, alright?”

“Will do” promised Thomas, barely looking at him.

“Are you taking your meds?”

Thomas’ silence spoke volumes. James frowned.

“Thomas, you must…”

“I’m not going to take them” interrupted the older man, dryly.

“At least, take the bottle with you” begged James, concerned. “I’ll feel better that way”

Thomas sighed and took his suitcase and exited his bedroom. James followed him with the glare, seeing his friend vacillating in getting in the bathroom or not. Thankfully, he did, getting out a few later, with the bottle in his hand.

“I don’t promise you anything” he deadpanned, as he tried to put it inside his suitcase.

“Thank you” said James, with total honesty.
The doorbell separated them for a moment. James had refused to leave Thomas alone that last morning he’d be there before leaving for until only God knew when. His friend’s nerves were almost palpable, and James could only thank that he hadn’t had a panic attack right there. Though the seeds for it to blossom had been planted since Lucy called yesterday.

“Hamilton?” said James, unable to conceal his surprise when he saw his workmate at the other side of the door, well-dressed and with a briefcase in hand, as if today was work day, instead of a Saturday. “What are you doing in here?”

Alexander dedicated him a death glare before taking a seemingly dangerous step forward. “I’m going to miss Maria’s birthday party for this ‘favour’. If your friend makes me regret this, or if he makes this worse than it already is, you’re gonna pay the consequences now as well. My promise totally forgotten, alright?” he swore.

That made the last piece of the puzzle to fit, and James found himself calmer when he understood that Alexander was there, with formal clothes, because he was going to accompany Thomas as if he were still his lawyer.

“Thank you, Alexander, seriously” he breathed out, barely believing the scene.

“Who was it, James?” asked Thomas, as he went downstairs, checking his luggage for the zillionth time. He half-closed his eyes when he saw Hamilton at their door. “You didn’t” he told his friend.

“He totally did” assured Alexander, with the same apathy.

“You weren’t going to let me come with you” James excused his action.

“Lucky you” said Alex.

“James, I’m…”

“Listen, none of us want this and I’m missing an important thing because I like things well done and I’m true to my word, as shocking as it might sound to you” said Hamilton, his voice drier than the Sahara. “If you don’t want me there, I’ll gladly go back to my house and keep doing my life as I planned it for today”

Thomas doubted there, his eyes looking for James’ opinion more than Hamilton’s. His friend was clearly distressed, and that was why he refused to let him come with him. He still remembered his siblings’ actions towards the man when he worked for his mother. Damn it, Lucy still treated the poor man as an inferior and hated his guts just because he and Thomas clicked when they met (and because Jen had cherished his friendship, surely). Going alone to that den full of hungry tigers wasn’t Thomas best weekend plan, but he had to do it. For making Lucy’s soft side to arise or be born already. Maybe that way they could stop that stupid war their mother had started and she’d continued without a second thought. Maybe this was the only chance Thomas had to finally make up with his siblings and give their daughters a bit of peace, not always worrying about the day aunt Lucy would come to take them away from him.
And, though he hated to admit it, the only person he’d seen silencing Lucy and stopping her attempts to mess his day and terrorize him with what she could do to him if he didn’t do as he was told, had been Hamilton.

“We’re going in my car” was the only thing Thomas said, before storming out of the house, a frown of discomfort in his face.

“That sounded like a kidnap” complained Alexander, following him to his car.

“Who in Hell would want to kidnap someone like you?” retorted Thomas, throwing his suitcase to the backseat and closing the door vehemently.

“I’m sure I’m worth a lot” fought back Hamilton, quite childishly, as he jumped in the passenger seat.

“You’d drive the kidnappers crazy with their ransom” said Thomas, seating beside the immigrant and making everything comfortable for him to drive. “I can almost hear you” he kept arguing, in the meantime. “Complaining and getting offended because the ransom is too little for someone as big as you. Just like Caesar”

A mischievous smile spread on Alexander’s face. “If you really think you’re insulting me by comparing me with the greatest man that ever lived, you’re more of a fool than I initially thought”

Thomas watched him for a long moment. Then, he stuck his head out of his window, looking pleadingly at his friend.

“James, what have I done to you for this punishment?” he whined.

“Have a good trip” deadpanned James, slamming the door shut without hesitation.

Alexander laughed loudly as Thomas frowned when he thought about standing only that man’s presence for about seven hours inside his car and for the rest of the day along with his siblings. This trip could not get any worse.

---

*Friends show their love in times of trouble, not in happiness*

—Euripides.
The nerves didn’t really kick in until Thomas found himself facing the huge double doors, the relatives he hadn’t seen in the past three years waiting at the other side. He raised his fist to knock or to ring the doorbell, he wasn’t sure what would be the best option, but froze. Now, in front of the doors, standing at the other side of the house he’d grown up in, of the observant walls that knew his childhood maybe better than he did, reality hit him like a punch in the guts.

He hadn’t talked or seen his relatives, his family, in three years. Almost four, if Martha’s stubbornness weren’t bigger than his own. He hadn’t received any calls or texts from them in all that time. The only ones he had were Jen’s, who persistently sent him one a day. Thomas had felt horrible for ignoring his sister’s efforts, but his fear mastered him more than his guilt, and so he pretended said texts and calls that adorned his phone weren’t there. He didn’t erase them, that seemed a bit too excessive, but he didn’t find it in him to open them and read what his older sister had to say about the whole thing. While it was true she wasn’t invited to his wedding (nobody was, actually, but he could understand the hurt and treason she might had felt), she was still the only decent relative he’d grown up with, the only one that made him smile and put on a brave face to live through celebrations and holidays when their father left them for good.

No, no, Thomas, don’t go there, he reprimanded himself.

Two knocks on the door returned him to the real world. He looked at his right, seeing his wife throwing a scolding glare with the corner of her eye.

“You’ve gotta knock on the door, Thomas, not to ask it for a date” she admonished, in a jocular way.

Thomas rolled his eyes, though his nerves were a bit under more control now. God bless this woman, really. And especially the little one-year-old girl that held to her, looking at her surroundings and making her two up ponytails to move in a comical way.

The door opened slowly, revealing a practised indifferent face that changed in a millisecond with a genuine smile as soon as the woman recognised who they were.

“Thomas, good to see you again!” greeted Consuelo, dying for hold him in her arms as so many times she had done when he was younger, but containing herself. He wondered under how much pressure the poor woman was living lately, with Christmas so close and the house getting fuller. “Martha, it’s lovely to see you as well” she added, when she was finished looking up and down at
Thomas. Her eyes shone with delight when they fell on the little girl. “And who is this cutie? What’s her name?”

“Martha, like her mother” answered Thomas, feeling more at ease at the calm vibe the Latin woman always brought with her.

“We call her Patsy, though” added Martha. “Say ‘hi’, Patsy” she instructed, sweetly.

The baby looked at the woman first, as if judging her (which caused a contained laugh from the three adults awaiting for her verdict) and then stretched out her little and robust arms to the housekeeper, laughing.

“She likes you!” translated Martha, sharing her daughter’s happiness. “Here, take her”

“Can I?” asked the woman, completely shocked.

“Of course! She wouldn’t let me forget!”

And Thomas smiled along with his wife at that. Patsy had the habit of throwing short tantrums when something was denied to her. (“She took it from you”, Martha would say, suffering from a small memory loss at all her reactions and sour expressions she made when something didn’t go as she’d planned).

Consuelo took the baby in her arms, and that made the girl to laugh more loudly as she moved her arms and legs, to emphasize her happiness. She only stopped when one lock of hair caught her attention.

“Oh, sorry, get in!” said Consuelo, suddenly, stepping to the side to let the couple enter.

“It’s alright” said Martha, who only had eyes for her daughter.

Thomas, on the contrary, looked around himself, anxiously. “Consuelo, where’s my mother?”

The housekeeper’s expression flattered, the shine in her eyes almost disappearing if it weren’t for Patsy’s innocence. “She’s in her workroom, cielo*”

Thomas flinched. How typical.

“Does she know I was coming?” He knew the answer already, but needed to hear it or he’d feel more guilty when his mother saw him and opened her mouth.

“Yes, I talked to her about your wife’s call”
“Maybe she wasn’t expecting us to come this soon. It’s still a week for Christmas” Martha tried to erase the tension from the room as well as she could.

Thomas sighed. “And what about my siblings?”

“Oh, Anna and Randy would come here on the 23rd” explained Consuelo, relieved from the change of subject. “Lucy, as this is her last year, could came here last weekend”

“Thought they all went to the same college?” asked Thomas, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Yes, but according to her, this last week they’ll be doing nothing. Your mother didn’t seem to mind”

Of course she doesn’t, Lucy’s always been her favourite, thought Thomas, a bit bitterly. He decided to bite his tongue and instead keep it cool.

<<You’re already bothering everyone by coming, don’t try to turn this into your problems again>>

“And Jen?” he asked, ignoring the critical voice inside his head.

Martha threw him a worried glare and took his hand, squeezing it with reassurance. God bless her, again.

“She’s reading something in the living room” she answered, also noticing something was off. She frowned slightly. “I would take a shield if I were you”

Thomas tightened the grip on his wife’s hand. “Is she mad?”

“Not mad, but…”

“But when you mess up with a dramatic soul such as me, you always must come prepared” a voice answered on the old woman’s behalf.

Thomas felt calmer when he sensed the joke in his sister’s tone, and felt warmer when he finally saw her with his own eyes, walking down the hall, book in hand. Her black heels resounded throughout the whole big house, her black jeans clung to her legs in juxtaposition of the long and baggy sleeves of her pale purple shirt. Thomas raised his glare to her face, oval-shaped, with thin lips always curved in a smile and big dark brown eyes always shining with mischief and with that clear look of ‘I-know-something-you-don’t’. For a moment, he was expecting to see her long dark hair waving at her backs, but he blinked in surprise when he saw now Jen’s hair was as curly but shoulder-length.
“Hello, deserter” she said, folding her arms upon her chest.

Thomas felt his wife letting go of his hand and stepping aside. God not bless her that much this time.

“Hi, Jen…” he said, after swallowing the lump in his throat.

“Why didn’t you answer my texts if you still remember how to greet?”

Thomas felt like an idiot for thinking she was going to let it slide. Jen was good-hearted, but also possessed an elephant’s memory.

“I… I’m sorry” he managed, unsure of what the correct answer was.

“I was hoping you were” said Jen, raising one eyebrow. “But that doesn’t answer my question”

“Listen, the last time I was here I left in such a way that…” he tried to excuse himself, though he knew he had no excuse at all. Jen had always supported him, and he had thanked her with the same indifference and coldness he began to treat the rest of the family.

“That what?” spat Jen, blinking in confusion, not believing her ears. “Did you think I was angry at you for leaving? Thomas, you made the right choice! I support you! I always have! When you left right after dotting the I’s and crossing the T’s, I spent like an hour cackling in my room! I almost shot some fireworks and all!”

“It’s true” nodded Consuelo, who’d given the girl back to her mother.

Jen sighed, after the vent. “Don’t do that again”

“I won’t” he promised.

“Good” She hit his arm with the book she’d brought. “Now, introduce me to that beautiful doll”

Thomas smiled softly and allowed himself to breathe. He could bear with his mother being angry at him (he never seemed to be enough for her, for starters) and his other siblings not talking to him ever again (they’d never gotten that much along, anyways), but he couldn’t imagine a life without Jen.

As long as she was there with him, with Consuelo, Martha and his beloved daughter, he could gather the courage until the end of the holidays.
Consuelo had left the three adults to talk and catch up. Jen refused to let go of Patsy. Martha made some jokes, swearing she’d go after her if she dared to steal her child, and Jen just wiggled her eyebrows with that imp smile of hers Thomas had missed so much.

“Thomas” the housekeeper called, standing at the doorframe, the shadow of worry casted on her face again. “Your mother wants to see you”

Thomas stiffened in his seat, across the three females. Jen and Martha exchanged a glare, and the latter was about to get up when Consuelo took a cautious step forward.

“The mistress said just him” she clarified.

Martha frowned and looked at her husband, as if trying to make him say something on the matter. Thomas wished he could, he really wished. He’d already done it once, what was keeping him from doing it a second time?

The babble of his daughter gave him the answer. He was doing all this for her, more than for himself or his wife. He was doing it so the girl could know her relatives, to grow up healthy with a normal family, with no drama or rancour in between. He’d always make an effort for his daughter.

Martha seemed to catch on and dropped back on her seat, arms folded, though, clearly not agreeing.

“Doesn’t she want to meet her granddaughter?” she spat, nonetheless, unable to control her tongue.

Consuelo frowned. “No, she didn’t mention the little girl”

Thomas knew the woman was concealing something from them, and he could only imagine what his mother could’ve said. He didn’t want to know, though, less in front of his temperamental wife and sister. Jen was about to jump in, when he got up and walked to the housekeeper, faking a smile.
“It’s alright. Thank you, Consuelo, you can be dismissed now”

The woman gave him a hesitant curtsey and went back to her duties. Jen frowned at the act.

“Thomas…” she tried to speak.

“It’s alright, Jen, just stay there, you three, I’ll be back soon” he promised, walking (maybe too quickly) to the staircase.

James hated his health and his obsessive nature. He was used to those (ironically) unhealthy feelings towards his own being, but that didn’t make them easier to cope and live with.

After the nervous breakdown he suffered at Princeton, his mother had decided to take him out and let him rest back at home. His father didn’t share her same worry and opinions, and acted on her backs, looking for a job that could keep his son’s mind occupied.

“That way, you’ll be too busy to worry over imaginary illnesses, once and for all” his father all but grumbled.

And, as James’ luck wouldn’t want it to be in any other way, his father found him a job as an accountant (“Let’s make your math skills finally worthy”) of a wealthy family that lived a few blocks away from them, in a huge mansion at Shadwell. James didn’t need much detail, coming from a rich family himself and after spending his whole life from private school to private high school to private college. He knew whom to expect there.

So, he wasn’t surprised when Lucy didn’t look in his direction or acknowledged him whenever he entered a room, when Anna and Randolph barely cared to learn his name, when Mrs Jefferson dismissed all his advices but then blamed him when some account didn’t fit, or when the only decent people there were the personnel.

And, well, to his pleasant surprise, the oldest child of Mrs Jefferson was nice as well. She didn’t come much, but after spending three months working for her mother, he could understand completely why and agreed with her (though he never told her, he didn’t want to be part of whatever this family had going on).
Jane (or Jen, as she insisted to be called) would always be seen drinking and eating with the personnel when they were on a break, or chatting with them as they worked. On more than one occasion, she’d invited them to their outings and parties. She even took James into account. And if James’d been a lover of parties, he’d have accepted without hesitation.

“I’ve got a brother you’d like as well!” she commented one day, when he had to wait for Mrs Jefferson until she was back from a meeting.

“Randolph?” he guessed, cocking a curious eyebrow at that. He didn’t seem to mind anything but that alcohol he hid from his relatives. “I don’t think so, sorry…”

“No, no! Thomas!” she explained, laughing as if the sole idea of he and Randolph being friends was the best joke ever. Maybe it was. “He’s the second, younger only by three years”

“Ah… I don’t think I ever saw him around here”

“That’s because he and Mum had this huge fight over… Well, personal matters” she said. James was already used to her rambling and stopping when she realised she almost gave personal information she had no right to talk out loud. “And, well, he kind of cut touch with the family, but I’m trying to bring him around… To me, at least. And to you, something tells me you two would get along just right. Like, you’d absolutely click”

“If you say so” conceded James, with a small shrug.

“I know so, Jemmy-James”

James loved his mother more than his life, but why did she have to slip that nickname when Jen was with them? There was no turning back now…

“Believe me” she insisted. “He’s just like you. Shy, weird and a nerd”

“Thank you…” he said, sarcastically, with an eye-roll.

“All in the good sense…” she said, nudging him playfully on the shoulder. “I know you’d be made for each other. Hey, maybe you knew in another life and all!”

James shared her laugh. “Who knows… If he ever comes, I’ll give it a try” he promised, wanting to have a big of hope.

“That’s the spirit!”
Why did Jen think that brother of hers and he could be anything near friends? The man didn’t seem any different from his siblings. He avoided everybody in the house (sometimes even including his own wife and little daughter), he spent the whole week locked up inside his bedroom, only getting out when it was needed and only talking to the ones who went to him. Perhaps he thought so highly of himself that you could only talk to him if you knock on his door while he was having a moderately good day.

Jen didn’t say anything about the issue during the whole time. Maybe she was too busy buying and adorning the house along the servants (“That’s their job, Jane”, her mother always admonished, just to be ignored), but James thanked she’d forgotten about the matter by now.

His luck didn’t last (it never did).

James had to go to the party the Jefferson family (more than their employees) prepared throughout the whole week before Christmas. When the night of the 24th arrived, the first floor of the mansion was full. James wouldn’t be exaggerating if he said there was no room for a single pin*. And still, Jen and Mrs Martha moved throughout the whole group of people as if they’d been trained their whole lives for such a duty, being able to start or get in any conversation and charming every soul that crossed their paths. Lucy, though more collected and quiet, did the same as her sister, making conversation with different guests and gaining a few ‘friendships’ that could be useful for her in a near future.

The youngest siblings, the twins Anna and Randolph, weren’t as prepared as their older sisters, blushing and stammering when they got lost at some topic they were talked about (which happened quite often; James could feel the hatred glares of Mrs Jefferson from the other side of the room, watching each one of her children as raptor). At least, Anna knew how to get away with the embarrassment with some witty response that would make everyone laugh and forget about the little incident. There was a point in which Randolph let his twin do all the talking and focused only on his drink, his only friend there, it seemed.

James almost felt bad for him.

But, without a shadow of a doubt, the one that shone brighter than a star in a natural nocturnal night was the little one-year-old Mr Thomas had brought with him. The girl was dressed like a doll and showed off by her grandmother, who refused to let go of her, no matter how deadly Mrs Martha’s glares were becoming. Everybody was enchanted by the baby, who looked around her (uncomfortably, according to James, he could sense the poor soul’s discomfort from a mile, and the eager of going back to her mother’s arms). Little Patsy received all kinds of compliments and nice words that night. Each made Mrs Jefferson’s smile to grow, but not to become legit.
She wasn’t James’ daughter and even he wanted to take the little girl away from her and give her some space and peace. He was 22 and he was planning how to run away upstairs to refill his batteries to be able to come back and pretend to care about this party and its many, many guests.

Yes, let’s just think about how much people there are in here. That would totally make your nerves to calm down.

“Have you seen Thomas?”

Thank goodness, Jen appeared in front of him. A frown of worry adorning her soft features.

“Um, no, I have not seen him”

Jen sighed. “I shouldn’t have taken my eyes away from him” she reprehended herself, under her breath.

“I can go look for him, if you want” he proposed. And if he was being selfish, using Jen’s problem as an excuse to leave the party behind and breathe some air, well, nobody needed to know.

“Really?” asked Jen, smiling happily. “You’re a life-saver, Jemmy-James!”

“Don’t call me that. Less in front of all these people”

“Alright, alright, I’ll let you live for tonight for this favour” she acceded. “I’m serious. I can’t leave Martha alone with my mother. Have you seen her face? If glares could kill, she’d have to be arrested before the night ended”

Well, good to know he wasn’t exaggerating... Maybe.

He bid farewell to Jen and went upstairs. He locked himself up inside the first bathroom he saw and splashed some water against his face, thanking its grounding coldness.

“At least, I’m not having an anxiety attack. Yet”

His plan was to stay there for a bit longer, until his hands stopped being frozen and his heart beat normally, but a series of whispers that came from the same floor called his attention.

Curiosity killed the cat.
For James’ fortune, he was not a cat.

Thomas didn’t do well with social interaction. That was why when his mother told him she was going to hold a party for Christmas Eve, he wanted to rewind in time and fought with Martha for not coming there. Undoubtedly, the worst decision of his life. That was why he didn’t do good deeds, less to his relatives.

He’d only gone to one party in his entire life, following his sister’s advices of trying something new. And destiny gifted him with knowing the most awesome woman on Earth. But Thomas wasn’t looking for another partner or even some close friend, so this party was absolutely a no-no. But he couldn’t say that to his mother. His judgmental mother, with that dark, cold glare that could freeze hell in one blink.

Oh, well…

He spent the whole week until the occasion arose inside his bedroom and only getting out to eat with the family and participated as little in their conversations as he could. It wasn’t like they were interested in what he had to say. Martha, Jen and Consuelo were the only ones he talked to during his whole reclusion (the only ones who bothered to go to him to see how he was doing). His daughter the only one able to make him smile genuinely and whom he allowed to touch him.

By the time the night of the 24th came Thomas had gathered enough mental strengths to go to that party and pretend he cared, pretend everything was fine, pretend he loved his family and wanted to be there, supporting them. He ignored the pitiful comments about ‘how sad it’s that you decided to choose another path’ or ‘it’s a waste of talent, but if you’re happy’. The last thing he needed to remember that night was how a failure he was, working as his father-in-law’s secretary instead of being a proper lawyer, like the rest of his family wanted and succeeded in studying to be. Even Anna and Randolph seemed to be doing just fine back at college, but Thomas had the slight suspicion that had to do more with their bank account than with their true efforts.

“It’s not a suspicion, it’s an affirmation” declared Jen, as she refilled her glass with more wine. He accepted the second glass she brought with gusto.

“Wasn’t expecting anything else…”
Jen and Martha’s companies were his pillar throughout the night, and as the room started to be more and more fill with unknown people. He was about to tell Martha he was going to go with the baby upstairs, Patsy didn’t seem to be having a very good time either, being the first time she stayed up so late, when Jen’s groan interrupted his attempt.

“Gosh, can you believe this?”

“What?” asked Martha, getting closer to where she was standing.

Jen pointed discreetly with her glass to some group of people that weren’t that far away from them, and so the only ones they could distinguish their words among the thousands of topics being discussed around them. To his not surprise, their mother Jane was there.

“Have any of you seen Mrs Knox tonight?” one man asked.

Jane shook her head quickly, pretending the question didn’t sting in her pride. “Nope. She decided to celebrate Christmas with her family. Now, she has a child”

“A child?” parroted a woman, dressed in bright green. “I don’t recall her being pregnant”

“She’s fostering him” explained another woman of the group, dressed all in purple and black.

Jane nodded. “From one of her cases… The couple, the Fulton, were charged of child abuse” she explained uninterested, swinging her glass slowly.

“The Fulton? God, who would’ve thought! I know them, and I even was about to do some business with them for next year” admitted the man, horrified at the news.

“Hm, one never knows who they’re collaborating with” concluded the woman in the purple dress, before taking another sip of her glass, surely ignoring the slight blush that was spreading on her cheeks.

“Why did she foster him, though?” the one in the green dress asked, confusedly. “If their allegations are true, with sending them to jail she had enough. Now she has to raise a child that’s not hers”

Jane huffed, non-comical. “One thing is to win a case and another one is to involve yourself in charity. She doesn’t know what to do to gain more applause”

Martha frowned and pressed her lips at the remark, Jen was seething from spot, and Thomas thanked whatever God that might be up there for making her behave in front of all those people. There was no need to make a scene, the situation was uncomfortable enough. He couldn’t help but frown in compassion for the kid those people (of which their own mother was part of) were badmouthing about. He could hope the poor soul could choose some other career to practise that wasn’t Laws, or they’d eat him alive.

“I can’t believe that woman shares my blood” commented Jen, before drinking her whole glass of
wine in one single gulp. “If this were a fucking family dinner, she’d know who I am”

“We all know already, calm down” advised Thomas, frowning at her taking his glass away from him and drinking the whole thing as well.

“Thomas is right” supported Martha, cocking an eyebrow at the enraged behaviour of her sister-in-law. “There’s no need to make a scene, as disgusting as their words are. They’re not worthy”

Who would have thought Martha would forget about her own advice not three minutes later?

Though, to be completely honest, Thomas couldn’t blame her and shared her fury once Jane came to them, with that practised fake smile she plastered on her face whenever she wanted to look good in front of people, arms stretched out as she said flattery things to their daughter.

Daughter she hadn’t seen in that whole week for more than one hour in total. The daughter she didn’t want to see when she called Thomas to her office the day they arrived to tell him she’d be having a party and she wanted him to behave.

Thomas and Martha stood to the side, the parents of the baby forgotten as the grandmother took Patsy in her arms, showing her to her guests. Lucy didn’t hesitate in taking part of it at one point, but got bored quite easily when she wasn’t the full centre of attention and let Jane do. Thomas had to stand to see his one-year-old daughter being displayed as a simple piece of expensive art. And the worst part was that he didn’t find within himself the needed strength to go there, take his daughter and wife and leave the house for never returning.

When Jane gave him instructions about how he’d have to behave at the party (basically: try not to call the attention, you’ve embarrassed us enough), Thomas felt like a little boy again; a tiny muppet at the mercy of a cruel child that played rudely; a half-done canvas full of scratched mistakes, unable to fulfil the high expectations of its artist.

Thomas put a hand on the table by his side, feeling his head turning in circles and the walls hovering over him. The air was trapped in his throat and, before he could call the attention of his angry wife or his shocked sister, he slinked off the living room and sprinted upstairs, going automatically to his bedroom, closing the door behind him with a thump. He didn’t care about making noise now.

He let himself fall on his mattress, feeling his whole body shaking from impotence and his head pounding from contained rage. Breathe, he instructed himself, in and out, Thomas. In and out. Uno, dos, tres, inhale… Cuatro, cinco, seis, exhale…
It worked when he was little and Consuelo had to come to his aid because ‘his mother was too busy working’. Or even when he was in college. Even that day when he fucked everything up and had to tell his mother he wanted to drop out and study anything but Laws.

But that night it did not.

Of course. The best of luck always reserved just for him.

His breathing turned erratic, shallow and quick; his hands turned into ice; his body trembled despite being sweating and his head was hurting more than ever with all the screams he fought to drown along with tears. If he cried tonight, he’d reach another level of being pathetic.

“Hello?” someone said, knocking on the door twice.

Well, maybe being seen by some of his mother’s guests as he tried to contain his sobs and keep his composure was even worse. Thomas tried to keep his breathing as steady as he could and wait for the stranger to go away, but again, fortune hated him.

The door opened slowly, his mother’s new accountant showing at the hallway. Well, better than one of Jane’s stuck-up friends or any of her siblings that weren’t Jen, that was sure. But still, Mr Madison would only make his anxiety worse than better if he tried to help, Thomas was feeling his chest heavier and his throat more constricted by the man’s presence.

“Are you alright?” asked the younger man, entering the room.

Ideal. Well, at least he had the decency to close the door to keep this as private as possible.

“Sir?” Madison insisted, more urgently. “Are you feeling alright?”

“Of course. It’s just that when I’m having a great time I come to hyperventilate in my bedroom” he spat, taking his frustrations out on Madison.

The man narrowed his eyes. “Well, I see sarcasm is hereditary”

“Just…” Thomas took in an unsteady breath. “Just leave me alone. I don’t need help”

“I’m not leaving, you can barely breathe” said Madison, impressed at his petition. He took a cautious step forward. “Can I touch you?”
“No” breathed out Thomas, rapidly.

“Alright” Madison bit his bottom lip, as anxiously as Thomas seemed to be feeling. Why was he worrying that much?

“I’m fine” he repeated, moving unconsciously to the other end of the bed, wanting to be as far away as possible. “Go back to the party, I’ll be fine”

“Well, I’m not very thrilled with the idea of going back there” admitted the accountant.

Thomas, despite the odd situation, found himself giving the man a weak laugh. “Well, that’d make two of us”

Something flashed through Madison’s eyes, then, and understanding adorned his features.

“Do you suffer from social anxiety?” he asked, strangely straight to the point. When he received no response, he smiled softly. “It’s alright, I have a bit of experience. Maybe more than I’d want to have” he admitted, his smile flattering a bit.

Thomas felt his muscles relaxing a bit. The guy seemed sincere enough, and that put him at ease. Yet, the (ir)rational part of his brain warned him to go warily. For experience, just because someone shared his anxiety meant their intentions were good.

“Listen, I think I can help you” talked Madison, his voice grounding him somehow. No, no, be cautious, Thomas kept warning himself inside his head. “Just, let me…”

He saw Madison looking for something in his pockets, and he took one wrinkled paper that he unfolded, trying to read something written on it. Thomas cocked one eyebrow.

“Are you seriously…?” He took in a breath. Gosh, since when his bedroom lacked so much oxygen? “Are you seriously going to help me by reading some paper…” Another inhalation. “…as if I were a furniture that needs instructions?”

Madison half-closed his eyes. “Well, excuse me, good sir, I forgot to memorize this for the surprise test”

“And now who’s being sarcastic?”

Thomas tried to take two deep breaths, but he failed each attempt. His anxiety grew even more before that, and he could feel his heartbeat in his ears now, his whole body tensed. In for a penny, in for a pound, he concluded.
“What do I do?” he asked, trying not to sound desperate (he’d made a fool of himself enough for one night), but his shaking voice betrayed him.

Madison blushed slightly as he looked at his paper. “See, something very curious happened...” he started, coughing nervously. “…and it turns out I can’t understand my own handwriting”

“Sweet Lord, Mr Madison, you truly are the hero everyone expects...”

Madison seemed surprised when he heard his name coming out from his mouth, but he returned to be worried when Thomas threw a groan of complain and frustration at his third failed attempt to take a deep breath. The counting in his head became erratic as well, and he didn’t remember the numbers orders both in Spanish or English.

He went out his troubled mind when he felt Madison putting his hand on the top of his, a bit hesitant.

“Mr Jefferson?” he called. “Can you hear me?”

He nodded, avoiding eye contact at all costs.

“Try to follow my instructions, alright? Focus on my voice only”

Thomas, without truly knowing why, gave him another nod.

“Good. Breathe in. That’s it. Now, breathe out. Breathe in... Out... You’re doing great. Can you tell me five things you can see, sir?”

Thomas was a bit surprised for the question, but did as he was told. “You, the window, the nightstand, the lamp on it and my desk over there”

“Okay. Four things you can...?” Madison thought for a moment. “That you can touch?”

“Your hand, my bed, the headboard and part of the wall?” he answered the last two a bit unconvinced.

“Alright” encouraged Madison. “Three things you can hear?”

“Your voice, my voice and the vultures from downstairs”
That made Madison laugh, and Thomas found himself following along. He was starting to realise his breathing had come back to almost normal and that his mind was focusing on something else that weren’t his worries or fears. He allowed himself to relax and give a tiny bit of trust to his mother’s accountant.

“Now, two things you can... taste” Madison kept saying, this time a bit more hesitantly.

“The wine I was drinking before... and nothing else I guess”

“I think I got the two last ones mixed up” confessed the man.

Thomas laughed more whole-heartedly than before. “You’re one of a kind, Mr Madison”

“You must be the first one to tell me that in a good acceptation” he commented. “How are you feeling?”

“Better” admitted Thomas. “Whatever you did, worked. Though the end was not as good” he tried to joke.

Luckily, the man caught on with quite ease. “What does that mean? That I’ll only get a B?”

Thomas laughed once again. “B-”

“How strict” teased Madison, rolling his eyes. He got up from the bed. “Do you want me to leave?” he asked.

“No, no, just... Can you stay here and go back with me?” he asked, finding himself oddly comfortable enough.

Madison shrugged. “Sure”

By the time Thomas thought to be stable enough to go back down, both men were glad to see the first floor was almost empty except from the closest persons Jane had invited. He was glad to see Martha holding their baby, now fast asleep against her mother’s chest. His wife still had the same deadly glare each time she looked at her mother-in-law, but she was calmer than last time.

“Your daughter’s adorable” Madison complimented, sounding very sincere.

“Yeah...” he said, feeling mentally and physically exhausted after the incident.

“Right now, she’s also my spirit animal” he added, after a yawn.

Guilt built up inside Thomas’ chest. He had to thank the man for all the trouble he’d caused
him without any need. Before he could, Jen spotted him and strode without a second thought to the staircase.

“You found him!” she said cheerfully to Madison. “Thanks, Jemmy-James!”

“I told you not to… You know what? I’m too tired for this discussion, remind me to remind you tomorrow”

“Never” swore Jen, with a playful blink. Turning her attention to her brother, she asked, more concerned. “Tommy, what happened? Are you alright?”

Again, Thomas didn’t have the time to answer, or to try to make a poor excuse his sister would rapidly dismiss before she demanded sincerity from him. The front door closed and their mother made her way to them. Thomas saw Martha walking closer to the small group, her chin up as a sign that easily read ‘Try to tell something to my husband to see how this party could go to hell at last hour’.

“Well, look who finally decided to show up” Jane commented, with venom. “Thomas, when I told you I wanted you to be discreet, I didn’t mean for you to literally disappear”

“I know, Mum” answered Thomas, throwing a warning glare to his wife and holding his sister’s wrist, both seething from their spots.

“You don’t seem to” argued Jane, frowning disapprovingly. “Where were you? What were you doing instead of being here as I asked you?”

“It was my fault” Madison said, without hesitation and surprising the whole group. “I was not feeling well and your son helped me out” he made up.

Thomas cocked one eyebrow. If the man got tired of being an accountant at some point, he’d have a bright future as a lawyer. Still, his stomach made knots of anxiety when he realised Madison was lying for him. Again, with no need or gain in doing so.

Jane recovered from the shared shock first, her stern face coming back.

“Well, Mr Madison, next time ask for somebody else to help you. Like one of my personnel. They get paid for something, you know?” admonished Jane. “Try not to get my son in between your problems again. Your family sent you here to be my accountant, not to make friends”

“C’mon, Mum, the guy was being a guest tonight as everybody else” Jen defended her friend. Thomas could sense her bother deep down her jocose tone. “He wasn’t working”

“I think” Martha talked as soon as she saw her mother-in-law opening her mouth. “That the night’s been long and tedious for us all, and we should go to bed. Tomorrow’s Christmas, anyways”
Thomas swallowed nervously at the exchange of hateful glares between his wife and mother. 
He could only hope Martha had been able to hold her tongue while he was gone, but as she was left 
with only Jen as her self-control... Damn, Martha...

“Alright. I’ll go bid farewell to the few guests that are left” informed Jane, her voice hoarse, like 
when she was really angry but couldn’t show it for the appearances. “Goodnight, everyone”

She turned around, not expecting an answer. Jen laughed against her hand.

“Gosh, you can almost literally see the smoke coming out from her ears” she joked.

Martha relaxed at her attitude. “You’ve drunk too much” she concluded. “Come on, Dionysa, let’s 
get you to bed”

“Huh, take me to dinner first”

Martha rolled her eyes and pushed her with her free hand. “Your brother beat you to that”

“See you in a bit” said Thomas, kissing his wife on the cheek.

“Don’t be late” whispered Maratha, before passing to drag her sister-in-law upstairs.

“Mr Madison” he called, before the man could get out of the house. “You didn’t have to do what 
you did earlier”

Madison gave him another shrug as a response. “It’s nothing”

“Thank you” Thomas managed to say.

“You’re welcome, Mr Jefferson”

“Thomas” he corrected.

“James, then” retorted the man, before nodding as a farewell and then exited the house.

If Thomas was going to find this kind of people every time he went to a party, he wouldn’t 
mind trying it out more often.

When Hamilton asked Thomas to switch drivers, he wanted to refuse, but his lack of sleep 
won over his most cautious side. It wasn’t like Gilbert had told him stories about Hamilton as a driver
(he had) or that Thomas feared the caffeine addict gremlin could do something to his car (he did), it was just like he never liked to be on the passenger seat while another person he didn’t trust completely was driving.

He really should’ve slept as James’d advised him to do.

Or simply go by himself and make as many stops as he wanted. It wasn’t like Thomas was dying to see his siblings or assist to that party to commemorate his mother’s acts.

“Now, turn right” instructed Thomas. He gestured with his hand. “Over there”

“Yes, I passed kindergarten. I know that much” said Hamilton, turning the wheel on the correct direction in the meantime.

Thomas decided to let it slide. They’d have the rest of the day and way back to argue. “And keep going straight” he ordered, putting his head against the window.

“They could’ve sent you a cab or limo or whatever if they really wanted you there for one single night” complained Alexander.

“Hm, you’re asking for too much” huffed Thomas, also bothered by his sister’s attitude. “There’s the house” he indicated. “You’ll be able to run around and jump freely”

“That light blue house over there?” asked Hamilton, ignoring the taunt.

Thomas frowned slightly, seeing what his workmate was referring to. “No, no, that’s the storeroom” he clarified. “The house is the white one”

Alexander felt a lump in his throat when he saw the huge house (or was it a mansion? When one was supposed to change the term?) a few meters away from the light blue storeroom he’d mistaken it with, and that now seemed so insignificant that Alexander felt like an idiot for his confusion.

Though now Thomas was having financial struggles, he came from old money, he was used to luxury and had lived in a world completely different from the one Alexander knew until he met the Knox. And even then, Lu and Henry were still humble enough and never showed off their fortune with… that…

“That’s Monticello?” he asked.

“No, that’s Shadwell” explained Thomas, again. “That’s where I grew up”

“Huh, guess one could become a very expert player of hide and seek in there” joked Alexander.
“I guess. I’m surprised Lucy’s going to throw the party there, when she could do it at Monticello, which is bigger and now that’s hers” commented Thomas, with a bit of resentfulness in his tone.

Ah, there’s something that’s bigger than this… Thought Alexander, feeling suddenly dizzy. “She inherited it?” he asked, trying to keep the conversation as casual as possible.

“She purchased it when I lost it” explained the older, and now the bother in his voice was almost palpable.

Alexander remembered the conversation he had with the man’s daughters, back in December. Patsy complained about Lucy taking advantage of her brother’s situation and especially about her refusing to give them Thomas’ wife’s piano back.

Alexander curved his lips when he found himself almost sympathising with Thomas. The story had touched him in its day, having lost the books his mother had given to him before passing away because of those assholes that had fostered him when he arrived to America. Alexander swallowed the bitter taste the memory caused him and tried to push whatever empathy he was feeling back to the darkest corners of his heart.

Gosh, how much he wished he was doing this while he was still a cold-hearted dick. It’d been so much easier. Especially because, maybe, he would’ve refused to come at all, past promises be damned.

He parked outside the fence that surrounded the house, not wanting to ask for more directions or fearing they’d have to press some intercom and bring the familiar tension his client was going to live under forwards. Jefferson didn’t say anything about it, maybe, for once, agreeing with him and wanting to avoid any interaction until it was strictly necessary.

They made their way inside. Alexander thanked that obsession Jefferson had over being organised even with the littlest things and that allowed him to still possess the key that opened and locked the fence. As they approached the house, Alexander felt his anxiety growing. And he hated himself for it. It had been fifteen years ago when the Fulton brought him to their fancy and huge house (what young Alexander thought to be huge, after his life back at the Caribbean, now he was starting to doubt the image definition he had for the word). Fifteen years since he felt so little, since he was reminded on a daily basis how little he truly was, since he felt unworthy of walking on some gravel or floor in case he made their price to lower, since he felt like an invader inside of a world he never finish to catch or understand, since it had become a habit for his internal world to be destroyed a bit more each day.

Alexander shook his head when they reached the front door, wanting to erase all those thoughts from his mind. It was not the moment for this. It was never the moment for this. He was over all that, it happened a lot of time ago, he wasn’t that kid anymore. He’d achieved great things by his own will and efforts and hard work. He’d proven all those who doubted him wrong.
For a few years, at least…

The door swung open before Alexander could have the chance to sink into self-hatred for how he’d messed his whole life up. Thankfully. A young girl with light brown skin and black hair tied in a low bun appeared at the other side. Her honey-coloured eyes scrutinized them as Alex did the same with her, seeing her clothes consisted in a long dark blue dress with a white apron that covered great part of her skirt and combined with her shoes.

“You must be the mistress’ brother, master Thomas?” she asked, timidly. The title made Alexander cringe a noticeably bit.

“Just Thomas, please” said the man, rapidly.

“Alright” she nodded, respectfully. “Who is your companion, sir?” she questioned, looking at the immigrant with a polite smile.

“Alexander Hamilton, he’s… a workmate” wavered Thomas.

“It’s a pleasure” said Alexander, stretching his hand.

The girl took it, a bit surprised. “Same” she replied, taking a step aside. “Please, come in. The mistress is busy right now, but miss Anna’s in her bedroom and master Randolph, in the den”

“A very united family” commented Alexander, taking in the sight in front of him.

Thomas gave him a look of disdain. “Thank you, um… Your name, please?”

“Libby, sir” answered the girl. “Does the sir want me to take his suitcase to his bedroom?” she asked, pointing at the luggage Thomas was holding.

“Yes” he nodded, passing the heavy suitcase to the girl, who struggled a bit. “Thank you, Libby. You’re excused”

The girl gave them a curtsey, as best as she could, and was about to give them some privacy, when she turned around. “Would the sir like something to drink?” she asked.

“I’m fine, thank you” replied Thomas.

“And you Mr. Hamilton?”

“Nothing, dear. And call me just Alexander” he let her know, starting to feel uncomfortable with her forced tone of voice and posture.

“As you wish. If you need anything, call me” she automatically offered, before disappearing through a door.

Alexander waited until the girl was gone for good to throw the comment. “Will I have to bow before entering or exiting some room, Mr Jefferson?”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Shut up, you’re supposed to talk to them like that” he said, as if that was a
Alex huffed sarcastically. “I’ll remember that next time I ask something for you, secretary” he spat. “I should’ve asked the poor girl for a brandy, I won’t be able to survive this hell sober” he commented, turning on his heels and coming in the first opened door he saw. “Jackass” he muttered, feeling his blood boiling. It easily cooled down when he saw a man lying on the couch in pyjamas and drinking directly from a bottle of whiskey. “Huh, what was that old saying? In all families there has to be a priest, a gay and a drunkard?” he asked, jocosely.

Thomas, who’d followed him (surely for making sure he didn’t do something else while being in his sister’s house) frowned at the man. “More than ten years without seeing one another, and the first sight I have of you is this one” he scolded.

The man turned his head as best as he could without moving too much. “Oh, look who it is. The prodigal son” He returned his eyes to the TV. “Wasn’t expecting you to come, to be honest”

“I wasn’t expecting it either” admitted Thomas.

“Where’s Madison? Sick again?”

And if there was a slight mock in the question, both men did their best to let it slide.

“He’s back at home with my daughters”

“Huh…”

“Your nieces” emphasised Thomas.

“Hm”

“Well, Jefferson, I finally know where your training for standing Adams comes from” joked Alexander, laughing half-heartedly.

“Wish Adams had come instead” lamented the man. “He was way funnier”

“Well, Randolph, life’s that sad. I wish I had a brother who would at least get up to greet me instead of keep drinking his life away on the couch”

“With that lovely attitude of yours, I can’t blame him” commented Alexander, for the sole sake of teasing.

“He takes all that after Mum” explained Randolph, ignoring the daggers Thomas threw his way. “All the fucking day whining and lecturing people about their faults, ignoring hers” He took the bottle to his lips, as he mumbled. “Fucking waste of a life”

Thomas strode to the place, took the bottle away from his brother’s hand and frowned down at him.
“Give me that. Wouldn’t want you to slip those pretty things tonight during the party”

“What party?” asked Randolph, angry at the intrusion.

“The one Lucy told me about, the one for Mum” replied Thomas, having a bad feeling about the whole thing.

“That shit is not for tonight, it’s tomorrow”

“Pardon?”

“It’s tomorrow” repeated Randolph, slowly. Thomas contained a sharp response for both him and Alexander, who was containing his childish laughter at the doorframe. “Today’s just the mass”

Thomas’ cheeks grew redder at the explanation.

“Excuse me” he said, to both men, as he stormed out of the room.

Alexander couldn’t contain himself. “And the curtsey?”

Thomas looked at him over his shoulder, opened and closed his mouth several times, but then decided against it and made his way upstairs, cursing under his breath.

“He’s bitter” commented the brother, taking a flask out from under the cushions and taking a sip.

“Yep” agreed Alexander.

Lafayette looked in awe at his boyfriend as he made his way into the kitchen, fully dressed and prepared to get out.

“Well, Herc, finally you beat me at being prepared!” he teased, clearly happy. Lafayette hated being late to things, and his boyfriend had the ‘be-late-syndrome’, so he was glad to know today they’d be having a peaceful evening since beginning to end. “Though, Maria’s birthday party isn’t until six!”

Herc frowned in confusion as he took a bit of paper. “Uh?” He looked at himself and then waved one hand. “Aah, noo. I’m just going to take Freddy for a walk before leaving, so he’s at ease while we’re gone”

Laf arched one eyebrow. “Didn’t Johnny take the dog with him?”
“Doesn’t seem like it”

“Huh, this man… I’ll make sure to call him, so he can take him…”

Hercules whirled around, interrupting his boyfriend’s talk. “Why would he have to take the dog with him?” he asked, genuinely distressed at the thought.

Laf was taken aback at first. He blinked a couple of times. “Mmh… I don’t know, I was just supposing…”

“He’ll call him so he can take the dog, he said” commented Hercules, between dumbfounded and offended. “So he can take the dog with him, he said!” he repeated, indicating the pet to follow him. The dog obeyed and trotted to the entrance, thrilled for his walk. “Call him so he can take the dog with him, he said” he repeated once again, as if he couldn’t believe it, while he got the dog on his leash. “I flip out with this guy” he concluded, closing the front door.

Lafayette was left there, alone in the kitchen, with a shocked expression that slowly turned into one of understanding. He drank the rest of his coffee leisurely and narrowing his eyes in suspicion.

As usual, they were late to the place because Hercules decided at last hour he didn’t like the shirt he was wearing and spent almost twenty minutes deliberating between two that were awfully similar (for Lafayette, at least). All that so he ended up going out with the same one he was wearing.

Lafayette sometimes wondered how big his patience truly was and how much was left of it.

The Schuyler sisters went to pick them up. With Angelica sending them text after text of impatience, Eliza being more moderate and Peggy simply sending memes so no one killed anyone that night. Maria simply sent them a thump up emoji, clearly used to this. Lafayette, deep down, suspected the girl knew they were going to be late and she was still back at her house, getting ready.

“Well, about time!” said Angelica, with a frown, from the passenger seat. “Did you forget how to use the elevator or something?”

“Angelica, don’t be mean” admonished Eliza, tapping one finger on the wheel.

“Sorry, sorry, we lost track of time” excused Hercules, opening the back door for Lafayette to get in first.

Angelica rolled her eyes. “I’m gonna buy a book of excuses if you refuse to change your habit of being late”
“Come on, we’re going to a party” Eliza tried to stop the quarrel as she drove away from the building.

“Yes, party night, party night!” celebrated Peggy.

“She’s spent the whole day sleeping. Be prepared for her being more annoying than usual” said Angelica.

“Jesus, Angel, what’s wrong with you today? Are you in those days of the month?” asked Hercules, receiving a nudge of reprehension from his boyfriend.

“Look, Hercules, I don’t turn around and smash you in the face simply because I’m on my period for real” admitted Angelica, on the quiet and blushing slightly.

“Peggy, remember you must not drink tonight” said Lafayette, sounding like a father.

Peggy gave him a bored look. “Yeeees, I knooow”

“I brought her boxes of juice” added Eliza.

“It doesn’t matter how many years will pass, Peggy will always be the child of the group” laughed Hercules.

“Yes, and because of that you must love me, pamper me and overlook me a lot of things”

“Huh, and she was stupid when we bought her*” Angelica told her sister, who giggled slightly.

“Hey, where’s John?” asked Eliza, suddenly.

“True, he didn’t come to work today” added Angelica. “Is he sick?”

“He must be if he doesn’t want to go out” chimed in Peggy.

“No, no, he just moved” answered Lafayette.

The three sisters were in complete silence for almost a minute, the only sound being the motor of the car. Then, they talked at the same time.

“Holy fuck! Why didn’t you say so?” asked Angelica, as if she’d just been told the true meaning of life.

“It’s your duty as our friends to tell us all strange occurrences that happen to you!” said Peggy, almost sounding hurt.

“I’m gonna write this day on the calendar” joked Eliza.

“Huh, yes, so we can literal tell how many days he’ll last” laughed Hercules.

Lafayette frowned at him. “Stop picking on the poor guy. That’s why he left!”

“No, no, he left for being a selfish pig”

“What happened?” asked Angelica, now completely turned around.
“He took one bag of chips Herc likes and left it there opened, all night, in his bedroom” explained Lafayette, with normality.

The sisters were silent once again, this time exchanging glares. Eventually, Peggy shook her head as she laughed.

“Fuck, in the end, Alexander’s gonna be the sanest man in this group” she looked at the two partners. “Do you realise how sad that is?”

Neither Hercules or Lafayette found it within themselves to respond.

Maria waved at them when they appeared at the doors of the restaurant. Laurens and Aaron were already there, chatting with her lively.

“Here you are. They didn’t let us pass unless we were all in here” she explained, as they were guided to their reserved table.

“Hey, Mari, did you do something with your hair?” asked Peggy, taking a seat in between her and Eliza.

She blushed slightly. “Yes! Alex gave me money as a present, and I spent it on the hair salon. I’ve been wanting to get blonde highlights since forever!”

“They look gorgeous on you!” complimented Eliza.

“Thanks”

“Hey, Mari, didn’t you invite Madison?” asked Angelica, reading the menu. “Thought you two were close now”

“I did, but he couldn’t come in the end. He has to take care of Jefferson’s daughters” she excused her friend. “Besides, Jemmy’s not much of a party-guy, and I respect that”

“Ah, true, Thomas had to go see his family back at Virginia” chimed in Lafayette, nodding.

“Yep, Alexander went with him” said Eliza.

“Really?” asked the Frenchman, not bothering in concealing his surprise. “Well, let’s see if the trip serves them to fix their differences”

“Isn’t that a lost war by now?” asked Hercules.
“It’s what Aaron says” added Maria, pointing at the lawyer. “They’re just two goats or rams or whatever butting each other’s heads”

Angelica laughed loudly at that. “Oh, God, it’s true. You outdid yourself that day, Burr!” she complimented.

“Don’t think so” denied Lafayette. “Thomas has come to me, asking me what he should do for Alex to forgive him”

“Really?” asked Eliza, surprised. “And what did you tell him?”

“I advised him to pray, because you know how proudful and stubborn Alex is”

“Too well, sadly” nodded Eliza, with resignation. “And what did Jefferson say?”

“That that was way too much work for someone like Alexander”

“Only one will return for that trip” commented Angelica, darkly.

“Hey, and what about Theo?” asked Eliza.

“She has to help Augustine with the whole school stuff” answered Aaron, discreetly.

“Still?”

“Turns out the kid wasn’t doing that good back at the boarding school as her ex claimed…”

“Poor woman” Maria shook her head. “I’m very glad she found someone else to spend her life with”

“Talking about partners” said Peggy, with an imp smile. “Jackie, some bird told me you moved with your new boyfriend. How is it like to finally be an independent man at the age of 32?”

Laurens gave her an annoyed look. “And what’s like that a dog is a better matchmaker than you?”

“Be careful with all that salt, man…” said Maria.

“Johnny, is everything alright?” asked Lafayette, with worry.

“Perfect” said Laurens, nodding exaggeratedly. “He’s a nice guy, with temper when needed, with strong convictions and beliefs… If he weren’t married and had any children, he’d be my perfect match”

The whole table had its eyes on him, then. Hercules and Peggy burst out laughing, breaking the tension. The man with humour and the girl, cruelly.

“Hahaha, and now? Who’s a better matchmaker than me?” she rubbed in the freckled man’s face.

“Well, the guy’s just married. Yours tried to kill him” Angelica reminded her sister.

“And us” added Lafayette.

“You know what? I don’t have to stand this. I’ll eat and drink in silence and I’ll only talk with Maria. She’s the only decent human being in here” spat Peggy, sticking her nose in the menu.
“And me?” asked Aaron.
“You don’t talk in general”

“People, this is my birthday party, not a meeting. Go be bitter somewhere else” said Maria, with tedium.

Hercules had stopped laughing then. “Fuck, John, someone could make a TV series out of your life and they’d never run out of ideas”

“But is he married to a man or to a woman?” asked Eliza, clearly lost.

“Why does that matter?” asked Angelica.

“If it’s a man, he can compete” explained the middle Schuyler sister. “That’s why I didn’t do anything when Alex and John were dating. If it’d been a woman, well…”

“It’s a man” answered John, quite sharply. “And thank you for that exhibition of humanity”

“Thank that to your weenie” said Angelica.

“Jesus, if she’s like this sober, God have mercy on us when she starts drinking” observed Maria.

“And the kids?” kept questioning Eliza.

“Well, kids… That girl is about my age… She’s the husband’s, he was married to a woman before”

“Laurens, how do you always get in between those soap operas?” asked Aaron.

“That fucker for sure dedicated me a black candle” he accused, pointing at Hercules.

“Yes, I have no better things to do” spat the man.

“Well, that’s not so bad” said Maria, trying to cheer her friend up. “If she were little, she could resent you. But she’s an adult and with her own life”

“She hates me” said Laurens, feeling down. “Fuck, the daughter already threatened me about coming for me if her parents divorce”

“If Alex cheated on me, I’d divorce without a second thought” said Eliza.

“And that if he’s lucky” chimed in Peggy. “If she found out in a bad day, she’d capable of burning the whole house down”

Eliza looked at her, bothered. “Weren’t you going to ignore us?”

“I’m not talking to you, I was speaking my mind”

“Hey, Aaron” said Laurens, turning to the man. “You once broke a family. How did you get to live with yourself and get the child not wanting to kill you for ruining his parents’ marriage?”

Aaron frowned and slammed his hands on the table. “She was unhappy, alright?!” he spat, before getting up and running to the nearest restroom.

“Jesus, how sensitive for being a home-wrecker” said Laurens, rolling his eyes.

Hercules shook his head in disapproval. “See how he deserves no good luck?”
Eliza’s phone rang loudly, startling the woman. Nervously, she took it out, biting her bottom lip.

“Shoot, I shouldn’t have called with my own phone” she reprehended herself, as she ignored the call and turned off her phone.

“Who was it?” asked Angelica, narrowing her eyes in suspicion.

“Hm? Nobody” said Eliza, giggling nervously and fidgeting in her seat.

“And why did you turn off your phone?”

“Because I don’t want distractions tonight”

“What if Dad calls you because he has trouble with your children? Or something happens to Alexander?”

“What are you? The witch of the bad fortune or what?” asked Eliza, strangely defensive.

“And what are you? A fugitive from the law?” said Peggy. “You also act very odd whenever the phone rings back at home”

“Peggy, choose the children’s menu you like the most and hush” she ordered.

“Eliza, can you accompany me to the restroom?” asked Angelica, getting up, showing she wasn’t going to take ‘no’ for an answer.

“Em… I still haven’t…”

“Come”

And with only that as a warning, she took her sister’s arm and make her to get up and dragged her to the women’s restroom. She locked the door.

“You shouldn’t do that in a public area” said Eliza, wanting to postpone the discussion.

“They’re gonna hit me up for my several bottles of wine tonight. I’ll do whatever I want” said Angelica, crossing both arms upon her chest.

“Several?” echoed Eliza.

“That’s not important now”

“It has to be at some point…”

“What’s important is that both Alex and now Peggy have been telling me that you’ve been acting strange lately”

“No, I have not” denied Eliza, uselessly.
“Betsey, I’m your sister. Both you and Peggy can tell me anything, you know that, right?” she said, sounding gentler.

Eliza fidgeted in spot. “If I tell you, do you promise not to tell a soul until I do first?” she asked, eventually.

“Of course I won’t tell! Who do you think I am?”

“The woman who uploaded that video of Peggy face-falling on the ice that time we went to skate last winter on her Twitter and Instagram”

“That was different. It was a funny family moment. Now it’s clear you’ve got something serious going on”

Eliza sighed. “I… I don’t want you to freak out because of it!” she warned.

“Nooo, nooo…”

“Alright, good. I… Hm… And I don’t want you to pressure me!” she kept instructing.

“Nooo, nooo…”

“You know I need my time”

“I dooo, I dooo…”

“Good… And I don’t want you to interrogate me day after day after day to see if I…”

“Damn it, Eliza, tell me already!” exploded Angelica.

“I’ve got a job offer” blurted out Eliza.

“You what?”

“I… Remember when I went to that organization, the foster home for children I talked to you about, with Dad, to leave some things from when we were little?”

“Aha?”

“Well, um… One of the girls working there told me they were looking for personnel, and, well, at first it all ended there. But then I came back once. Twice. Thrice… On one of those times it slipped out the fact that I’m a psychologist, and on another occasion I gave them my number and today I called with mine…” Eliza rambled, playing with her raven hair.

“Oh. My. God” interrupted Angelica, a smile spreading across her face.

Eliza looked up, knowing that tone. She saw her sister opening her mouth, clearly excited, with sparkly eyes and all, and inhaling exaggeratedly. Eliza held both hands up.

“Please, don’t freak out!” she pleaded.
Angelica fought against herself. She moved her hands rapidly and looked both right and left, trying to find something to muffle her internal scream of happiness. She snapped her fingers and took out her phone, as she gestured Eliza to look at hers.

Eliza turned on her own device and opened her chats, seeing Angelica was writing. The notification of new message sounded a few seconds later.

**Angel:**

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Eliza giggled at her sister’s idea. “I get it as a ‘I’m super happy for you’?”

“More than that!” said Angelica, enveloping her in a tight hug. “God, Betsey, it’s what you always wanted! You’re going to help people with the work of your dreams! And children, nothing more or less!”

“Well, I haven’t accepted yet” Eliza reminded her.

“You totally should!” advised Angelica. “They’ve got your number and are calling you because they know they can’t let you go!”

“I guess”

Angelica frowned at the subdued attitude of her sister. “What’s wrong?”

“I haven’t worked since I got pregnant with Philip” she admitted. “And that’s another thing, Angie still has one more year of kindergarten and John will only be one this year”

“Peggy barely comes to work, she’d barely go in her last months of pregnancy, and I also can take care of them. And your husband has a lot of accumulated days. And he himself said he was longing for his holiday month to arrive so he can work at home without having to see our faces!” Angelica resolved quickly.

“Yes, Alex…” Eliza said her husband’s name with a bit of fear.

It made something snap inside Angelica’s brain. “What about him?”

“I haven’t asked for his permission yet”
“You don’t have to. You only have to talk it out with him” she corrected.

“Yes, that… That won’t change the fact that I don’t know how he’d react”

“If he doesn’t support you, then his opinion’s not important” lectured Angelica. “Eliza, you’ve got the final say” She frowned again when she saw the doubtful demeanour of her sister. “And if he dares to get in your way or discourage you, just call me and I’ll gladly roast some ham for you”

Angelica was glad to hear the soft laugh of Eliza.

“Thanks, Angie”

“Whenever you need me, sis”

Chapter End Notes

Esmeralda: Character from the 1996 Disney animated film "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". She was the characterisation of justice and seek of equality in the movie. And I'm a total nerd for this movie, so, yes, I'll take every little chance to incorporate something from it in everything I write lol.

"Jen" Jane Jr. Jefferson: The oldest sibling and older sister to Thomas. I changed her year of death when I realised the dates would not go well with the story I made up, but didn't realise until now (I'm this clever xD); just telling because I think I made a mention about how many years Jane'd been dead in "Of frogs and scorpions".

*Vince was mentioned in "The fishing trip (P 2)/The hurricane".

*Cielo: In this context, it means "dear". Though it also means both Heaven and sky.

*There was no room for a pin: No cabía ni un alfiler. When someplace it's full to a brim.

*And she was stupid when we bought her (Y era tonta/tonto cuando la/lo compramos): Just a expression for when you think of someone not being very bright for the way they act, and then turned out to be very smart.
Chapter Summary

Laurens tries.
Character death.
Thomas and Hamilton are two hot-headed with sharp tongues.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour, anxiety attack, bad-parenting, narcissistic mother, emotional blackmail.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abuse is any behaviour that is interceded to control and subjugate another human being through the use of fear, humiliation and verbal or physical assaults

—Susan Forward.

January 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2000

Thomas remembered each time his mother had decided to ignore him for something bad that he’d done. Like that time when school called to inform his parents his standoffish behaviour towards his classmates was worrisome. Both teachers and Jane ignored the fact that his marks were the highest in the class. But they didn’t do the same when his marks began to drop considerably and he refused to explain what was wrong to his teachers (who more than asking, demanded him to open up in the middle of the whole class, exposing him like a strange animal) and they decided to pass the problem to his mother. Or that other time when she had to go to the hospital because he’d had a horrible panic attack in the middle of one of the expositions in the middle of his first year of college, and he admitted he wanted to drop out because Laws wasn’t for him.

All those misbehaves and disappointments were met with absolute and cold indifference and silence from his mother, who dedicated her days to pay attention to Lucy, the light of her life, or Anna, who was struggling in school, or Randolph, who didn’t show any true intention of wanting to do anything of value with his future.

But before Thomas had to face the punishment for his actions, he had to face the
embarrassment he had brought upon his parents. Or, well, now only his mother. The usual spot his father filled, in complete silence and disagreement, was now Lucy’s, who, unlike their father, stood beside Jane with a smug smile on her lips. That day, also Anna and Randolph were presents, though whatever they might be feeling towards their older brother was concealed by a mask of pure indifference and avoiding glares.

Consuelo and Jen, the only ones who would’ve given him emotional support with their presence, weren’t allowed to be there. Surely, his mother knew this as well and wanted to eliminate the possibility of him feeling any comfort during this confrontation.

Jane had asked him to bring Martha with him, but he refused. He didn’t want his girlfr… Wife to go through this. If Jane could decide who was allowed inside her workroom to embarrass her son, Thomas could do as much. This could be her house, but he was about to be 26. It was about time he had a say in some decisions.

His mother was far from happy with his (another) act of rebellion, but let it slide. Work was calling, and Thomas wasn’t as important. Besides, after so many let downs, this habit of telling her oldest son off had lost the funny part. And Thomas could sense it in his mother’s appearance. For only being 49, the truth was that Jane Jefferson seemed to be almost sixty. Consuelo, who shared her boss’ same age, seemed also a bit older, but at least she had the excuse of working without a break for his exhausting and demanding family. Jane hadn’t raised any of them, hadn’t played with any of them, hadn’t gone to any parents’ meetings at their school, hadn’t gone to talk with any of their teachers until they called first. She hadn’t cleaned any place of her own house, hadn’t driven anywhere by herself. The only thing she did was taking care of the company her husband left to her care when he passed away, and nothing more.

Apart from scolding Thomas and Jen endlessly.

And yet, she still had the nerve to start her reprimand with a:

“I’ve raised five children, and none of them ever seemed satisfied with all the attention I give them”

Thomas flinched, but remained silent. He was used to this, he could ignore most part of her speech, put up with Jane’s innate coldness and wait until another family reunion arouse, in which he would mess up again somehow and the whole circle would start again. It’d been his life, he was more than used to this. He could do this.

“Or so I think that’s the case. What other reason could a grown-up man have to do this to his mother in an important occasion than looking for attention?”
Thomas moved in his seat, fidgeting with his hands as a nervous habit. He could do this. He was used to this. He could do this.

“Do you even realise what you did to me yesterday?” asked Jane, growing more frustrated before his impassive face. “Do you even know why I’m angry?”

No, and I’m not interested in knowing, he wanted to respond, with the same venom, but Thomas knew best. He opted for his best ally, the silence.

Jane’s frown deepened. “You did not only disappear from the party I threw to try and make you meet someone who could help you with that disastrous life you insist on keeping” she scolded, hissing and gritting her teeth dangerously. “But you also did it to marry that… that…”

“Martha” Thomas talked for the first time, and his mother’s face grew redder at the intromission. He was not going to talk only when she wanted him to.

“With that woman” continued Jane, keeping the word she’d wanted to yell inside her brain. The only decent thing she’d done since the year started. “Behind my backs, behind your siblings’ backs, behind your whole family’s back!”

Thomas didn’t flinch this time as the volume of Jane’s voice became louder. The almost-said insult of before filling his mind completely. He was feeling his rage building up within, but try to drown it. He was used to this. He could do this.

“Is this the education I’ve given you?!” she questioned, feeling clearly powerless at his lack of self-defence.

“No” he replied, half-shrugging one shoulder. Because you did not educate any of us, he added, mentally.

“And a civil wedding, nothing more, nothing else” continued Jane, now with a hand on her forehead. “What have I done to deserve this? One daughter doesn’t wanna give me grandchildren or know anything about the family business, and the other one only listens to himself. Do you think this is fair to me? After all I’ve done and sacrificed for all of you?”

Thomas didn’t dignify so many lies with a response. Jane sighed when she saw she’d receive only silence.

“You’re going to null that marriage” she decided, and Thomas frowned at her. “If you truly want to marry that divorced woman*, that’s your business, I’m tired of fighting with you. You’re helpless
“I already…”

“Do not interrupt me” she cut him off, sharply, throwing a hateful glare in his direction. “You’re gonna do this right. Even if it’s just this” she swore, pointing at him with her pen.

“I already did it fine” said Thomas, shaking in his chair for nervousness. “I’m legally married, there’s nothing done wrong”

“It is for me” spat Jane, raising one eyebrow. “Do you really think marrying out of the church is not wrong? God have not…”

“I didn’t marry God or you” interrupted Thomas, raising his voice in annoyance. “I married Martha. She was fine with the way…”

“Of course she is” chimed in Lucy, rolling her eyes. “None of us were expecting less from her”

“What…”

“It is a miracle she didn’t come to you with a backpack… You’re such an idiot you’d have accepted a stranger’s kid as your own” commented Jane, with disdain.

“I…”

“She won’t go through that much trauma” added Lucy, with a smirk. “She’s already divorced once”

“She…”

“Maybe while we’re planning the wedding you’d realise she can do the same to you when you’re officially and rightfully married” said Jane, looking at Lucy with rapport.

“I…”

“Or maybe you know someone worthier” kept talking Jane, now conversationally. “Before you stormed out cowardly last night, I was about to introduce you to…”

He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t do this. Not anymore.

“I will not marry again!” exploded Thomas, in a yell. His siblings and mother’s jaws clicked shut. “Both Martha and I liked the intimate wedding we had, that’s the way we wanted it and that’s all that matter!”

Jane frowned darkly. “So, you’d rather please your wife than your mother?”

“I’d rather please myself! I think it’s about god damned time!” shouted Thomas, getting up from his seat, the chair falling to the floor from the vehemence of the act.

“Do not swear…”

“Yes, I’ll fucking swear! I will because I’m twenty-five, and my mother still thinks she can control
my life!” he argued.

“As long as you keep living off of me, you’ll follow my rules” Jane reminded him.

Thomas clicked his tongue. “Is that all you care about? Your money, your business?” he asked, with mockery.

Jane clenched her teeth in contained fury. “I fed you with this money, with this business! The least I ask for you and your siblings is to be thankful!”

“What’s being thankful to you?! To be submissive?!”

“Rules exist to keep a balance, Thomas. You’re old enough…”

“This is not balance, this is a dictatorship!” he accused. “Nobody can talk in here, nobody can do anything without asking for your permission first! You’re right, I’m old enough. Old enough to make my own decisions!”

“I’m your mother, I know what’s best!”

“Now you are because it suited well with your schedule” spat Thomas, resentfully.

Jane inhaled slowly through her nostrils. “Thomas, sit down and let’s talk…”

“No” he refused. “I’m sick of your monologues and that you call that ‘talk things out’. I’m married to the woman I love, we did it as we liked it and we won’t do a farce so you can keep the appearances”

“Thomas, I won’t accept that marriage” Jane warned.

“Too bad, because we won’t back down” he promised, solemnly. “I won’t do something I don’t believe in just to, to please you. You’re not the one I wanted to marry. And-And I won’t baptise any children I might have with Martha just to— To make you happy! Because, yes, I’d love to form a family with that woman” ranted Thomas, his voice shaking and breaking.

“I won’t accept any unbaptised children in my house” swore Jane, finally raising her voice as well, horrified with his words.

“That’s not a problem. Those would be our children, and we’d raise them. Because, unlike you, I want to raise my own children, not to leave them with a stranger!” he threw in his mother’s face, feeling his eyes stinging. He blinked the tears of impotence away. He wasn’t going to cry. That’d be ammunition to be used against him later.

“You’re an ungrateful brat” defined Jane, stone-faced. “When you become a father, you’ll remember me”

“Yes, to know what I don’t have to do” blurted out Thomas, before he could contain himself. He turned around, more than ready to leave.

“We’re not done yet, Thomas!” screamed Jane. “You can’t speak that way to your mother and then leave!”

“Watch me” he replied, childishly, swinging the door open.

“Step out of this room and you’re disinherited”
Thomas froze at the doorframe, the place sinking into tensed silence. He’d been living off the family money his whole life, he’d experienced a very satisfactory life despite not being working himself, just studying and reading his life away. Though he hated to admit it, Thomas was as used to luxury and comfort as his siblings. He never imagined himself living poorly or scraping by. The thought of it made him hesitate.

A part of him didn’t want to abandon the life he’d known since he was born, he didn’t want to try and live like anyone else. A part of him loved his life-style, his care-free days. A part of him hated the fact that his siblings would be given something when their mother leave the world and he’d be left with nothing after all he’d gone through. It was very unfair.

Then, there was the other part of him. The part that found peace, comfort and warm in Martha’s embrace, smile and good-hearted nature. The part that reminded him how his self-esteem had gone better thanks to her constant and never-ending cheers. The part of him that reminded him how she had wiped away his tears and respected when he didn’t want to be touched or talked to. The part that reminded him how she didn’t understand why sometimes he didn’t want or wasn’t able to talk and still stood by his side, not asking questions, just being there.

He didn’t want to imagine a life without all the comfort and luxury he’d grown up surrounded by.

He couldn’t imagine a life without Martha’s presence in it.

The choice was tough, but she made it easier, and that made her worthy.

“You can keep all your money. It’s all yours, anyways” spoke Thomas in a serene tone, no hesitation or doubt, looking over his shoulder.

Jane seemed to falter a bit at the unexpected response. “What do you think you’d do with your life, then? Where would you go?”

“We’d buy a house in Monticello and figure it out. Martha’s father is as supportive as she is”

“And then what? You’d spend the rest of your days living off of your political family?” asked Jane.

“I’ll look for a job. Something that not everyone in this house know what it is” he said, throwing a glare to his siblings. Lucy was seething, while the twins kept avoiding his glare.

Jane laughed, mockingly. “What will you do for a living?”

“I’ll look for something. I’ve got my own resources” he said, proudful.
“You won’t last a week” kept commenting Jane, discouraging, as Thomas finally made his way out of her workroom. “You come where you come from and you are who you are, you can’t change that, like it or not. And you’ll always share this blood.”

Thomas closed with a thump, his whole body shaking from impotence and doubts, the words of his mother resounding inside his brain, persistently.

“You’re leaving” he deadpanned, taking her hand reassuringly.

Martha didn’t comment, just let him do. Thomas was thankful for her. He’d always be. He didn’t need money or a legacy to keep. He was going to create a family and he’d be finally happy, with Martha and his children by his side.

He was not his mother. He refused to believe that.

Everything will be fine that way. It had to be.

“You never mentioned a mass going on”

Alexander could hear Thomas complaints from the other side of the door. He’d asked Libby where ‘the mistress’ was and she responded as respectfully as she was expected. It was almost disgusting the plastic formality the poor girl was performing. Alexander didn’t think he’d be able to stand that for more than a whole day. And for what it seemed, he’d have to spend the whole weekend there.

“I don’t believe you got confused! You never got confused with these things!”

He could only hope he didn’t have to go to that. Religious buildings and institutions put him on his nerves. And he wasn’t in the best of moods to begin with.
“I’m not saying I won’t go, I…”

Alex distinguished some female muttering. Even in the incomprehensible words, the smugness and smirk could be easily sensed. Alexander almost felt bad for Jefferson. *Almost.*

“*You lied to me*” stated Jefferson, and Alexander tried to ignore the impotence in his voice. It gave him too many bad memories.

In between his struggles to not go back in time, the office door swung open, revealing a furious Jefferson, living his own internal fight for not making a fuss when he’d just arrived. He managed to close the door quietly after the startle of seeing him there.

“*Did nobody teach you eavesdropping is rude?*” he spat, marching down the hall and going up the stairs that were there.

“It’s not eavesdropping when China can hear you from all the way here” retorted Alexander, following not very close behind.

“I don’t want to discuss this with you right now. I’ve got enough on my plate” concluded Thomas.

“Because you know you’d lose” taunted Hamilton.

Thomas turned abruptly to one corner of the seemingly never-ending hallway, swung one door open and marched to the bed that was in the middle of the room. The suitcase was tidily put on the mattress, and Alexander guessed that was going to be Jefferson’s bedroom while he was there. Now, he’d only have to find his. Maybe he was lucky and they decided to marginalise him, sending him to the most isolated room this mansion had. Alexander had never been gladder for working for stuck-ups as much as now.

He was surprised to see his workmate’s bedroom could easily be twice his own back at the Knox’s house – where Jefferson currently lived in. Again, Alexander began to doubt the definition he’d always had for the words ‘big’ or ‘huge’. This house was an immense labyrinth. He made another mental note to ask Libby for some crumbs, so he could make a path to follow and not get lost.

Alexander took the liberty to sit in one of the chairs that faced the large window, taking in the natural sight the house had on its backyard. Apart from the whispered complaints of Jefferson, there was not a sound. Alexander could feel his nervous nature growing worse. He hated the silence and the quiet. Between that and the persons he was surrounded by, he doubted he could do it by the end of the weekend.
“Don’t you have your own room?” spat Thomas, again paying his frustration with him.

Alexander barely looked over his shoulder. “There’s a million rooms in here”

“When, go entertain yourself searching for the right door and leave me be”

“Do you really want me to wander around your family house all by myself?” he asked, with a naughty smile.

Thomas stopped his movements, reconsidering it for a moment. “No. Stay there”

“If you’re going to order me around, tell me” said Alexander, turning serious suddenly. “That’d make the rate to go up”

Thomas froze again. He raised his glare, frowning at him from across the room. “What rate?”

“The one you must pay me when all this is over” explained Alexander, with normality.

“You didn’t say anything about any fees” complained Thomas.

“Hey, it’s not my fault you really thought someone was going to work for free, during the weekend” Alexander excused himself innocently. “Blame your privileged past life”

“Hamilton, I’m already paying you 800 dollars per month. I will pay you 800 dollars next week”

“That’s for you living in my house” emphasised Hamilton cruelly. “My fee will be for being your lawyer”

“You never asked me for anything before”

“Because before it was a simple favour. Now, you don’t deserve it”

“Then why the hell did you come?” asked Jefferson, clenching his teeth in annoyance.

“Because work is work” replied Alexander, nonchalantly. “Besides, summer is around the corner and money will be good”

“But didn’t you have plenty of money now?” asked Thomas, taking one suit out his case, vehemently.

“But I want more” retorted Alexander. “I’m never satisfied, I’m very selfish and materialistic”

Jefferson inhaled through his nostrils, trying to calm his nerves. He eventually turned to the bathroom his bedroom had, striding inside as he muttered curses.

“Bunch of resentful bastards, I’m sick of the whole of you lying to me”

Alexander’s left eyebrow had a tic after hearing that. “What’s wrong, Mr Jefferson? Does it hurt now that it was done to you?”
Laurens came back to his new house, which was smelling of food. If he wasn’t bloated from all that he’d eaten from the party, John would’ve been licking his lips. The sound of the TV was the only thing he could hear from the front door. Some contest he wasn’t interested in recognising. He walked to the living room, seeing the table ready for dinner and Morgan watching TV, sat on the couch, as he’d been before he left.

“Good night” he greeted, wanting to keep things cool.

“Ah, you’re back” commented the man, throwing him a sideways glare. “I thought you were smarter than this”

“…”

“Ah, finally you came” said Vince, walking out the kitchen, with a bowl of vegetables in his hands. He placed it on the table and then, put a hand on his hip. “You almost missed dinner”

“I’m not going to dine tonight” said Laurens.

“Excuse me?” asked Vince, narrowing his eyes.

A shiver went down John’s spine. “I… I ate a lot at my friend’s birthday party”

“Ah, you’re late for being partying all night? Nice” nodded Vince, clearly offended.

Sonya get out the kitchen, putting a dish in front of each person in the house. “Look how he’s stumbling in place” she commented, with an evil grin. “He’s drunk as well”

“Nooo, nooo, it’s just that I hit my knee while coming up the stairs…” made up Laurens.

“John, I don’t mind you going out with your friends. But you’re going to respect the schedule of this house. Here, we have dinner at 10” explained Vince.

“That’s so late” complained Laurens.

“He even has enough nerve to criticise our life” spat Sonya, with venom.

“Noo, noo, I’m just commenting…”

“Come on, don’t fight, or this will cool down” interrupted Vince, snapping his fingers to distract the girl’s attention. “You” he added, looking at Morgan. “Get off the couch already. It’s dinnertime”

“I’m not going to eat that shit” declared Morgan, shaking the remote in his right hand in denial.

“I’ve been three hours cooking”

“Yes, all that green shit”
“Stop swearing”

“This is my house and I’ll say shit as many times as I want”

“Try it out, Morgan” advised Laurens, calmly. “Vegetables are healthy”

“Are you going to tell my father what he has to eat?” asked Sonya, upset.

“No, no, no, I was only suggesting… I don’t like vegetables that much anyways…” Laurens corrected himself, fearing for his life.

“Ah, are you going to insult Vince’s efforts to make dinner as well, while you were out there, only God knows where?”

“No, no, no, I was only…”

“Honey, leave him alone” Vince looked at Laurens comprehensively. “If you don’t like this, I can cook you another thing”

“No, no, I’ll eat it, sweetheart, I don’t want any trouble” said Laurens, nervously.

“Don’t call him pet names while my father’s present, because I’ll break your mouth!” shouted Sonya.

“Sorry, I…”

“No, no, no, eat other thing you like most” insisted Vince, interrupting the quarrel. “Nobody comes to this house to suffer”

“The fuck we don’t…” said Morgan, exhausted.

“Shit, I can’t end up in a normal house with calm people…” lamented Laurens, under his breath.

“Keep complaining, just keep complaining” encouraged Sonya, with a threatening tone.

“Do you see what you’re doing? You’re making everyone fight” accused Vince, looking at the older man.

“It’s this girl. She takes her mother’s hell of a temper…”

“There… He has to mention her every fucking day” Vince took a seat at one random chair and began to put food in his plate. “You know what? Go cook your own dinner, this is ours”

“The best fucking thing you’ve ever done for me” said Morgan, getting up the couch and walking slowly to the kitchen.

“Don’t swear!” reprehended Vince, irritated.

Sonya nudged her father’s husband in the shoulder. “How are you going to let Dad cook? He can’t even turn the microwave on”

“That’d be his problem” decided Vince, starting to eat.

Sonya looked at Laurens, hateful. “All because of you. If you wanted someplace to stay, you could’ve easily gone to a motel”

“I don’t have money” said Laurens, shrugging. “Besides, I came here tricked”
“Vince, please, go help Dad. He can hurt himself” insisted Sonya, ignoring the man’s words.

“I’ll go” Laurens offered himself, striding to the kitchen. “I like to help”

The girl looked more disgustedly at him. “And now he acts all nice. I’d smash your teeth in if I could”

“Jesus, each generation is more violent than the one prior” he commented.

“I’m as old as you are, sicko!” she hollered, throwing him a beet.

“Don’t throw the food!” admonished Vince.

“My God, she makes Hercules look like a saint” muttered John, closing the kitchen door just in case. He found Morgan trying to cook a fried egg while complaining about the oil landing on him. John’s eyes grew wide at the image. “What are you doing? You’ve got the flame too high!” he said, running to solve the problem. “There, now… Look the egg you were making” he admonished, a hand on his hip and Morgan avoiding his glare, in shame. “Let me”

Laurens took the spatula from the man’s hands and started to cook the egg himself.

“Frying eggs is just like oral sex. With patience and care, you got an A” he explained, adopting a teacher demeanour.

“I’ve never done it” admitted the man, looking in awe as Laurens cooked for him was great mastery. “What a mess this man put me in…” he lamented, supporting himself by the wall.

Laurens looked at him with empathy. “Look, we’re going to get into the critic phase” he kept explaining, trying to evade Morgan’s mind from his trouble. “The yolk must be thick, but also liquid so you can dip bread”

“What will I do now, at my age?” kept complaining Morgan. “I can’t do a thing by myself… What’s that little light that’s flickering over there?” he asked.

Laurens blinked twice when he saw what Morgan was referring to. “That’s the dishwasher… It’s not closed properly…” he explained, doing the action himself. The light turned off. “There”

“Ah… He destroyed me as a person, an individual, a human being” he kept going, his voice shaking a bit. “I’m just a useless old man” he summed up, in a sob.

“No, no, don’t break down, Morgan!” said Laurens, turning around and forgetting about the egg completely. “Or, at least, don’t do it in front of me. I’m very empathic. The other day, I watched *The Fox and the Hound* for the first time, and I cried what’s not written*. My friends had to take me to the hospital and there, they had to put me normal saline”

“Your friends?”

“No, the nurse. My friends waited out of the room”

“Ah… I haven’t watched the movie” he admitted.

Laurens was shocked a few seconds. “You haven’t practised oral sex, you haven’t watched *The Fox
and the Hound… You haven’t lived, Morgan, you have not lived!” sobbed Laurens.

“I just watch what they pass on the TV” admitted the man, with now watery eyes as well.

“You can borrow my DVD, it’s alright”

Laurens went to hug Morgan tightly, and the man returned the gesture. Both cried quietly, tapping each other’s backs, supportively. Vince entered just in that moment, freezing when he saw the scene.

“What the hell are you two doing?” he asked, disgusted.

“We’re supporting each other in difficult times” cried Laurens.

“I don’t want gay bullshit in this house, huh?”

“But if none us in here is straight!” complained Morgan.

“That’s different. I hate crybabies, I warn you” said Vince, coming in to take some bread with him.

“Leave us alone, man, we were bounding” said Laurens.

“How?”

“I’m just warning the guy” said Morgan.

“About what?” asked Vince, suspicious.

“About how much of a son of a bitch you are”

“Uh, so many hostility… Then, you’d complain about me replacing you”

“It’s so ugly when love dies” commented Laurens, wiping away the remaining tears.

“You, come to the table” demanded Vince.

“I’m coming, let me finish this first” said Laurens, pointing at the saucepan.

“Hm…”

Morgan waited until his husband was gone to talk again. “Listen, John, you seem like a good person. Leave that viper and be happy somewhere else”

“I’d love to, but I love challenges. It’s my weak spot” said Laurens, turning around. “Oh, the egg burnt…”

“Damn…”

“Buuut” said Laurens, cheerfully, as he walked to the fridge. He opened it as he talked. “No prob, good friend. Take this as a metaphor of life. Sometimes, our eggs burnt, but that doesn’t mean there’s no other box of eggs waiting for… Oh, there’s no more eggs… … No problem either. This is another way to see the metaphor. Sometimes, we can’t find eggs in our house, and have to look for them outside”
“… You are not very good at Literature, right?”

“Nope. I just passed it because teachers couldn’t stand me one more year back in high school. But I’ve got a master in the University of Life. So, listen to me: bachelorhood can be very good. Take it from me, I used to be a lonely hunter. Like the grizzly bear, but with love as prey”

Where there are lies and bad faith, there’ll be manipulation

—Albert Jacquard.

May 17th, 1991

Thomas didn’t remember anything from before he woke up in a bed in the hospital. His first instinct was to sit up abruptly, when he found himself in an unknown white room. He didn’t have more time to react or to think before a pair of arms embraced him with all the care in the world.

“You’re awake” the hugger said in a whisper, relief clear in each syllable. Thomas took a bit of time to comprehend it was his oldest sister. “Jesus, Tommy, you scared the heck out of me”

They stayed like that for a moment. Thomas wanted to talk, to ask her what was going on, why was he in a hospital bed, what day it was, what had happened, what had he done to make his beloved sister cry and shake and worry so much over him…

He was explained later, when the doctor came in and asked him how he was doing. He gave no response. He opened his mouth a few times, but he couldn’t manage to get any words out. His brain was full of them, though. His frustration was almost palpable, and Jen decided to lend him a helping hand, explaining he suffered from anxiety and he still didn’t understand what was happening. Though Thomas loved his sister, in that moment, he hated her for revealing such a shameful thing about him.

The doctor, who was nice enough, at least more than his teachers or any other adult he’d come across to in his whole life, told him that he had fainted due to a nervous breakdown. Then, he proceeded to explain what that was and the causes of why it might’ve happened. Thomas would never forget his saddened face, commenting about how he was too young for that kind of things to happen to him. Thomas would’ve loved to tell him it was the only life he had known since he was
born. But for some reason his vocal chords refused to work as they were supposed to, and he kept his silence, trying to ignore so much pity thrown towards him.

Though, he didn’t know what he preferred the most. That or the coldness of his mother. Jane thanked the doctor and nurses for their help as kindly as she knew, but once they were in the car, driving back home, she scolded Thomas.

“This joke cost me a good amount of money and me missing an important reunion” she started.

Jen didn’t let her finish or go on. She went ballistic for the rest of the trip. Their mother matching her taunts and sarcastic remarks. Thomas stood their bickering all the way, his heart rate increasing as well as his guilt. He had made his mother missed a reunion and Jen a day of college because he hadn’t been able to do a presentation in class.

When he was explained that, he wanted the earth to swallow him alive. He wanted to disappear. To leave this world and never return. He was eighteen and he couldn’t do something as simple as talking in front of his class. He couldn’t control his nerves for the final project. He couldn’t even pronounce a single word right now, after everything was over and he was surrounded by people he knew.

He tried to whisper a few words, but found he was unable to. He could only hope that by the time he was home, his voice had come back to him. He didn’t want to upset his mother any further.

<<You’ve done enough for today>>.

“Here” said Jen, as they entered the family house. Thomas looked down, seeing a bottle of pills in her hand. He took it and looked back up, cocking an eyebrow. “I told the doctor about your migraines. He told me this would help you to…”

“You don’t only miss classes for a trivial thing…” started to reprimand Jane once again.

“A trivial thing? My own brother?!" spat the young adult, fury once again in her eyes.

“… but you also try to drug my son?!” finished the mother, not minding the interruption at all.

“I’m not drugging him! I’m trying to help him! He…”

“Of course you’d think that’s help…”
“He’s been standing that pain since he was very little! And you never did anything to…!”

“Because it’s all inside his head! He can control that! He just doesn’t want to try!”

“I can’t believe you’re truly implying that Thomas’s having migraines for the sake of having them!” exclaimed Jen, shocked at the affirmation. “He’s been suffering since…”

“Ah, there we go again! Just like your father” interrupted Jane, scornfully. “What’s he now? A mistreated kid? He has all he could’ve ever dreamt of and more”

“Life is not about that!” argued Jen, already shaking from impotence.

Jane had turned to face Thomas, who stood there in silence, unable to muster a word. “Do you know how many kids are out there who would love to live the life that you have?” she asked. “There are plenty of people who got it rougher, and yet, here you are! Fainting in the middle of the class because you had a presentation…”

“Stop it already!” demanded Jen, walking to be in front her little brother. “Stop saying those things! You’re going to make him feel worse! He doesn’t…”

“You and your father made him like this!” accused Jane, taking a couple of steps forwards. Mother and daughter were now nose to nose. “You two turned him into a… a… A spoiled little child who refuses to grow up and face life!”

“Dad and I are not responsible for what happened to Thomas today” assured Jen, her voice level, dangerously level.

“What are you trying to say?! That I’m the one to blame?!” shouted Jane, enraged. “I’ve been trying to toughen him up, but you always…”

“This is not toughening him up!” repeated Jen, disgusted. “What are you talking about? He’s just a kid!”

“He’s eighteen…”

“Your son…”

“He needs to learn that Mummy and Daddy won’t go running to his aid each time he can’t handle a simple thing on his own!” interrupted Jane, clearly exhausted with the discussion. “He needs to stop being so soft, so weak! Y’all need to stop looking for excuses for his behaviour! He brought this upon himself!”

“I beg your pardon?” said Jen, blinking dumbfounded. “How did he…?”

“All day with those books instead of socializing… Don’t you remember your first day of school, Thomas?” she asked, pushing her daughter aside, to look him in the eyes again. The teenager nodded. “What did I tell you to do?”

Thomas swallowed. He begged in his head for his voice to cooperate. He didn’t want to make this any worse. He didn’t want to bring more pain to his already broken family.

His mouth didn’t open, his lips were sealed. His heart beat faster and faster against his
ribcage, the anger in Jane’s eyes making him dizzy.

Thankfully, Jen turned her mother around, so she was facing her again. Thomas sighed with relief. Yet, tears were threatening to go down any minute. He was suffocating again, feeling the ceiling falling slowly and the walls coming closer, prisoning him mercilessly.

“Stop it, he just woke up after a panic attack!” admonished Jen, red as scarlet.

“What? What excuse do you have now for him not talking to his mother? Not talking at all?” asked Jane, defiantly.

“He’s just under stress! You’re putting him under stress! Cut it out, Mum, you’re going to… To…”

“Oh, don’t come to me with the same tale your father repeated me incessantly” complained Jane, boringly. “He’s not gonna last a day out there when the time comes”

“He’s not gonna last a sigh if he keeps living in this house under your constant demands!” Jen shot back.

Jane’s glare sharpened. “And you are not going to last another year if you keep indulging him this much. Do you want to end up like your father?”

If his mother had just gone to him and punch him in the stomach with all her strengths, Thomas would’ve felt less pain than after hearing those words. This time, he couldn’t conceal his rapid breaths becoming shallow and his cheeks wetting with fresh tears. He turned around without a second thought, and sprinted upstairs, running directly and automatically to his bedroom.

“You can’t be implying what I… Thomas, wait!” he heard his sister said, but he didn’t stop.

Thomas didn’t stop until he reached his bedroom. He closed the door with a thump and slid down it, sitting on the floor, knees pressed against his chest and strangled sobs coming out his throat. The only thing that seemed to get out his throat right then.

Two knocks startled him and he began to shake, imagining what his mother could be thinking of him now, what she would tell him now.

“Thomas?”

The teenager felt a lot more relaxed when he recognised the voice as Consuelo’s.
“Can I come in, cielo?” she asked, gently.

Thomas didn’t hesitate that time. He got on his feet and swung the door open, throwing himself to the woman, hugging her as close to him as he could and wetting her uniform with uncontrolled tears. The woman was shocked at first, but soon started to caress his hair, motherly.

“Ssh, there, what’s wrong?” she asked, quietly.

And Thomas wanted to tell her everything. He wanted to explain her what had happened today, why he was such a bad son and how he didn’t deserve Jen or hadn’t deserved his father. The remainder of Peter made his crying worse, and he clung to the housekeeper as if his life depended on it.

“Thomas, can you take a deep breath?” asked Consuelo, still with that soothing voice. He shook his head against her shoulder, where his face was buried in. “Could you try for me? Come on, I’ll help you. Un, dos, tres, inhale…” she instructed, and he did as he was told. “Cuatro, cinco, seis, exhale. Good, you’re doing great, mi cielo” 

She kept counting in her mother tongue until the trick did its expected effect. Thomas had calmed down, had gotten separated from her, had wiped his tears with a tissue she had given him, and was able to control his breathing, the world around him coming to focus once and for all.

“Are you feeling better?” asked Consuelo, with a tender smile on her lips.

Thomas nodded. “Thank you, Consuelo” he said, just realising he was able to talk again. The relief for such a normal thing made him sigh.

“Me alegro, cielo [I’m glad, dear]. Do you need a mint tea?” she offered. “I’ve heard what…”

“A tea would be nice. Thanks, Consuelo” he interrupted, not wanting to remember anything.

“Alright. Will you come with me or will you wait in your bedroom?”

“I’ll wait here” he said, feeling embarrassed for the coward action.

Consuelo just nodded, understanding. “That’s alright, cielo, I’ll try to be back soon”
Thomas had closed the blinds to calm his pounding head. The room was illuminated by the enough amount of light to see his surroundings, which included the bottle of pills in his hand. He’d read the label thrice and his nerves still hadn’t had died down, which only made his migraine to go worse, ironically. He decided to put the bottle on the nightstand and lie down, waiting for Consuelo to come back with his tea. If it didn’t help him enough, he’d look for his sister and would take one pill with her by his side.

He curved his lips, disgusted with himself. He couldn’t even take one pill by himself, like an adult. The words of his mother resounded inside his head, making it to hurt a lot more than he was able to handle. He put one of his cold hands against it, wanting to calm a bit the pain. Thomas counted from one to six in Spanish again, controlling his breathing.

<<You can’t even breathe without someone by your side.
You’re pathetic>>.

Thomas continued with the trick, trying to ignore the hurtful voice that tormented his days and nights endlessly. Sometimes, he wanted to go running to Jen and tell her all about it, he wanted to tell her his enemy lived within himself and he didn’t know how to take it out, wanted to tell her he didn’t remember what inner silence and peace felt like.

He had tried to tell his father plenty of times, as well, but never found enough courage to do so. Not because a lack of trust, Heaven knew how much Thomas had loved and trusted his father. Peter had been, along with Jen and Consuelo, his only support in the family, the ones whom he could always run to when he had a problem or when he didn’t understand what was going on inside his head or heart. Maybe his father hadn’t confronted his mother as many times as Thomas’d wanted or expected, but he couldn’t blame him. Jane had always been good at twisting words and her cold indifference hurt as a knife stabbed in the heart. Thomas would never blame someone for not wanting to experience that more times than necessary.

The memory of his father just made his headache to go worse and his breathing to become uneven, as Thomas tried to swallow all the sobs that fought to get out his throat. He was not going to cry today. He’d made enough show already, he’d already made poor Consuelo to worry more than she already deserved and made her work more.

The door opened, and Thomas changed into a sitting position, longing for the tea the housekeeper had promised to prepare for him. His nerves arouse when he saw the one entering his room was his mother, not Consuelo. In that moment, Thomas realised the door simply opened, nobody had knocked. He should’ve suspected something was odd, but he was so tired he couldn’t think properly. How much he wished he could just go to sleep without so many nightmares and bittersweet memories invading the realm of his dreams.
“Consuelo made you some mint tea” said Jane, leaving the door opened and walking to his bed. “Said your head was bothering you again”

“A bit” he admitted, wavering.

“Ah, you have your voice back. Good to know” commented Jane, leaving the steaming cup on the nightstand. She wrinkled her nose when she saw the bottle standing there. “You took that”

It wasn’t a question, his mother’s voice was too dry to articulate the sentence as such. But Thomas nodded, nonetheless. Why couldn’t Consuelo come? Why couldn’t it be Jen the one who bumped into the woman and take the cup and come here? Gosh, Thomas would’ve preferred a total stranger to come in his bedroom before his mother. Anyone but her right now.

“Did you take any?” she inquired, crossing both arms upon her chest.

Honestly, only a bright lamp was missing in this interrogation. Thomas’ chest was almost hurting for how hard and rapid his heart was beating.

“No. I was ex-expecting the tea to… To calm down the pain” he explained, quietly.

“But does it hurt that much?” Jane asked, in disbelief.

Thomas took his time before answering. “It… It bothers me a little” he lied, afraid of giving the wrong response.

“This is not a game, Thomas” lectured Jane. “Your sister should have not done this without asking me first. I’m your mother, your legal tutor”

“I know” he conceded, wanting to keep things calmed.

“I don’t want you to throw away your future because you’re too busy taking pills for a bit of pain” she continued, her harsh tone not changing one bit. “Would you hire a lawyer that doesn’t know where he is because…?”

“I’m not sure I want to be a lawyer” he admitted, under his breath.

Jane stopped talking. For way too long for it to be good. Thomas saw her rigid posture, her pressed lips, her clenched fists.

“Beg your pardon?” she whispered.

The ice in her voice made shivers to go down his spine. “I—I don—don’t think I want to…”
“Why not?” she interrupted, words as sharp as a sword. They cut Thomas’ confidence deeply.

“I… You saw what ha—happened today… I…”

“So, you’re gonna give everything I worked so hard on up because you’re unable to overcome a headache?” she summed it up.

“N-no, it’s not that… I… I just… I don’t s-see myself as…”

Thomas kept his silence when he saw Jane covering her eyes, head lowered in disappointment. He bit his bottom lip, blinking away the tears. Don’t cry, don’t, you’ve done enough.

“God, Thomas, when are you going to grow up?” complained the woman, eventually, words hissed in annoyance. “You’ve turned eighteen last month, I thought you were going to start to take life seriously. Once and for all”

“I…”

“Do you want to kill me by making me upset unceasingly, just like you did with your father?”

“N-No” he said, hurriedly.

The memory of his father became stronger inside his mind. He remembered Peter feeling not very well, but telling him he’d get better, he’d overcome his illness and that everything was going to be fine. Thomas remembered believing him.

Thomas remembered how the only thing he did was complaining about how much he disliked the fact of being alone and far away from home, from Peter, from Jen. How alone he felt and how difficult it was for him to open up to someone, how bad he felt for being unable to do so. He remembered the frown of worry on his father’s face, how much he fought to be able to entertain his mind with more violin lessons or walks around the garden.

Thomas remembered the afternoon his father fell to the floor, hand on chest, drops of sweat going down his face. He remembered the shock made him unable to move and look for help as soon as possible. He remembered when he finally was able to leave his father’s side and alert one of his parents’ employees.

Thomas would never forget the glare Jane threw in his direction when she was told by the cooker what had happened. The mix of hatred, ire and disgust thrown at him by his own mother who didn’t talk to him for the rest of the week, just when she had no more option.
He remembered all those times he saw his father on a bed after that incident, struggling for breathing normally, the efforts Jen made to make him forget about their family situation and make him laugh during that summer. He remembered leaving to the boarding school, naïve and stupid enough to believe Peter the last time he told him he was feeling a lot better and that he’d make some visits to the school from then on, still concerned about the situation he’d been complaining all summer.

Thomas remembered all that, remembered stressing his father with his own problems when he was sick and needed the rest, remembered his selfishness and self-absorbed behaviour, remembered how he waited for his father to come once he felt better. He could never forget when his mother made that call to the boarding school to let him know his father had died.

Thomas still held a strong grudge against his mother for not calling sooner, when Peter’s health worsened, or even on time so he could go to his funeral, but deep inside he could not blame her. She was taking revenge and was angry at him because he’d killed her husband, he had made everything terrible worse for his father’s health and had killed him.

It’d been all his fault.

He was doing the same to his mother now, to his sister, he was tearing his whole family apart.

Jane sighed, returning him to the present time, to the last result of yet another selfish action on his part.

“Do whatever you want, then” she concluded, walking to the door. “I won’t spend more money on your education if you’re not going to make full use of it. Maybe your siblings will... But you’ll follow my rules if you want to keep using my money on whims and living in my house”

“Yes, Mum”

“Good. I will see you at dinner”

With that demand, she left his bedroom, closing the door quietly. Thomas took a look at his tea, that had turned cold. Suddenly, he didn’t want to drink it. Or to go to Jen and ask her if she could be there as he took the pill. He lost the will to try, he lost the hope for it to be useful.

Thomas lay down slowly on his bed, turned his back on the door and closed his eyes, his head pounding and hurting more than before. This time, he let it be. He deserved as much.
By the time Thomas returned from the mass with his siblings, he found Hamilton talking with Libby friendly in the kitchen, while the girl finished dinner for them. The bright smile on Libby’s face disappeared as soon as she saw him at the doorframe and she abandoned her relaxed posture, leaned on the counter. She gave a courteous curtsey at Thomas while Alexander simply turned around on the stool. He half-closed his eyes and kept drinking the coffee he surely had made himself, ‘just to make a point’.

“Mas… Thomas” she corrected herself, hurriedly. “Welcome back”

“Good evening, Libby” he responded, politely.

“Is dinner ready yet?” asked Randolph, appearing behind Thomas and looking over his older brother’s shoulder.

“Not yet, master Randolph” said the girl, apologetically.

“Ugh, hurry up, I’m starving”

“I’m sorry. I thought you’d come later”

“Next time think better” complained the man, rolling his eyes.

His two sisters were seen back at the hallway, coming to the kitchen as well, ignoring their brother’s rude comments. Just as Thomas, who simply made his way in and took a seat beside Hamilton. All of them, Libby included, froze in their spots when the lawyer spat, looking upset at Randolph.

“Or next time make yourself dinner. What, you don’t have hands?”

The man looked dumbfounded at Hamilton, who took the last sip of his coffee and then got up and walked to the sink, before Libby could take the mug and wash it herself.

“That’s her job” retorted Randolph, after a pregnant silence.

Hamilton had had time to wash the mug completely by the time he received the response. He shrugged, drying the mug. “And she’s doing it. Can’t you smell it?” he rhetorically asked, keeping the mug back in its rightful place. “Now, why don’t you go do yours and drink your existence away on the couch, while watching trash TV?”
Libby and Anna lowered their heads, containing a laugh. Lucy’s eyes sharpened at the immigrant’s remark, and her cold glare made Anna and Libby’s struggles to stop, in fear. Randolph simply blushed as he frowned, enraged, feeling insulted.

“Call me when the dinner’s ready” he decided, turning on his heels and marching down the hall.

Hamilton simply sat back on the same stool, a smug smile on his face. Thomas contained the urge to pass a hand through his face. If he was like this now, he didn’t want to know what Hamilton would do when they were having dinner… Maybe he should tell him to go chill in whatever bedroom Lucy had assigned to him. If he was going to pay the bastard, at least he’d ask for him to behave.

“How did the mass go?” asked Libby, wanting to erase the tension.

“Libby, I’ve told you plenty of times to mind your work” admonished Lucy, sternly.

“I’m sorry, ma’am” the girl apologised once again.

“I expect for you to know best next time” lectured Lucy one last time, before turning around, prepared to leave to another part of the house and wait for the food to be ready.

“Yes, Libby, you need to learn that talking with respect and kindness to people who lack both is never well paid” added Hamilton, with mocking seriousness.

Anna and Libby again had to bite their bottom lips to prevent a laugh to escape. Lucy tensed and threw an irritated look at the immigrant over her shoulder. It made Thomas to tremble in spot at how much it reminded him of the ones their mother used to give.

“Are you going to have dinner with us tonight, Mr Hamilton?” she asked, with a fake polite tone.

Hamilton shrugged. “I don’t know. I haven’t booked a seat yet”

“He’s tired from the trip” hurried to make up Thomas.

“And from other things, as well” nodded Hamilton, less helpful than ever.

“He’d like to go to bed soon”

“Or to explore the dark secrets of this family”

Hamilton wagged his eyebrows at Libby, who was red from containing her laughter. Thomas kicked his shin with fury, making the immigrant to bend over himself and hiss in pain.
“Son of a bitch, you did that for resent” complained Hamilton.

“Totally” admitted Thomas.

“It’s a pity” said Lucy, the dark honesty in her tone making Thomas to fear what she’d been planning for dinner if Hamilton had accepted to be there. “Hope you sleep well, then”

“I’ll try my best” promised Hamilton, still with an upset expression and rubbing his aching leg. When the two women were gone, he whispered, enraged. “You’re gonna pay for this”

“I already am” shrugged Thomas.

Thomas leveraged the calmness he was able to live for the first time since he came. Hamilton had gone to his bedroom after Libby gave him his share of food, and his siblings were scattered all throughout the house, minding their own business and glad that they didn’t have to pretend they were close, as they had to do back at church.

He decided he preferred to help Libby with dinner and to set the table. Her company was good enough and there was some familiarity to her that he needed right now. The girl kept throwing glares his way. Maybe just surprise to find a member of this family able to offer her help and fulfil his word. He couldn’t blame the girl’s surprise and silent stare.

Just when the table was ready, Libby excused herself, saying she had to go to tell his siblings dinner was ready. Thomas hadn’t seen her stopping at the doorframe of the dining room, throwing a last hesitant look in his direction. Eventually, the girl decided to talk.

“Aunt Consuelo was right. You’re a good person”

Thomas stopped midway to sit on the chair. He looked at the girl, startled, while she smiled gently in his direction.

“She really loved you like the son she couldn’t have, Thomas” kept saying the girl, clear melancholy in her broken voice. “And she never stopped missing you when she had to leave the job”

“Neither did I” admitted Thomas, having recovered from the shock.

“I’m sure she’s very proud of you” was the last thing she said before leaving him alone, waiting at the table.
“That’d make only one of us” muttered Thomas, a bittersweet feeling enveloping his heart.

“Well, at least you had a peaceful dinner” encouraged James, through the phone.

“Yes, now I’d have to control the situation for another day” nodded Thomas, looking out of his bedroom window. The sight always calmed down his nerves, and he needed that to sleep well and face the day that was awaiting for him tomorrow.

“Come on, it’ll be just one more day... And you now have the niece of your former housekeeper”

“I actually don’t want to know how the poor girl ended up working here” admitted Thomas, going to lie down on his bed. “How are the girls?”

“Good. Maria came and she’s staying here with her daughter. So, Polly’s having fun”

“And Patsy?”

“Good as well. She’s in her room”

“She hasn’t tried to get out?”

“Said she doesn’t have plans for this weekend”

Thomas frowned at the clear lie of his oldest daughter, but said nothing about it. Despite James’ tone giving away that he didn’t believe the girl either. A series of coughs interrupted his trail of thoughts.

“Are you sick?”

“I got cold, nothing more” dismissed James.

Thomas curved his lips in anguish. He was about to bid farewell and leave James alone so he could rest properly instead of standing his complaints, when the man beat him.

“How’s your head?”

He took his time to answer. “Fine” he lied.

“Have you taken the meds?”

“No”
“Thomas, the doctor told you…”

“I don’t need them” interrupted Thomas. “It doesn’t hurt too much”

“Yet”

James sighed, and Thomas bit his bottom lip anxiously.

<<You can’t give him a break even when the man’s sick>>

“Take care, Thomas, please” said his friend, sounding really worried.

It just made everything worse for him. “I am. It’s alright, it doesn’t hurt too much”

“If you say so…” conceded James, far from pleased.

“Good night, James” said Thomas, not wanting to prolong his friend’s distress. “Rest”

“Same, Thomas. Goodnight”

Laurens was resolute to fix the family situation. No matter what. He woke up earlier than ever and started to make breakfast for the whole family. When that went wrong (and he’d finished airing the kitchen from the smell of burnt food and cleaned the rest of scorch from the walls), Laurens decided to go buy some cereal to the nearest shop and put the several boxes there, lined up on the dinner room table for when the family woke up and so they could decide which one they liked the most.

Sonya was the first one to wake up, in a tracksuit and with her raven hair tied up in a ponytail. She was looking at the screen of her phone, one earbud plugged in and the other hanging down her right shoulder. She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw Laurens sleeping with his head against the table, surrounded by the boxes of cereal.

“What is this man doing?” she wondered. She walked closer and tapped him on the shoulder. “Tts, eeh! Wake up! John!” she urged, ending up shaking him.

Laurens gave a loud snore before opening his eyes. He looked at her, drooling, and then got up in a jump. “Good morning, Sara” he greeted, pretending he hadn’t fallen asleep.

“Sonya” she corrected, disgusted.
“Wanna have breakfast? I bought these all by myself” he explained, cockily.

“Good for you” she dismissed, passing him by.

“Wait, you had no breakfast”

“I don’t like cereal”

“But there are lots of them in here!”

“I don’t like any!”

“You haven’t read them!”

“I don’t like any!” she repeated, more sharply, and dedicating him a deadly glare. “I’m going for a run. I’ll eat later”

“That’s not good, you could fall down for a fatigue!” said Laurens, concerned.

She walked back to him, slowly. “Are you going to tell me how to run now as well?”

“No, no, I was just…”

“I hate you so much” she declared, before marching to the door.

“Nothing, this girl’s a lost battle for me…” lamented Laurens, sadly.

The front door was opened then, but not by the girl, who walked back to Laurens’ eyeshot, a clear surprise on her face.

“Dad?” she said. “What’re you doing? It’s 9 in the morning, you aren’t supposed to be awake until it’s two pm”

“Good morning, daughter” said Morgan, giving her a peek on the cheek. “Good morning, John. Oh, cereal!” he said, happily, taking a seat.

“Thank you. See?” said Laurens, giving the girl a huge grin of superiority. The girl showed him her fist, in a threat.

“Dad, where do you come from?”

“From the park, I went for a walk” replied the man, eating the cereal from the box.

“The park?” repeated the girl, perplexed.

“Do you know we’ve got one very near our house?”

“Of course, I go for a run there all mornings. I was about to leave!”

“Oh, tomorrow we can go together then!”

“But…”
“Do you want a bowl and some milk, Morgan?” asked Laurens, seeing the hurry demeanour the man was eating with.

“No, no, no. I’m about to leave. This is for regaining energy” explained Morgan.

“Leave where?” asked Sonya.

“I met a group of people my age that were going to the gym. And I said, ‘hell, let’s try it out’!”

“The gym? You?”

“Be very sure of it” advised Laurens. “My friend Hercules always signs in, but then abandons in three days”

“I’m pretty sure of it” assured Morgan, nodding. “And all thanks to you”

Sonya looked daggers at Laurens. “What did you do to my father, you asshole?”

“Nothing, nothing!” promised Laurens, hands held up.

“Honey, this man has changed my life” said Morgan, smiling widely. “He taught me to turn the microwave on”

Sonya looked in shock at Laurens. “You did? That’s a historic deed!”

“Well, I was just born this way” showed off Laurens.

“He made me see I can do things” kept rambling Morgan, with bright eyes. “And now I can’t stop”

“What have you done?!” complained Sonya, looking enraged at Laurens. “You broke the balance of this house!”

“Come on, honey, don’t be like that” Morgan tried to calm her down. “Now, we can do things, as you always wanted. Like going to the zoo”

“I will n… The zoo?” asked the girl, her red face coming back to normal. She thought for a moment. “I’d totally love that”

“Then, it’s settled” decided Morgan, nodding his head. He took his daughter’s hand and marched with her to the front door. “Let’s go together after I’m out the gym”

“Alright!” agreed the girl.

“John, come with us!” said Morgan, energetic.

Laurens nodded in satisfaction. “Another crisis solved by John Laurens. I’m unable to fail” he congratulated himself, as he made his way to the front door with the happy father and daughter.

Thomas had woken up with a worse headache than the one he endured yesterday. He entered the kitchen, glad to find it isolated but from the already working form of Libby, who was preparing
breakfast. He asked her for a mug of coffee and left, wanting to drink it in silence in the living room.

There, he found Hamilton going from window to window, anxiously. Five mugs of coffee abandoned on the table and totally empty. Thomas sighed, exhausted, and dropped himself on the couch, deciding to ignore the immigrant as he tried to gain strengths for the gathering that was about to happen that afternoon.

After the first ten minutes of standing the incessant pacing of his workmate, Thomas finally exploded.

“Don’t you have more places to go and pace?”

“Not where I can bother you at the same time” replied Hamilton, right away.

“What have I done to deserve this?” lamented Thomas, passing a hand through his face.

“Do you want the alphabetical or chronological list I wrote?”

“Go to hell”

“You brought me there already”

“Huh, I can agree with you on that…” decided Thomas, before getting up. “Try not to break anything” he warned. “You’re costing me enough”

To his surprise, Hamilton didn’t reply that time.

The response came a few hours later, when Thomas had returned to his bedroom to have a few more moments of peace, in the form of a mint tea and another bottle of lavender Libby brought him, with a sincere smile. There was a little note with messy handwriting attached to the lavender, that belonged to his workmate. After a moment, he deciphered what it said. ‘Try not to lose it, you’re costing me enough’.

Thomas didn’t want to name the sensation that spread across his chest for the action.

There are moments that the words don’t reach,
there is suffering too terrible to name.
You hold your child as tight as you can
and push away the unimaginable.

The moments when you’re in so deep
it feels easier to just swim down...

September 6th, 2013

Thomas had broken many promises he’d made throughout the entirety of his life. He’d promised himself he would raise his own children, and he’d sent his two daughters away when they had a certain age to do so; he’d promised his wife they’d live well despite he having renounce to his inheritance, and they were struggling; he’d promised Martha things would get better now that he found a job in a law firm and had a stable job to help pay the debts her father left for them after his passing, and he’d messed everything up in that important meeting; he’d promised himself he’d take care of his wife when doctors told her this last pregnancy was going to be lethal for her and she insisted on having the child, nonetheless, and yet, here she was, in New York with him, instead of in Monticello, resting, as she was supposed to, after given birth to their third daughter in a very painful and difficult labour, bedridden and unable to move as she used to.

He had broken so many important promises he’d made, to himself and important people, but he was resolute to fulfill the one that mattered the most to him. When the doctors told him the fragile state his wife was in, Thomas didn’t hesitate in calling the boarding school his oldest daughter was studying in, his sister Lucy, with whom his second daughter was spending time with until he could be back, and bring them with him, so they could spend some time with their mother and new-born sister. He received a few complaints from both the teachers and his sister for the abrupt decision, and teachers warned him about his daughter being in danger of failing the year if she left with only one month left to finish. Thomas couldn’t care less. He gave the teacher a sharp response and the discussion ended there. The same went for his sister who, for once, shut up and obeyed.

Patsy and Polly, 11 and 6 years old respectively, almost never left their mother’s side. There was a moment when his sister-in-law came to see the state her half-sister was in and accompany her. Lucy paid some visits, in which all past bitterness seemed forgotten. Though that might have been the weak state Martha was in, and her inability to fight back.

For four months, his wife spent her days barely doing anything more than lying on bed, half-sleep, half-awake. Only the company of her three daughters and husband seemed to bright her pale face. The summer was about to finish, there was a faint breeze coming through the half-opened window. The girls had fallen asleep on the top of their mother, under the spell of the quiet morning; the baby did as much, in her mother’s arms. Martha was looking down at the three of them, with a small smile on her lips.
“Thank you for bringing them” she said, eventually, caressing the middle sister’s hair.

“It’s the least I could do” answered Thomas, sitting beside her bed, holding her free hand.

“They’re such good girls” kept commenting Martha, mind-absently.

“They take after you”

“And after you too”

Thomas smiled softly at her. Even in her state, Martha still had the strength to argue if that meant cheering you up and remind you your value. What had Thomas done to deserve someone like her?

“I never had a good relationship with my stepmother…” she said, her smile totally gone, a serious expression replaced it. Thomas nodded. He knew. She’d told him. She’d told him everything about her life before knowing him, and he, surprisingly, had done as much. Martha squeezed his hand as much as she could. “Please, promise me you’ll never marry again” she begged, her voice shaking.

Thomas froze at her words. Not because he was mad at the request, but because he couldn’t imagine a world without her.

“I’d never think about it” he assured.

Martha squeezed his hand harder. “Promise me” she demanded, probably with the last strengths she had left. “Promise me, Thomas”

“I promise you” he said, without hesitation.

That seemed to calm his wife down. Her soft features adorned by pearls of sweat. It made his heart ache. Thomas kissed her on the forehead and took the baby with him, he woke his other two daughters and the four of them left the sick woman to rest.

Thomas spent the rest of the day writing all that’d been happening today. He had closed his office door for privacy, forbidding anyone to enter. Not even his daughters. He refused them to see him like this. He needed the silence and solitude now, he needed to clear his mind and ideas. He took his pen and diary and began to write.
He wrote the promise he’d made his wife and how he was resolute to keep it, no matter what. He wrote he hoped he didn’t have to fulfil it any time soon. He didn’t imagine himself falling in love again, but imagining his life without his wife? That was impossible, he didn’t want to try.

Luck was never on his side.

The door swung open, the figure of his sister standing there, a stone-faced expression that didn’t augur anything good.

“She’s barely breathing” she informed him, an even voice.

Thomas startled her when he jumped from his seat, not even thinking about his actions. He ran to the room, blindly, desperately, his breathing catching in his throat. He came in the room, the doctor he’d hired by the bed, a stressed expression adorning his features; Sally in one corner of the room, tears streaming down her face as she embraced herself, trembling uncontrollably; his Martha on bed, pale as a ghost, barely moving and making the only noise inside the room. Her struggle for breathing made him sprint to her side.

He knelt on the floor, took her hand, looked at her, seeing her barely aware of what was happening, her eyes clouded and unfocused.

“Martha?” he called, softly. She didn’t respond, her eyes fixated on the ceiling. He turned her head caringly. “Martha” he said, once again, his voice shaking as well as his body. “Darling… Please, look at me…”

A horrible feeling shot him in the heart when he saw his wife also struggling to keep her eyelids up.

“Martha, look at me” he begged, urgently. “Please, look at me…”

“Thomas...” she whispered, and her voice, as quiet as it was, sounded like angelic music to his ears.

“I’m here, darling, I’m here...”

“Thomas...”

“It’s gonna be okay, darling, I’m here, just don’t fall asleep” he pleaded, when he saw her closing her eyes twice.
“Thomas, I love you” she sighed.

“I love you too” he admitted, after swallowing the lump in his throat. “Don’t fall asleep, please, it’s…”

“I love you and the girls so much…” she continued, not following any conversation, as if she were in a dream. The thought made Thomas too scared.

“Please, don’t fall asleep, you’ll be fine. Just… Just don’t fall asleep, please…”

There was no answer, as illogical to the conversation as it could’ve been, that time. The hand he was holding fell limply. Thomas dared to look up, seeing Martha’s head had fallen to the side as well, her eyes closed and her chest not moving in the slightest.

“Martha?” he called, with no avail. Her silence was the loudest sound he’d ever heard. “Martha?” he tried, again.

The next silence that followed fell on his shoulders, the weight of the world, a dark and cold world, crashed him; a numbness he hadn’t felt in a long time coming back to him, enveloping his heart quickly; his pounding head making the room going in circles.

Another feeling came back to him, resurging from the deepest part of his head at full force. Guilt. He had done it again. Just as he had done it to his father, driving him crazy with his childish problems when he needed to rest; just as he did when he asked for Jen to come in the middle of the night when having a crisis, making her to drive on the same night, on the same street a stupid man decided to do the same action, but under the effects of the alcohol; just as he did by letting his wife come here despite her weak health without putting up a fight, making her to stand his difficult and internalized feelings.

He had done it all over again. He had killed three persons who were always there for him and he never gave their sacrifice back, he never thanked them.

Thomas couldn’t control himself when he threw the most heart-breaking sounding scream.

Patsy saw all adults around her running nervously, avoiding her, pretending she didn’t exist when she asked what was happening. Polly clung to her, afraid of so many movements and so much unawareness. She held her tight, wanting to be strong enough to protect her little sister. She hadn’t
realised how much she’d missed her until they found each other here, by her own father’s petition.

Patsy hadn’t even realised how much she’d truly been missing her parents until she saw them. The image of her weak and sick mother came back to her brain, and she trembled, tightening the hug with her sister. Her mother. She wasn’t allowed to see her for the rest of the afternoon. She’d tried to go and spend the day with her father, but aunt Sally told her he was too busy right now, writing and working. Damn his work, his writings, and everything he seemed to prefer before being with them…

Aunt Lucy came out the room their mother was in, a stoic face and rigid posture. She passed them by and entered the room their father was in, not bothering in knocking.

“She’s barely breathing” was the cold sentence that left her mouth.

The next thing she knew was that their father sprinted out of the room, out of breath himself, and entered Martha’s bedroom without minding anyone or anything around him. Not even her or Polly.

“Is Mum alright?” asked her sister, scared.

Patsy didn’t answer, their aunt’s words invading her mind and making her unable to think correctly. She couldn’t feel her legs. She would’ve run into the room as well if she did. Polly hugged her closer, sobbing. Lucy passed them by, throwing them a rapid glare, before coming inside the room and closing the door.

Seconds passed like hours, the beating of her heart and the sobs of her sister keeping her in touch with reality.

It was the heartrending scream their father threw inside the closed room what made Patsy come back entirely to the present, to break down as well and cry with her little sister, alone in the little hallway.

She didn’t need more words or someone coming to them to understand what had just happened in that room.
Patsy had seen her father being dragged out of the room, barely conscious, by aunts Sally and Lucy. The first one was a crying mess, the second, just as she had known her, serious and impassive. Both she and her sister saw their father almost falling when he finally collapsed. Polly hugged her closer, shaking like a leaf. Patsy took her to their bedroom and closed the door. Polly didn’t need to see that.

They were told by aunt Sally that their father had suffered one of his migraines and that this one was too strong to handle and he fell asleep. It was a half-sweet lie, Patsy would give her that, and thanked her for being able to calm Polly and cheer them up with the theory that their mother was now in a better place, still watching over them.

His father barely left his bedroom in the next three weeks, barely talked with anyone.

Barely talked to them or held their baby sister. In fact, Patsy wasn’t exaggerating when she thought Thomas hadn’t wanted to look at the baby after their mother passed. Aunt Sally lived with them for a bit, helped their father in all she could, she even went with him to France when something bad happened back at Thomas’ workplace and he was sent there.

They were sent to live with Lucy. Boarding school be damned. Thomas wasn’t going to be able to pay that from now on. Patsy, at first, thanked the Heavens for some good luck, but when Lucy showed her true colours once they were under her care, she stopped feeling so much gratitude.

Something happened between aunt Sally and Thomas, and he returned alone. She kept in touch with them, though, sending them encouraging texts and calling them sometimes, to see how they were doing. She didn’t want to know much about Thomas, though. Patsy couldn’t blame her when she knew they were involved in a relationship that went to hell for her father’s fault.

Elizabeth, their baby sister, died. The news destroyed the two sisters, especially because they didn’t know how it could’ve happened. Whooping cough. How did none of them realise? Patsy and Polly cried a lot, they felt broken. But Thomas felt devastated when Lucy called him to inform him. The coldness in her tone made Patsy to want and slap her in the face, to scream at her until her throat hurt too much.

Another fight arouse between Thomas and Lucy. Thomas took them with him and they changed schools when they arrived at the north. Lucy kept pestering, calling and Thomas was starting to lose his patience, his nerves going out of control, his migraines getting worse. When he lost Monticello (and found out Lucy bought it right after) their father started to be more irascible.
But the concerning apathy of Thomas’ behaviour put his oldest daughter on her nerves. Because she didn’t understand, because she couldn’t do anything for him and because they had drifted apart. Because it hurt to see any life in her father’s eyes gone. Because it hurt like hell to have lost two parents and that one of them didn’t even realise it.

Things cooled down when uncle James moved with them and his constant support was now 24/7. Fights happened daily between her and her father, and Patsy, deep down, loved them, because it returned some fire in her father’s actions and words, because it made her believe he’d come back and still had the will to fight. Because it meant that maybe he cared for her and her sister. Because it meant that he didn’t give them away to anyone to raise them because he didn’t want them. Because it meant all her insecurities were inside her head and Thomas truly loved them. Still loved them.

Patsy had left one of their parents die, she wouldn’t forgive herself if she let the same happen to the one Polly and she had left.

“Hamilton, get ready, we’re going to have lunch”

Alexander stopped midway of the staircase, frowning his brows. Thomas had already his jacket on and was swinging the keys in his index finger. Libby stuck her head out the dining room, exchanging a curious glare to both men.

“Aren’t you and Alexander going to eat here, Thomas?” she asked, politely.

“No, Libby, I’d rather breathe some fresh air before the gathering” explained the man, with a small smile.

“Do you want me to tell your siblings?”

“No, let’s play a game of who notices first”

The girl blinked a bit perplexed, but nodded.

“And I don’t have a say in all this?” complained Alexander. “Maybe I don’t want to eat out today”

“Pity, the one who pays is the one who decides” concluded Thomas, opening the door and not
closing it when he stepped out.

Alexander sighed. “This is gonna make the rate to go up as well” he swore, marching to the opened door.

“Have a nice time” wished Libby, smiling with amusement.

“May God hear you, dear…”

“So, I see the lavender did its expected effect” commented Alexander, when Thomas drove away from the house. He felt his distress almost disappearing when he saw the huge form getting littler through wing mirror.

“You didn’t have to buy me that again” said Thomas, after a thought.

“I know. It’s called politeness. After sharing my air with your family, I understand it shocks you that much”

Thomas frowned slightly at the sardonic response. “I’ll make sure to give you what it cost you back”

“Don’t sweat it. I already added it to my fees”

“How much are we talking about?”

“You come from a family of well-known lawyers and work in a law firm, you can’t imagine it?”

“You’re a true conversationalist, Hamilton” sarcastically flattered Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“I just adapt myself to my company, Jefferson”

And they fell into (uncomfortable) silence. Thomas didn’t know which of the two was worse when it came to the immigrant. Alexander was, at least, entertained with his phone, texting someone, and that gave him a bit of peace until they reached the place.

“Fast food, really?” commented Alexander, when the car stopped and he looked up.

“I’m adapting to my company” he threw his words in his face, smiling smugly.

Alex showed an upset face before replying. “Yeah, that or that you didn’t want to risk it before seeing my bill”

Thomas was resolute to make James pay half of that, just for putting him in this mess with his least favourite person on the planet.
They chose a table near the window, waiting for their order to arrive. Alexander kept with his eyes glued to the screen of his phone, and his strange unwillingness to talk was putting Thomas on the edge of his nerves.

“You know? If I wanted to spend my time with a person who only pays attention to their phone, I’d have brought my daughter” he said, not bothering in concealing his annoyance.

“Maybe you should have” dismissed Hamilton, not giving in for once.

It just made Thomas’ nerves to go worse. At least, Hamilton gave him a couple of words or sharp responses to work with, but the indifference and apathy in his tone of voice reminded him too much of his mother. And though today was going to be a day to remember her, Thomas didn’t want to. Not in the slightest.

“You know” Hamilton talked just in that moment, and for a second Thomas really thought the little bastard could read minds. “This trick of eating out so you don’t have to face family unless it’s strictly necessary is so old. I was hoping something better from the erudite of the family”

Thomas blinked a couple of times, not having expected *that* coming out from the immigrant’s mouth from all the things he was thinking that Hamilton could say to him. He came back to the real world when the worker put their order on the table and wished them for a good meal.

“Well, I was expecting from the scholar of his forgotten island to come to the conclusion that my family is not the best company by himself” he retorted.

Alexander looked up for a brief moment, then returned his glare to the screen. “Fair enough…” he conceded, eating a couple of chips. “And you decided to take me with you, instead?”

“Like I’m gonna leave you alone with them after what you did last night” said Thomas, upset.

“True, I see your family – you included, of course – is not very used to hear the truth. I gave them too much of my truth dose, I’ll try to give the it little by little when it comes to them, I understand” nodded Hamilton, in a condescending manner.

Thomas gave him a sour look. “Are you this obnoxious with everybody or just with me?”

“Just with you, I’m afraid”

Before Thomas could continue with the conversation, a childish voice started to call Alex’s name over and over. The immigrant finally looked completely up, phone forgotten, as he looked for the owner of the voice. Thomas was shocked to see the easiness with which Hamilton’s face changed from serious and stoic to happily bright.
He got up and knelt on the floor, arms wide opened. A child came running his way, smiling widely. He threw to his arms, hugging the immigrant tightly.

“How much you grew!” said Alexander, getting up with the boy in his arms.

“And he got faster as well” a man said, out of breath and coming in their direction.

“Or you are older” teased Alexander.

“Ahh, that might be!” laughed the man. “It’s good to see you, Alex”

“Likewise, Don. And the same goes for you, Timmy” added Alexander, with a funny tone that made the kid laugh.

“Alex, I won the poetry contest back at my school!” Timmy told him, with bright eyes.

“Really?” asked Alexander, gasping in awe.

“Yes, do you wanna see it?” asked the boy, excited.

“Timmy, maybe Alexander’s busy…” the father tried to calm the hyperactive child down.

Alexander was fast to shake his head. “I’m in my lunchbreak”

“Really? The day has finally arrived?” Now, it was Don’s turn to gasp.

Alex laughed falsely. “Ha, ha, very funny…”

“Do you wanna read it?” asked Timmy, now a bit more insecure.

Alexander smiled softly down at him. “Of course I do, sweetheart” he turned to Jefferson, who was left forgotten back at the table, seeing the exchange with a bit of confusion. “Do you mind if I go for a moment?”

“No, no” he hurried to say.

“Settle, then” said Alexander, putting the kid down and letting him to drag him to the table he and his father had been eating before spotting him.

Don laughed wholeheartedly. “Kids, huh?” he said, conversationally.

Thomas tensed at his try of small talk. Maybe he shouldn’t have let Hamilton leave. He simply nodded, sending the man a polite smile.

“A client or a friend?” asked Don, not giving up just yet.

“Client” replied Thomas, laughing a bit at the second option. If only the man knew how he wasn’t even a proper client, per se…
“Custody?”
“Yes…”

“You’re a lucky one” said Don, sincerely. Thomas stiffened, his stomach making knot after knot. “It’s not very common for a man to win a case for domestic violence and the custody of his child”

“I’m sorry” replied Thomas, automatically.

“Don’t be. It’s in the past and it’s experience for the future” assured the man. He patted Thomas on the back, reassuringly. “Whatever you’re struggling with, I wish you the best of lucks. You already got a great help to begin with” he promised him again.

“Thank you, sir” said Thomas, forcing a smile.

He decided to ignore the unnamed sensation that spread again over his chest and that made his head to hurt once more for the rest of the meal.

The two men made it back to Shadwell (with Alexander in a seemingly better mood, thank that kid and his father), and the first thing they saw when the door opened for them was the concerned face of Libby.

“Thomas?” she said, in a cautious whisper. “Mistress Lucy wants to talk to you”

He went rigid at that. Why couldn’t he have a moment of calmness? He felt the fixated glare of Alexander on him, as he closed the door and hang his jacket on the coat stand by the door.

“Did she say what she wanted?” he asked, trying to drown his paranoid theories inside his head. Libby shook her head. “No, she didn’t tell me. She just… She wanted to talk to you during lunch, but as you were gone…”

“We’re sorry if that caused you an inconvenience” said Thomas, immediately. “Is she in her workroom?”

“Yes”

“Alright, thank you, Libby”

Alexander saw Thomas running upstairs. Libby followed him with the glare, twisting her
hands in nervousness. He walked closer to her.

“Hey, you alright?”

Despite his efforts to talk in an even tone, the girl jumped, startled. “Ah, yes, I am, but…”

“She didn’t tell you anything, did she?” he asked, arching one suspicious eyebrow.

“Um, no, no…” she clearly lied, avoiding his glare. “It’s… It’s alright, it’s just that we’re all very stressed for the gathering this afternoon and…”

“Why don’t you go rest?” he suggested, gently

The girl seemed shocked to hear that. “No, I can’t. Today’s…”

“I’ll prepare you something to drink and you spend a bit with me, calming your nerves” he proposed. “I think y’all, the ones who are not part of this family, need the rest”

Libby thought it for a moment, and eventually, nodded.

“But just five minutes” she insisted.

Alexander, that time, held up both hands in surrender. “Okay, that’d be enough, dear”

Libby and Alexander didn’t reach the five minutes of calmness. A thump of a door slamming shut interrupted the beginning of their conversation. The young housekeeper looked at the door, waiting to see anyone coming down the stairs. Alexander waited expectantly as well. The only thing they heard was another thump, maybe louder than the one before.

The girl sighed.

“I think the conversation didn’t go well” she commented, about to get up.

Alexander put a hand on the top of hers, stopping her. “I’ll go”

“Are you sure?”

“I promised you some rest” he shrugged, jumping off the stool.

“Thank you” said the girl, totally honest.
Alexander nodded in her direction before turning around and marching upstairs. He knew he was the last person Jefferson wanted to see right now (if he was the one upset, but who else could it have been? Everyone in here looked like statues and the man was the only one who’d shown some emotion at some point during their past quarrels), but he also knew the girl truly needed to breathe. He didn’t want to imagine how demanding the family was. The complaints about a simple thing such as a little delay for dinner answered his question, though.

He tried to remember the path he had followed yesterday a few times to find the correct bedroom. The muttered curses that could be heard from one closed door were very helpful for his search. He knocked on the door twice, loud enough to be heard above Jefferson’s voice and accelerated pacing. Alexander didn’t wait for a response, only opening the door after a few seconds of silence.

“Can I come in?” he still asked.

Thomas gave him an annoyed look, but Hamilton knew he was not angry at him. Or that his whole anger came because he had entered his private bedroom without waiting for an invitation first. Hamilton walked in, closed the door at his backs and stood there.

“What lie was it now?” he asked, almost comically.

That behaviour just embittered Thomas’ mood a lot more. “None of your business” he responded, turning his back on him and trying to calm his ire by the outside sight.

Alexander arched one eyebrow. “Sorry to burst your bubble, but it is literally and technically my business”

“They want me to give the speech about how good my mother was” explained Thomas, against his best judgement.

“Allright?” said Alexander, still not catching where the drama was. “And? Did you forget your homework back at home?”

Thomas frowned over his shoulder. “The hoaxes are included in your fee or are on the house?”

“Don’t tempt me”

“Just… Leave, I don’t want to lose the energy I’ll need later on you” spat Thomas, rubbing his temples.

“Can’t your sister or any other do that?” asked Hamilton, changing his demeanour to a serious one.

He narrowed his eyes when he saw Thomas tensing at the other side of the room.
“No, it’s not…” the older man wavered, still with his back on him. “Hamilton, just… go back with Libby, I’m used to this, it’s not the first time…”

“You’re not that used to this if you have to resort to hide in your room as…” began to argue Hamilton, taking a single step forward.

“I am not hiding…”

“I came here to try and help you see this through, once and…”

Thomas rolled his eyes, barely throwing the immigrant a glare over his shoulder. “You came here because you never think to have enough money in your bank account…”

Hamilton frowned darkly at that. “Listen, your friend…”

“You complain about always having to go after everybody and for once someone tells you to leave them alone, to solve their problems on their own, you keep pestering”

“Because that’s my job!” exploded Alexander, throwing his arms in the air, in frustration. “That’s what I came here to do!”

“You didn’t want to come here in the first place, stop playing the martyr card” spat Thomas, turning half around, arms crossed.

“And you stop playing the victim card, for God’s sake, you brought this upon yourself…”

“And I’m paying for it, a lot more than you’d ever admit”

“Paying it how? By talking in front of a crowd of people?”

“I don’t expect you to understand. Whatever room you come in, you always have someone behind you to help you…”

“I don’t, that’s all my hard work” Alexander cut off, sharply. “And I won’t understand if you refuse to talk to…”

“What else do you want from me?” interrupted Thomas, raising his voice. “You try to put up a fight with every member of my family…”

“Well, someone really must do it!” Alexander defended himself, right away. “I don’t know in which century you think you live in, but…”

“That’s our problem, or theirs, for that matter”

“Or the employees who are scared of thinking about…”

“They get paid for do what they’re told, they knew before accepting…”

“A simple break!” kept complaining Alexander, his face red. “That girl, Libby, you should’ve seen her face when I told her to…”

“Well, admit it’s very hypocritical from your part…”

“I know where my limit is! I know when I have to stop and…”
“Yes, you know it very well. That’s why you’re reduced to work for me instead of going to court as you dream of, afraid of suffering from another breakdown” spat Thomas, venomously.

Alexander’s expression faltered, Thomas was glad. Maybe that way he’d finally shut up and leave him alone. Alexander’s eyes sharpened and he clenched his teeth. Thomas slapped himself mentally; he should’ve known better.

“Do you wanna talk about failures?” asked Alexander, with an innocent threatening tone. “Alright, then, why don’t we talk about Mr Porter? Why don’t we talk about all the times you have to send Madison to me because you’re unable to speak a fucking single word like the adult you are? Why don’t we talk about the money that appeared mysteriously in your salary when you worked for King?”

“You told me that was going to stay between you and I” Thomas reminded him, enraged.

“Do you see anyone else in this room?” asked Alexander, stretching his arms to the sides. “Oh, and talking about Mr King… At least I wasn’t freaking drunk when I almost fuck Maria’s only chance up, Mr Jefferson” he said, with a smirk spreading across his face.

Thomas clenched his fists in contained ire. “You know? For wanting to get paid for defending me, you’re doing the total opposite”

“It’s not my fault you’re such a difficult client to defend” said Alexander, sighing out and pinching the bridge of his nose. “You’re more difficult to understand than the weather”

“I wasn’t asking you to, so don’t worry over that”

“Well, I have to!” insisted Hamilton, to Thomas’ weariness. “I have to understand what the hell is going on in here, why would you come here to stand this… This Falcon Crest 2.0 you made me live here…”

“No one made you live anything. You’re free to go. The sooner, the better” assured Jefferson, with indifference.

“Why would you accept them to treat you like that, playing around, lying to you…” continued Alexander, growing angrier as he spoke.

“I wasn’t expecting you to understand, Hamilton” said Thomas, raising the voice so he could interrupt him. “I wasn’t expecting someone like you to understand why somebody would do all what I’m doing to demonstrate my sister that I’m fully capable of taking care of my daughters, to demonstrate my anxiety doesn’t incapacitate me for doing my job as a parent fine enough, to keep the remaining family I have with me. I don’t expect you to understand all that, after spending your whole life with one thousand families to choose and not knowing what a home is, but the rest of us do”

Thomas didn’t stop himself before he ranted it all, the anger he contained when Lucy told him he’d be the one doing the speech about their mother that afternoon coming out now at full force, against Hamilton, making the immigrant pay the frustration he felt when Lucy warned him that her lawyer was coming to the gathering to see how well he was doing.
Hamilton that time didn’t flatter, his expression changed completely, all fury evaporated. His shoulders tensed and his eyes shone with a myriad of emotions Thomas dare not to name or even want to see. But he knew they all meant the same: he had crossed the line. Yet again. Worse than last time. It wasn’t like he didn’t know about how Alexander ended up being the Knox’s child, it wasn’t like he didn’t know he was the child he once felt bad about when he heard his mother and the rest of her ‘friends’ badmouthing a poor teenager who was not to blame for the sick mind of some scoundrel scattered around the world and who didn’t have a say in with whom he stayed with until he reached legal age.

He already knew the kid Thomas pitied a long time ago had always been the man who he couldn’t stand for his fierce and stubborn personality, the man who he spent meeting after meeting arguing with and who also couldn’t see Thomas, both just agreeing on that they hated the other’s guts.

Alexander stood there without saying a word for a few moments, before simply turning around and leaving the room. A third thump resounded throughout the big house, louder than the other two he had made before. The silence that stayed right after and that he had longed to have felt heavier than Thomas wanted to admit.

Chapter End Notes

Why should I have a heavy heart?
Why should I start to break in pieces?
Why should I go and fall apart for you?
Why should I play the grieving girl and lie,
saying that I miss you
and that my world has gone dark without your light?

I will sing no requiem tonight.

'Cause when the villains fall, the kingdoms never weep;
no one lights a candle to remember.
No, no one mourns at all
when they lay them down to sleep.
So, don't tell me that I didn't have it right;
don't tell me that it wasn't black and white.
After all you put me through
don't say it wasn't true.

That you were not the monster
that I knew...

—Verses of the song Requiem from the musical "Dear Evan Hansen"

NOTES:
*A divorced woman: This might sound very unrealistic and stupid, but I've heard people these days hating on women just for being divorced. Especially, women themselves. Our Queen, Letizia, is hated (among other reasons I won't get into) because she married Felipe while being divorced.

*What's not written (Lo que no está escrito): An expression when you overdo something. For example, here it means "I cried a lot".
Laurens came back to the house of his current boyfriend, with Morgan and Sonya, the three of them laughing happily and sharing in-jokes. It had been a great family day, and nothing could spoil it.

“Well, look who finally arrived”

Or so they all thought before Vince greeted them with a grim face and arms upon his chest.

“Oh, hi, Vince” greeted Laurens, with a wide smile.

“Where were you?” he demanded to know.

“We went to the zoo, Vince!” explained Sonya, happily.

“The zoo?” repeated the man, sceptically.

“We made a baby giraffe to drink milk from a bottle, it was fantastic” laughed Morgan.

“Look, look, I made photos” said Sonya, showing Vince her phone.

Vince looked at the screen, not changing his serious face one bit.

“Awesome” he nodded, resentfully. “You all have so much fun together…”
Sonya turned to Laurens, who saw the conversation with a smile. “John, thank you for making my father so happy” she said, sincerely. “I misjudged you” she admitted, before kissing him on the cheek.

Laurens looked at her, moved. “She gave me a peek” he told his boyfriend, at the verge of tears.

“Yeah, I saw it” said Vince, dryly.

“Now we look like a true family” commented Morgan. “Tomorrow we will sightsee whatever place you want!” he promised.

Sonya hugged her father, smiling from ear to ear. Vince walked pass them and patted Laurens on the arm, who was still in shock for Sonya’s previous display of affection.

“And you didn’t promise me we’d go to the cinema today?”

“Agh, it’s true” said Laurens, hissing and slapping himself on the forehead. He looked at his watch. “We can still make it for the next session” he urged, taking him by the wrist.

Vince released himself from his grip. “No! I won’t go now, it’s almost ten pm! I can’t eat popcorn that late!”

“Don’t eat anything then”

“No! You have to eat popcorn while watching movies, it’s a well-known non-written law”

“Hey, we can all go together” proposed Sonya, all of a sudden.

“Yes, like when you were little” agreed Morgan,

“Yeah!”

“That sounds like fun!” nodded Laurens. “And I can buy you an ice cream!”

“Ice cream? I adore this man!” said Sonya.

“No!” hollered Vince, angry. “He’s my boyfriend, god damnit! I brought him here and you all are enjoying him but me! It’s not fair!”

“Screw you and put up with it!” retorted Morgan, matching his ire. “After all these years standing lunatics like you or my wife I finally have a friend!”

“And does it have to be my boyfriend?!”

“Vince, don’t be so selfish” admonished Sonya. “When was the last time you saw Dad so happy?”

“Listen, honey, if I gave a damn about the happiness of that cushion-man, I wouldn’t have given myself to another man” explained Vince.

“Well, maybe you don’t care, but I do” said Sonya, embracing her father by the shoulders.

“Aaah, I see what’s happening here. You’re jealous because everyone in here found love but you”
said Vince, with a cruel smirk. “Living in your father’s house at the age of thirty, alone and a living mess”

“Uuuuuuh, you just did not say thaaat” said Sonya, walking dangerously slow to the man.

“Come on, come on, don’t fight!” said Laurens, putting himself between the two. “This is stupid to fight over. I’ve got enough love and time for everybody… I mean, someone would have to write me a schedule and I’ll try to learn it, but I do have it!”

“I at least have my own salary from own job!” kept continuing to argue Sonya, pushing Laurens aside. “What have you done, apart from breaking my father’s marriage and living off of him?”

“Me? I helped you study that career you now are boasting about, you ungrateful brat!” responded Vince, hurt. “Because your awesome father over there didn’t even want to know anything about it!”

“Because you and the bitch of my wife destroyed my fucking life and took my willing to live away!” complained Morgan, walking to them to be face to face with his partner.

“Don’t blame me or your ex-wife for your incompetence!” argued Vince, pointing accusatorily at him. “I know you barely wanted to know anything about this girl when she was born!”

“Because he got scared of parenthood, alright?!” Sonya defended her father again, with watery eyes. “We’re pass that!”

“Scared of parenthood, are you sure?” taunted Vince.

“Don’t you dare!” warned Morgan.

“Dare to what?” asked Sonya.

“Girl, he didn’t got scared of parenthood, he almost abandoned you and your mother because she slept with his brother and you were his daughter” explained Vince.

“What?” exclaimed Sonya, covering her mouth in shock.

“You son of a bitch!” insulted Morgan.

Sonya looked enraged at her father. “And why did you tell this man before me?!”

“Because I got drunk one night and it slipped, okay?!”

“Apart from a cheated on, you’re a drunkard!”

Sonya began to cry. “My life has been a lie!”

“And mine has been the worst shit ever, and I don’t cry that much” complained Morgan.

“You insensitive bastard” said Vince, wanting to hug the girl.

Sonya pushed him, disgusted. “Get away from me!”

“And now I’m gonna pay for something I have not done!” shouted Vince.

“For opening that big mouth of yours, you fishwife!” retorted Morgan.

“For the love of God” commented Laurens, seeing it all from the corner of the room. “You have not
opened the door, you blew it up into pieces!” He put his two hands at each side of the head, flipping out. “It’s true I can’t get away from soap operas”

Vince threw daggers in his direction. “You get out from here, asshole! You ruined my family!” he accused.

“Eeeeh, eh, eh” said Laurens, raising one hand, right away. “Excuse me, mister, but this family was already in deep shit before I even knew you… Now, he wants to pin the blame of this mess on me. Ha!”

Vince took two cushions and threw them at him, blinded by rage. “Get out, get the fuck out, I don’t want to see you again!”

Laurens avoided the cushions, startled. “Like I want to keep living with you, you’re crazy, man! Did you hear me? Fucking crazy!” he insulted.

He turned to the front door. He took a moment of thought, and then turned in the direction of the kitchen. Sonya was crying in the living room, while Vince had buried his face in his hands. Morgan stood there, shaking his head and with his bitter expression back. Vince looked up when he heard no door closing, and frowned at Laurens when he got out from the kitchen, four bags of chips in his hands.

“I told you to get the hell out of here!”

“Now, now!” complained Laurens.

“Hey! Don’t take our food!”

Vince ran to him. Laurens sprinted to the front door and stormed out of the house, cackling with superiority as he ran down the hallway. The turned his head, to throw a last cruel smirk in his ex’s direction.

“Haha! I’m faster and smarter than…!”

The rest of his sentence was never spoken. Laurens fell down the stairs in front of him that he missed. He rolled down them, complaining, and landed when they ended, hissing from pain. Vince stayed in his doorframe, still angry at the man.

“It was still worthy!” he heard Laurens said.
Thomas looked at the bottle of pills in his hand. His head was pounding like crazy and his anxiety was making him shake in spot, no matter how hard he tried to be in control of his own body. Thomas toyed with the tap of the bottle for a bit, tapping and untapping too many times that he would ever be proud to admit.

Someone knocked on his door, and Thomas was glad it was when he decided to tap the bottle once again, otherwise he’d have dropped them all on the floor when he jumped in a startle.

“Thomas?” Libby called from the other side. “They're waiting for you downstairs, sir” she informed.

“Thank you. I’ll be there in a minute”

The response the girl gave was her footsteps becoming distant. Thomas sighed and threw the bottle aside. He didn’t need to take it, he could handle this, he was used to this, he was not a little child anymore, he could do it, he could do it and would do it…

He could not do this. He would not do this.

Their second dining room, the one destined to parties or important meetings, was infested by people. The majority of them unknown faces to him. For not saying all of them. He only distinguished a few employees of his family who walked on auto-pilot, offering drinks or something to snack to whatever guest they saw empty-handed.

Hamilton was nowhere to be seen.

Lucky him, honestly.

He finally spotted the table his siblings were, and though they were not the company he was needing right now, he walked to them.

“For a moment, I thought you would not come” was the greeting he received from Lucy.
“Same” he said, just as sharply, taking a seat by Anna’s right side.

“Good afternoon, Thomas” the woman by Lucy’s side said, with a polite tone.

Thomas looked at his sister’s lawyer. Just thinking how he used to babysit her when she was little and now she was siding with the people who thought he was unable to take care of two girls. Life truly had a funny way to work.

“Good afternoon, Abigail*” he greeted back.

The girl smiled forcibly at him. “Please, Thomas, you’re my father’s friend. Call me Nabby as you’ve always done”

“This is a formal gathering and your father and I no longer share a friendship, Abigail” explained Thomas, also giving her a forced smile.

The girl nodded and kept looking at her surroundings, deciding that was the end of the conversation. Thomas thought that was for the best. He would not forget Adams for talking about his personal case to his daughter and encouraging her when she was hired by Lucy to take her side on the dispute about Patsy and Polly’s custody; but she was also to blame for accepting, knowing how hard it was for Thomas.

Call him resentful if you want.

“Thomas, it’s your turn. You’re starting” instructed Lucy, taking him away from his memories.

Thomas nodded, trying to swallow the lump in his throat. The room fell silent when they saw him getting up and Lucy called their attention. Though it was necessary to do so in these situations, Thomas hated the fact that now everybody was paying attention only to him. He could feel the liquid of his glass wetting his hand, as this was shaking uncontrollably.

He started as he was supposed to, as he was expected to do so. All eyes were on him, demanding him more than he was already giving, and he fought to keep speaking, focused on the volume of his voice, on how level it was, on how well pronounced the words were…

God, he hoped his annoying lisp wouldn’t make an appearance when he last needed it.

“My family and I would want to thank you for coming today. All of you knew my m-mother,
He wavered on the word ‘mother’, and he knew everybody noticed. How would they not? His mistakes were always very evident. At least, for his ‘mother’, they always were. Thomas tried to ignore the slip-up. He’d have the rest of the night to repeat the mistake inside his head.

“She held you all in great esteem…”

More than she ever held her family…

“She did pl-plenty of things for those in need…”

For (what she considered that it was) a small fee…

“And she was…”

…

What was she? What had Jane been for Thomas?

She’d been his mother. His source of resorts. His unachievable goal. The voice inside his head. The reason behind all those critics he made about himself, that prevented him to try a lot of things that he’d wished. The constant reminder of all his mistakes. The disappointment he carried upon his shoulders. The coldness he’d inherited, he feared, he despised. She had been the light that fell on all the insecurities and flaws he tried to conceal from the world. She’d been the ‘but’ in all his little achievements. She’d been the prisoner, the pessimistic voice of reason that ‘did everything for his own good’, that ‘knew what was best’.

She’d been the reason behind the hatred Lucy and the twins felt towards him. She’d been the narrator that twisted the story on her favour, taking advantage of the youth of his siblings. She was being the reason why he couldn’t live with his daughters in peace, she was the reason why he couldn’t raise them as he’d wanted, as he’d promised.

Thomas was all he despised about his mother, all he swore to never be, especially to his own
children.

“Thomas?” his youngest sister called, a faint concern in her voice.

He blinked, the image of hundreds of pairs of eyes on him coming back to focus. Why did he think he could do this? Any of this? Why did he come here? Why did he insist on making a fool of himself more than he already had?

“Thomas, are you alright?” Anna asked again, more urgently.

He looked at her, saw her getting up, with a frown on her face. Anna walked to him, the rest of their siblings looking at them, as the rest of the room. She put a gentle hand on his arm, and he didn’t feel it. Thomas tried to talk to her, to invent some excuse, to tell her to keep going on his behalf. He didn’t mind about this stupid gathering, never did in the first place. But when Thomas opened his mouth, no words came out. All his vocabulary died in his throat, not seeing the light.

It was then when he couldn’t control the panic he felt.

Thomas tossed his glass in his sister’s hands, who almost let it drop from the sudden movement, and then ran out of the room, ignoring the whispering and curious looks dedicated to him.

Libby was surprised when she saw Alexander alone in the kitchen, talking with someone via text over the phone. She was about to prepare a polite smile, but she did the gesture naturally as she approached the lawyer.

“Good afternoon, Alexander” she greeted, putting the empty tray on the counter. “Did you need a breather?”

Alexander gave her a weak smile. “I doubt anyone wants me there” he answered, honestly.

“Almost nobody in there is a good company, if I’m allowed to say so” commented Libby, lowering her tone.

“Of course you are” encouraged Alexander. “It’s not like you’re lying, anyways”
“Did Thomas and you have a fight?” she asked, straight to the point, as she lined a series of glasses up on the tray.

“Did we scream that loud again?” he asked, boringly, as if the occurrence was something normal between the two men. Libby didn’t know it was.

“Employees entertain by gossiping” she excused her knowledge.

They were silent for a moment. Libby filled the glasses with the champagne Lucy instructed her to use. When the last one was half-filled, she talked again.

“My aunt, Consuelo, used to work in here when Thomas and his siblings were little” she admitted.

“She wins Heaven by standing this family” said Alexander.

Libby smiled and laughed a bit. “My mother used to tell her the same. They were sisters… She wasn’t very happy when I told her I ended up working in here as well”

“If I may, why did you decide to work in here? You’re still too young to lose the rest of your life in here” commented Alexander.

“I needed a job and money” replied the girl, sincerely. “Besides, I’m not planning on staying forever; I’d love to form a family”

“What does that have to do with you working in here?” asked Alexander, confused.

“Well, one of the requirements for working in here, if you’re a woman, is that you can’t have a partner, less children”

“And you really signed something like that?” kept questioning Alexander, the disgust clear in his voice.

“Again, I needed the job and the money. And they give me a roof over my head until I put my life together” explained the girl.

“There are better jobs out there” assured Alexander. “In fact, I know nobody back at the law firm where Jefferson and I work at would mind having someone like you for the cleaning. We’ve been needing one since we changed buildings…”

Libby’s eyes grew wide. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah” said Hamilton, shrugging.

“You wouldn’t mind recommending an illegal to work at a law firm?”

Alexander wrinkled his nose. “Illegal? What are you? A bag full of drug in the airport?”

“No, but…”

“People are not illegal. You’re undocumented” he corrected. “And that can be easily solved…”
Alexander was surprised when the girl gave him a tight hug, shaking slightly. He tapped her on the back, letting her do.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Yes, it’s… Gosh, I’ve been told that so many times… I…” she stammered, as if she were in a dream.

The moment was interrupted when some doors were violently swung open in the distance. They distinguished Anna’s voice, calling her older brother’s name. Thomas appeared for a brief moment in front of the kitchen door, running upstairs. Both Libby and Alexander heard his accelerated breathing. The girl ended the hug and sprinted in the direction the man had run to, Alexander followed her immediately.

Libby didn’t knock on the bathroom door, she simply swung it open, mannerisms totally forgotten. Alexander stopped at the doorframe, seeing the girl bursting into the room and just stopping by Thomas’ side, who was wetting his face with trembling hands, his breaths strangled and shallow.

“Thomas?” said the girl, a bit panicked. She stretched and withdrew her hands a couple of times, not knowing if the wisest option was to touch the man in the moment. “Thomas, can you hear me?”

The only thing she received as an answer was Thomas’ gesture of vomiting. Alexander sighed when nothing came out. He didn’t do well with those things, and it was clear Libby didn’t know how to handle the situation on her own. The two persons took a step forward when they saw Thomas stumbling on spot.

“Sit him on the floor” instructed Alexander, getting in the room completely. “Gently” Libby nodded and turned to Thomas. Still a bit doubtful, she took one of his arms and took him away from the sink. She supported him and helped him sit down, back against the wall, as Alexander walked to turn on the water again.

“Thomas, what’s wrong?” asked the girl, worried sick.

“He’s having a panic attack” replied Alexander, as his workmate was busier trying to breathe properly again. “Could you please bring him a glass of water, dear?”

“But…”
“I’m here with him”

Libby just doubted a second before nodding and running out of the room. Alexander filled her spot in front of Thomas, who was rigid in his sitting position, knees against his chest and eyes locked on the piled floor.

“Jefferson?” called Alexander, more resolute than the housekeeper. “Jeffer— Thomas, can you hear me?”

The mention of his name coming from Alexander made the expected effect, as Jefferson finally looked up at him. Whatever that might be passing through the man’s mind, Hamilton decided, was terrifying him.

“Are you hearing the water running?” he asked. After a few seconds, he was given a nod. “Focus on that sound, alright? Can I touch you?”

A rapid shake of head. Alexander moved a couple of centimetres away, then.

“Can you try and match my breath?” he asked, taking in a deep, exaggerated breath. Thomas imitated him, a bit more shakily. “Now, out… There. Do it again, please. In… Out… Perfect”

Libby came in again in a rush, glass in hand. She stood beside Alexander, passing him the water.

“Thank you, dear. Could you turn off the water? Thank you” he talked to the girl, nodding at her rapid moves. “Do you want some water?” he asked, now looking at Jefferson.

Thomas nodded, his breathing calmer than a couple of minutes ago, his shaking just the same. Hamilton decided to help him drink, assuring him again that he was not going to touch him. After he was finished, Thomas let out a deep sigh.

“Are you feeling better?” asked Libby, as she took the glass again in her hands. She frowned when he shook his head.

“Are you having another migraine?” asked Alexander. He received a nod.
“Can we know what happened?” inquired Libby.

Both saw the man gesturing to his throat and saying ‘no’ with the head in the meantime.

“You still can’t breathe?” guessed Libby, growing more worried.

Thomas shook his head, a bit frustrated. He then made another gesture with his hand, and Alexander put two and two together.

“You can’t talk” he concluded.

Thomas gave him a nod and then took another deep breath when he felt his nerves trying to go out of control.

“You won’t talk because you don’t wanna talk to us, or one of us, or because you can’t talk?” asked Alexander, wanting a straight response. Thomas raised two fingers. “You can’t talk” Libby frowned at the man giving another nod. “Is there anything we can do to help?”

Thomas shrugged. Then, shook his head, as unsure as the girl.

“Can you get up?” kept asking Alexander. He stretched out his hand when Thomas nodded again. “Alright, let us help. Maybe you’ll be able to talk after you had some rest” he encouraged.

“Did you use the lavender before the event?”

Thomas was lying on his bed and the blinds were closed. Libby was sent to prepare him a tea to calm the pain he claimed to feel. Thomas nodded, eyes closed and focused mostly on not losing control on his breathing.
“Didn’t it work this time?”

Thomas was silent for a long moment. Then, shrugged. Since Alexander and Libby helped him to lie down, he refused to look at the immigrant in the eye.

“Did this, the not talking thing, happen to you before?”

Against his best judgement, he admitted that it had indeed happened. He felt his muscles tensing and his heart beating fast. Gosh, just when he thought he couldn’t sink any lower, he had to go and had one of his ‘silent episodes’ in front of Hamilton, of all people. Right after he helped him get over a panic attack.

Could the day go any worse?

Thomas dared to look at Hamilton when he was asked nothing else. The immigrant hadn’t stopped looking for personal information since Libby left the room. He’d tried to give as little information as possible, his inability to talk for once working on his side.

Hamilton was a few steps away from his bed, still keeping the distances, a thoughtful expression on his face. Maybe he was thinking about all the possible ways he could use this against Thomas once they came back to work. It’d been a miracle they hadn’t fired him after all he’d done wrong. King didn’t hesitate in sending him to a foreign country after the show he performed, going drunk to the meeting, in an absurd attempt to drown his social anxiety, once and for all.

As the silence continued, his heartrate accelerated. If he was fired, he would lose all the money he had to survive and to support his daughters. If he was unable to give them at least that, Thomas would totally lose their custody.

If he hadn’t already after the shamefully scene from before…

“Thomas, calm down”

Hamilton’s voice, again saying his name, returned him to the real world. The immigrant was still in the same spot, but with his full attention on him. Thomas realised he’d started to gasp at the thought of losing his daughters.
“Do you want me to leave?” proposed Alexander.

Thomas nodded without thinking. To his surprise, Hamilton did as he was told, closing the door quietly.

The action made the room to feel smaller and more suffocating. But nobody needed to know, less Hamilton.

Libby came back later, a steaming cup of tea in one hand and her worried face still on place.

“Did you leave him alone?” she asked, and there was a bit of reprehension in her tone.

Alexander shrugged. “He wanted to be alone”

“Did he tell you that?”

“He answered to it” Alexander narrowed his eyes at the sigh the girl threw to the air. “Do you know something about it? Something your aunt told you?”

Libby wavered before responding. “She used to tell me he was a very quiet child. Nervous. Anxious. I never thought it could be this bad”

“Maybe because when she was working here, it was not that bad” commented Alexander, still thoughtful.

“Those poor girls… I feel bad for Thomas, but…”

“What girls?” interrupted Alexander.

Libby blushed. She had talked more than she was supposed to. But the glare Alexander threw in her direction was so resolute that she didn’t dare to pretend she hadn’t talked.

“One of my co-workers heard mistress Lucy talking with Mrs Adams…”

“Mrs Adams?” asked Alexander, changing his stern expression for one of genuine surprise.

“She’s mistress Lucy’s lawyer” explained Libby, looking around, fearing the walls could grow ears in any moment.
Alexander hummed. So, that was why Adams and Jefferson drifted apart; his wife was working for Thomas’ sister against him for the custody of the girls. Well, with friends like those, who would ever need enemies…

“She’s young, but very good at it, for what I know” kept talking Libby, in a hurry.

Ah, Adams’ daughter, then. It didn’t make the matter any better…

“Well, I better give this to Thomas” said Libby, when she saw he was not going to comment anything or ask her anything else. “Mistress Lucy wants to talk to him”

“She does?” asked Alexander, a dangerous edge in his voice.

Libby nodded. “She’s in her workroom and I wouldn’t make her wait longer than…”

“You’re right” said Alexander, getting separated from the wall across the door. “Let’s make the poor woman not wait any longer”

Libby’s eyes grew wide when she saw the man marching down the hall. “Where are you going…?”

“I’m going to have a few words with mistress Lucy. Tell Thomas to wait there, he needs to rest. I’ll come back as soon as I can”

Libby didn’t say anything. The time she took for entering Thomas’ bedroom let him see how worried she was.

Alexander found Lucy, her husband, lawyer and siblings very easily. The fact that he’d spent the whole night before prying throughout the whole house helped him. Blame his insomnia.

The door was opened, and Alexander didn’t even bother to knock. But he closed the door with enough force to stop their conversation. Lucy’s sombre expression sent chills down Anna and her husband’s spines.

“Mr Hamilton” she said, drawling the words with revulsion.

“Mrs Jefferson” he echoed, mocking her disgusted tone, though that didn’t mean he didn’t feel the
same way. His eyes went to the man that was closer to her. “Your husband, I presume?”

“Charles Lewis” introduced the man, throwing a nervous smile in his direction. “Nice to meet you”

“Same” said Hamilton, dryly, ignoring the stretched hand of the man. Charles withdrew it, a bit embarrassed.

“Charles, please, make sure the guests are attended by some of us” ordered Lucy, barely looking at her husband.

The man obeyed immediately. Alexander threw him a rapid glare and then his eyes fell upon the youngest girl in the room.

“And the scholar of Harvard. Miss Adams”

“Mr Hamilton” greeted the girl.

“It’s a pity they don’t teach loyalty in any universities” he spat, making the girl to walk a step back.

“Mr Hamilton, please, let’s be civil” said the girl, her expression hardening. The intelligence of the mother plus the temper of the father, Hamilton guessed. “And professional”

“You’re asking for too much in exchange of lies and trickeries” commented Hamilton, raising one eyebrow. “Miss Adams, please, I understand the hurry to climb up the social ladder of this profession, I’ve been there. That’s why I can assure that having your loyalties and moralities clear will take you far” he advised.

Nabby seemed to falter a bit, her lips curving. “I…”

“Choose your friendships wisely. Don’t be like Thomas”

The girl clenched her fists, enraged. “Don’t bring my father into this, Mr Hamilton. I’m warning you”

“I did not. If you took it personally, it might be because you know he and you did something very wrong to a man who didn’t deserve it” Hamilton was rapid to admonish.

“Nabby, please, whatever personal issues you have with Mr Hamilton, I’d advise you to solve it in your free time” said Lucy, interrupting the quarrel sharply.

“I’m sorry, ma’am” said the girl, lowering her glare, the fire within totally extinguished.

“Not in my free time” continued Hamilton, frowning at the woman sat on the desk. “She’d have to ask for an appointment, as anyone else”

“Mr Hamilton, I said…”

“If you’re used to people obeying and making your will blindly, that’s your problem, mistress Lucy” Hamilton pronounced the last two words with mockery. He smirked when he saw the tight grip the woman had on her pen. “But I’m a busy man and I’m not working for you, but for your brother”

“Where’s Thomas?” asked Anna, sounding concerned.
“About time someone asked” blurted out Alexander. “He’s in his bedroom, resting”

“In that case, Mr Hamilton, we can talk about…”

“Thomas is indisposed right now, miss Lucy” interrupted Alexander. “So, whatever issue you wanted to discuss with him, you’re free to discuss it with me”

“It’s a personal matter, Mr Hamilton”

“I’m a lawyer, miss Lucy” Alexander was quick to answer. “Yours is there, your brother’s here… I think we can discuss the legal and important matters easily”

Lucy pressed her lips and inhaled through her nostrils. She tapped the pen on her desk. Randolph, sat on one of the couches, threw an impressed whistle at Alexander’s responses. He lowered his glare when Lucy looked daggers at him.

“I’ve heard you wanted to discuss something about your nieces” began Alexander, impatiently.

“Yes, I do” nodded Lucy.

“Go on, then. I’m listening”

Nabby cleared her throat and took a step forward. “Mr Hamilton, I know that you used to take care of family cases”

“You’re well informed”

“And I think you took each case with the best interests of the kids in your mind”

“You think right”

“In that case, I also think you’re seeing, as we all do in here, what the best interests of my client’s nieces are”

“You thought wrong”

Nabby stood in silence for a moment.

“Mr Hamilton, please, this is a serious matter” she reprehended, straightening herself in spot.

“I agree, a very important one” nodded Alexander. “A man suffered a panic attack and all his relatives are in here, plotting against him, instead of going to see how he’s doing”

“We’re not plotting, Mr Hamilton” argued Lucy. “And I’m sure Thomas’s being treated and looked after right now”

“Yes, by the staff. Isn’t it funny? You all depend on them on laughable levels and yet you still treat them as scum”
“They’ve got their own rooms and their meals, Mr Hamilton” said Lucy, her cold glare hardening. “Don’t be a demagogue”

“You need to have a nerve to accuse other people of demagogy. You, who want to use his brother’s anxiety against him to take his daughter away from him” commented Alexander, crossing his arms upon his chest.

“That’s not demagogy. It’s reality” retorted Lucy. “You’ve witnessed what happened before. If he can’t take care of a simple speech, what will he do when something happens with his daughters? A man unable to face life as expected from an adult, is also unable to raise two little girls”

“Well, by that same logic, a woman who can’t even prepare her own toasts or pour a simple liquid in her glass, can’t raise a child” Lucy’s jaw went rigid at the mockery of his tone. “Ah, true, but you have a whole bunch of servants for doing that as well… True, true…”

“Mr Hamilton…”

Alexander turned to Nabby. “Is that why you’re siding with her? Because you were raised by Thomas instead by your own parents and can’t comprehend the opposite happening?”

“Mr Hamilton, I told you to keep personal issues out of this discussion” admonished Lucy, raising her voice and silencing whatever response her lawyer was about to give the immigrant.

“Let’s not traumatize some girls by receiving love and human warm from their father, their remaining parent… Let’s the cooker or the housekeeper who barely speaks English, because that way is easier to underpay them without them having the ways to retaliate, hug and drive my nieces to school…”

“My brother is not in a good mental condition to face parenthood, Mr Hamilton” interrupted Lucy, almost yelling, her ire palpable.

“Miss Lucy, you need to ask your lawyer to define the place her father and my client work at” said Alexander, with a smug smile. “Your brother is not only the sanest person in there, but the most professional and hardworking as well”

“Is running away from important meetings a professional behaviour for you, Mr Hamilton?” asked Lucy, eyes half-closed.

“No, but that’s not Thomas’ responsibility. In fact, it was her father’s” he said, pointing at Nabby, who was looking daggers at the immigrant, seething. “And yet, he could raise this bright young woman who’s now working for you”

“My father never attended an important meeting inebriated” spat Nabby, in offence.

“No, he doesn’t need to tipple to be an incompetent, I’ll give him that” nodded Alexander, enjoying the red face of the girl.

“Mr Hamilton, let’s be sensible” said Lucy, conciliatorily. “I understand that you’re doing your job and getting paid for it, but you must have the future of the girls in sight”

“I do” assured Alexander. “And, believe me, the closer I imagine them to you, the darker their future becomes” He turned on his heels and opened the door, vehemently. “We’ll finish this discussion later, miss Lucy, now, I think you’ve got guests to take care of”

“Have you asked Thomas what happened with Elizabeth?” asked Lucy, before he had the change to step out.
“Yes, I have” half-lied Alexander.

“Ask him again” proposed Lucy, with a wee smile making her way onto her lips. “Something tells me he didn’t tell you everything”

“It must run in the family”

Alexander knocked twice on the closed door of Thomas’ bedroom. Libby opened, her worry still there. Alexander frowned at her.

“How’s he doing?” he asked, quietly.

“Not very good…” admitted the girl. “I told him you were talking with mistress Lucy and I had to calm him down again…”

“Can I come in?”

“Mmh…”

“Let him pass, Libby” Thomas said from inside the room.

The girl obeyed, stepping aside. Alex walked in and stood at the feet of the bed.

“Can I come closer?” he asked, cautiously. He interpreted the shrug he was given as an affirmative. Alex stopped by the nightstand, raising one hand when he saw Thomas trying to sit more properly. “Don’t move if you don’t want to”

Unwillingly, Thomas returned to the same lying position Alexander had last seen him with.

“I was talking to Lucy” explained Alexander, straight to the point. He noticed how tensed the other man turned. “I could convince her to leave you be for a moment, but I need to talk a few things with you. I kind of improvised it all…”

Thomas fidgeted with his hands, turning nervous once again. He looked at Libby, who smiled at him from the other side of the room. How did Thomas miss how much she looked like the woman who truly raised him?
“Thomas?” called Hamilton, frowning slightly. “Do you want to talk it in private or…?”

“Libby can stay” he hurried to say.

The girl looked as shocked as the lawyer. Alexander nodded.

“Alright. Just whatever makes you comfortable” he said.

“But the gathering…” tried to excuse Libby, growing more worried as she thought about the aftermath of missing any of her work hours.

“Don’t worry about Lucy anymore. Told you there’s a vacant post for you in the law firm” said Alexander.

“But…”

“And if something happens, I’ll take the blame” assured Alexander, looking at the two persons in the room. “Maybe Lucy would love that and all” he joked, to try and erase the tension from the environment.

“What did she talk to you about?” dared to ask Thomas.

“Patsy and Polly. Or she tried to” explained Alexander, as tactful as he could. “And she also told me I should ask you about Elizabeth”

Thomas stiffened, clenched his hands, wrinkling the sheets that covered him from below the hip.

“Did she tell you anything?” he asked, the air caught in his throat.

“No. Just that I had to ask you”

For a time his sister wanted to share, it had to be about this issue. What else would she choose? He looked at the expecting forms of Libby and Alexander, their eyes on him. Thomas didn’t think there could be a worse tension than the one he felt back at the gathering, but it was. This was ten times worse.

He couldn’t tell what he did to Elizabeth. Libby would turn her back on him, and, as pathetic as it sounded, he needed her for whatever more visits he’d have to pay Lucy in order to keep her happy. And let’s not talk about Hamilton. The man already hated him and their relationship, or feud, was in flames, unable to go back to what it used to be. If Thomas told him, he’d not only stop doing this ‘favours’, fees included or not, he could go and start working for Lucy, as Nabby had done.
“Thomas, breathe” said Alexander, taking a step forward.

“Un, dos, tres, Thomas” said Libby, walking to the other side of the bed and taking one of his hands. “Un, dos, tres, inhale” she instructed, calmly. “Cuatro, cinco, seis, exhale. There”

“I know what happened” said Alexander, thinking that maybe that way he could calm Jefferson down, or make the conversation easier. Nothing as far from the truth. “Polly told me”

Thomas’ breathing became more erratic at that. Did his daughters know? Did Lucy tell them? Well, if he didn’t think his daughters didn’t love him before, he surely knew they hated him now. How could they not. He absolutely did.

“Thomas…” called Libby, squeezing his hand. “Calm down, please”

“We can talk about it later” proposed Hamilton, seeing this was going nowhere. “Or… I don’t know… If you’re indisposed, they can’t make you…”

Indisposed. Yes. That was the excuse he used to make Lucy take care of his three daughters. The excuse he used to let his little baby daughter in other’s hands, just when he had promised Martha to never do that, to take care of their daughters and love them and be there for them himself. Not anyone else.

He hadn’t not only broken the last promise he’d made to his wife, the one she cared about it being fulfilled the most, he had also killed Elizabeth. It was all his fault.

“What’s your fault?” asked Libby, concerned.

Thomas looked at her, going back to be in the room with her and Hamilton. The two were exchanging a frown.

<<You can’t talk when you’re asked to.
You talk when you must shut up.
You can’t do a single one right>>.

Ah, the last one he needed there right now. He could feel his whole body trembling, but he stopped feeling Libby’s hand on him. He looked down, seeing the girl was still holding his hand, her knuckles were white for how much she was squeezing it.
“Thomas” he heard Hamilton calling again.

“It was my fault” he admitted, this time hearing his own voice, though not sure if he should be talking or not. “I… She… She got sick…”

“I know, I…” tried to say Hamilton, coming closer to him.

“I wasn’t there when it happened” he continued, his voice shaking, the head pounding. “I… I left them with Lucy and… And I barely…”

“Was the baby with your sister when it happened?” asked Alexander, making a gesture of sitting on the mattress. When Thomas said nothing about it, he took the seat.

“I abandoned them” Thomas reprimanded himself, more than answering the lawyer’s question. “I left them with someone else, instead… Instead of taking them with me”

“Thomas…”

“I killed my daughter”

Libby and Alex shared a shocked look. “Thomas…” said the man.

“It was my fault” kept saying Jefferson, his free hand buried in his curls. “Everyone who ever got close to me died” he admitted.

“Thomas, that’s not…”

“You were right, I’m gonna end up alone”

Alexander was left speechless, the rant he dedicated Thomas back on February coming back to mind. He bit his bottom lip anxiously as Libby rubbed the man’s back, soothingly.

“Thomas…” Alexander talked when his workmate had stopped hyperventilating so loudly. “I shouldn’t have said that, I overstepped the limit” he admitted.

“My mother hated me for killing my father” explained Thomas. “I barely wanted to see Elizabeth after Martha died, after she gave birth to her”


“Alright” nodded the girl, with tiny voice.

Alexander waited until she was gone to talk again.

“Thomas, I know I’m your least favourite person on the whole Milky Way, alright?” he started. “But I need to understand what’s happening. I need you to be honest with me, please. Because I need to know if you want me to help you. And all you’ve told me…” He struggled to find the right words,
hating how the man in front of him was avoiding his glare. “It’s just a mess. I don’t understand anything. Please, talk to me. Just the right amount so I can defend you and your daughters can stay with you”

“Maybe they shouldn’t be with me” doubted Thomas, under his breath.

“They want to be with you, Thomas” assured Alexander, deadly serious. “They love you, and they adore you, and you don’t even realise it”

“I left them with whoever I could think of” argued Thomas. And wasn’t it almost comical how he wanted to put up a fight with Alexander even when he was trying to help him?

“Welcome to modern parenthood” retorted Alexander, jocosely. “I’ve spent the whole weekend here, instead of being with my children watching… I don’t know, SpongeBob? Is that still a thing?”

“They’re with your wife”

“And your daughters were with your sister, their aunt” said Alex. “You didn’t leave them with the first person you crossed paths with”

“I sent Patsy and Polly to a boarding school while I could still afford it” kept contending Thomas.

“I don’t agree with you on doing that. But, let’s be real, they’re professionals, they work there for a reason” tried to support Alexander.

“I promised myself I wouldn’t do it. I swore in front of my mother, whom I resented all my life for doing the same to me, that I wouldn’t do it”

“And why did you do it?”

Thomas frowned enraged at the immigrant. “Because I got scared, alright? Because I know nothing about children”

“None of us do…”

“Please, you should’ve seen your face when that kid went to greet you back at lunch” laughed Thomas, half-heartedly. “You were right once again, congratulations, I’m just like your father. I fled at first chance”

“But you came back” said Alexander, as soon as he’d stopped talking, like he’d had that comeback prepared for the occasion. Knowing him, maybe he had. “You came back because, I want to think, you care about them and saw you made a mistake. My father came back for asking for money” he admitted, against his best judgment.

“Patsy hasn’t forgiven me” continued Thomas, who, now that he felt more grounded, in the familiarity of arguing with Hamilton about something, realised he didn’t know why he was telling him all that.

Hamilton gave him a sided smile. “Well, according to her, she’s a bit mad for it, but she sees you’re trying and wants to give you a chance”

Okay, maybe that was not the retort Thomas was waiting. “Did she say that?”

“Ask Polly if you don’t believe me. She was there when she did” shrugged Alexander. “And they also didn’t think it once before telling me they wanted to be with you” He frowned when Thomas
avoided his glare again. “Your daughters adore and love you more than you want to admit. The three of them, I’m sure”

Thomas flinched at the last statement. Why did Hamilton have to be such a good orator? He was starting to see the appeal of all those people who assured him having Hamilton as a lawyer was the best thing that could happen to him. But he was not going to admit it.

“Now” spoke Alexander, turning a bit more to him, in a more comfortable position. “Could you please tell me what happened? You don’t need to get into detail if you don’t want to, but I need to know something if you want me…”

“It was whooping cough” interrupted Thomas, before the immigrant could start to ramble. “She… She got sick and nobody realised in time. It was during the night”

“Were you there?”

“No, they were staying with Lucy, I told you. I left them there” explained Thomas, again with an accusatory tone directed at himself.

“Look, unless your sister or you have any power that make people fall ill, I don’t see anyone to blame in here” concluded Alexander. “Maybe life, which is very unfair most of the times”

“If I’d been there, as I was supposed to, nothing would’ve happened”

Alex shrugged. “You can’t know that. Lucy was there and that didn’t avoid the tragedy”

Thomas moved uncomfortably in his spot in the bed. How much he hated this conversation, these memories. How much he was starting to hate Hamilton for trying to be logical and comprehensive with him. Why couldn’t the little bastard be as unbearable and asshol-y as ever?

“Look, I’m sorry for being too harsh, but people die” Alexander filled his silence. Thomas felt bad for feeling so well at his sharp words. “And, sometimes, we can’t do anything about it”

“I’ve lost four of the most important persons in my life” said Thomas, upset at everything and nothing at the same time. Before he could stop himself, he added: “And each time I wished it’d been me instead”

The silence that followed his most buried and concealed statement felt heavier than any words Hamilton could’ve thrown his way. He felt his workmate’s glare on the top of him, fixated, immovable, curious, calculating.

“Thomas, do you feel guilty for being alive?”
It was a simple question. Or, at least, Hamilton spoke it as if it were. Yet, the response was so complex, and Thomas was feeling so mentally and physically exhausted. He didn’t want to think about any of this anymore. Ironically, the only thing he wanted to do right now was disappearing and pretend that day hadn’t happened.

Hamilton well-interpreted his silence as a ‘I’m not going to answer’, and talked again. This time, the sentence hit him like a punch in the guts.

“It was not your fault”

And wasn’t that what James, who knew the whole story, always told him? What Martha, knowing half of the tragedy, promised him? What Gilbert, who only knew part of it all, assured him? What Hamilton now, knowing not even a 2% of the story was telling him, as serious as he’d ever seen him, believing each word, trusting him enough to promise him that and telling him what he needed and hated to hear at the same time?

“It wasn’t your fault, Thomas” repeated Alexander, this time a bit gentler. And the second time hit harder than the first.

“Yes, it was” he contradicted, as an old habit.

“Why?”

Thomas didn’t think before he blurted it out. “Because if I hadn’t complained and bothered my father while he was sick, he’d have gotten better”

“How old were you?” asked Hamilton, before he could pass to the next person he’d destroyed their life.

“Fourteen”

A faint gleam of understanding crossed Hamilton’s eyes, then. “And what did you think you could’ve done while being fourteen, dear?”

“I should’ve left him rest more” answered Thomas. He breathed in, feeling the tears stinging in his eyes. He refused to cry in front of Hamilton, he’d acted enough foolish today. “Instead of complaining and driving him crazy with my problems”

“Wouldn’t you like to know each thing that troubles your daughters?”

Thomas was taken aback at the out-of-the-blue question. “Yes, of course”

“Even if you were sick?”

He understood where Hamilton was trying to go. He frowned. “It’s not the same”

“Why not? Both of you were parents. What you say you don’t mind doing is part of the job” replied Alexander.
“It was not part of my sister’s job” commented Thomas, in a bitter whisper.

“Lucy?”

“No, my older sister” he clarified.

Alexander was surprised for a moment. “Ah, you have an older sister?”

“Had”

“Thought you were the first-born”

“No, it was Jen. She…” He took in a breath. He didn’t know why he was telling all this to Hamilton, but he couldn’t stop. He feared he didn’t want to stop. “I called her one night, because I was not feeling well, and a stupid drunkard crashed against her car”

Alexander shook his head and shrugged. “Unless you made that man drink and then drive, I don’t see a well story for you to be found guilty”

“I should’ve not called her” argued Thomas, frustrated. “I was a grown-up man, I shouldn’t have needed…”

“Hey, I’m thirty-one, and if my older brother and I still had a relationship going, I wouldn’t mind going to his aid” interrupted Alexander. “And he was four years older than me”

“It’s not…”

“Not same, yeah” Alexander beat him to say. “I see you think you’re very special when it comes to these things”

“Hamilton, I…” Thomas sighed frustrated. “I don’t think to be special. It’s the truth. My father was sick and I pestered him; I called my sister in the middle of the night and made her drive because I couldn’t overcome a nervous crisis; I renounced to my inheritance and made my wife to have to move to the north, instead of resting back at Monticello, where she should’ve stayed, because she wanted to be with me and I didn’t put up a fight, though her health was at stake!” he contended, getting more agitated as he explained.

“Your father was doing his job, and I’m sure he was glad you had enough trust to tell him your problems. I know, I feel the same when my children come to me when they need it” argued Alexander, once again. “Your sister was a good sister. When I was younger, I would’ve done anything for my brother” he continued, with a bit of resentment in his tone, this time. “And you only wanted to live your life. Welcome to adulthood” he finished, in a more joking manner.

“I shouldn’t have dragged anyone else along the way” Thomas shook his head.

“Did anyone ever tell you all those things were your fault?” asked Alexander, suspicious.

“Yes” answered Thomas, without thinking. “My mother hated me, because of me my father died, his health went worse after that summer. She tried to warn Jen. She told the tale to my siblings… Do you wonder why they can’t bare to see me? Because I left them without a father when they were little. Just as I left my daughters without their mother and baby sister”

Thomas stopped the irritated rant when he saw Hamilton shaking his head.
“Dear, don’t you realise you’re fighting with me because you can’t accept the fact that none of that is your fault?” he asked, a bit saddened. “And that you also need to hear it, but you don’t believe it when somebody tells you because they introduced the idea of it all being your fault since you were very young? You’re living in a vicious circle. You’ve been living in a vicious circle for thirty years, dear”

Thomas sealed his lips. He tried to find the hole in Hamilton’s seemingly perfect argument, but his heartrate and messy thoughts got in the way. He had to be wrong. His father did get worse after he came to visit and he bombarded him with his childish problems; his sister had died because he had called her and made her drive for a stupid nervous crisis he could’ve overcome on his own; his Martha had died because he made them live under what they were used to for his stupid pride and personal feud with his mother; his baby daughter died because he was too busy mourning instead of being a proper adult, put up with it and take care of his responsibilities…

Hamilton talked again, during his internal struggle to undo his rationing.

“You’re very strong, dear” he complimented,

His brutal honesty fell on the top of Thomas as the whole weight of the world. It crashed him and broke him for good that time. He couldn’t control the sobs that escaped his mouth or the tears that fell down his cheeks that time. He didn’t even have the enough strengths to fight them anymore.

The child Thomas once pitied for how bad his mother and her ‘friends’ badmouthed for his poor and foreign origins, whom he wished for a better life than the one that’d be waiting for him if he decided to practise Laws as their foster parents, the child that overcame all that life and horrible people he’d crossed paths with had thrown his way to make him fall, to prevent him to reach the high goals he’d set, the man who won a good reputation, nonetheless, in the law field for his vocation, who had to stop practising for a nervous breakdown he was not to blame, Hamilton was telling him that he was very strong.

There was no doubt that that day couldn’t get any weirder.

Hamilton looked at him, an uncontrollable crying mess, for a moment before he got up and hugged him, rubbing his back soothingly.

Well, now the day couldn’t get any weirder.
“It’s alright, Thomas, calm down” assured Alexander, frowning down at him. He sighed. “It’s alright, I’ve got you, dear. I’ve got you”

Libby chose that moment to come back. She shocked at the image in front of her; her features softened a bit when she took in the state the older man was in. She closed the door quietly and made her way to the nightstand, putting another cup of tea there and taking the empty one.

“Libby, could you please go to my bedroom and bring me my briefcase?” asked Alexander.

“How course, Alex” she said, nodding as obliging as always.

True to her word, Libby came back rapidly. She was glad to see Thomas had managed to calm down significantly. She passed the briefcase to its owner. Alexander nodded in her direction, grateful, and then put it beside Thomas.

“Here. You’ve got water, tissues… Take whatever you need, alright?” he explained, patting his workmate on the arm. “Did you bump into any of his siblings?” he asked Libby.

The girl shook her head. “But I’ve heard several people leaving”

“Alright. Could you please wait for me out there doing your initial task? I think we need a moment” said Hamilton.

“Of course” she nodded, leaving them in private again.

“Hm, they’re gonna eat her alive when she starts working with us” commented Thomas.

“They won’t if she befriends Maria”

“True”

Alexander gave the man an up and down look. “I think asking you if you’re ready to go to talk to Lucy is stupid, isn’t it?”

Thomas heaved a sigh. “Right now, the only thing I want to do is to go back home, as the rest of the guests” he admitted.

“You do?”

“Yes”

“Alright, then, I’ll go tell her a few things, you stay here calming yourself down and we’ll leave” planned Alexander.

“I can’t”
“You can and you must. You’ve stood enough for two lifetimes this weekend…” he commented, as he took the teacup and passed it to Thomas. Jefferson took it. “Thank you for coming and staying” he said, eventually. “I know this wasn’t your top 100 weekend plans. Especially after everything that happened”

Alexander gave him a sided smile. “Well, I think we two are even when it comes to forked tongues” He turned forcibly serious. “I’m sorry for what I told you when I stopped working for you. Most of that was out of the line”

“It’s okay. I shouldn’t have made assumptions. Especially when… Well”

Thomas took the teacup to his lips and sipped a bit, wishing his nerves would die down and never revive. Alexander frowned at the hint.

“Why did you do it?” he asked.

“What?”

“Taking that money” clarified Hamilton. As if it were needed. The grip Thomas had on the handle tightened notably. “I saw it was a one-time occasion, while the others made it a habit”

“Is that why you decided to keep it to yourself?” questioned Thomas, avoiding answering.

Alex shrugged. “Call it sixth sense. I inherited it from my mother”

“Hm…”

“So?”

“I told you I didn’t want to tell you in its day”

“Well, you already shared great part of your life with me” pointed out the lawyer, comically.

“I’m starting to regret it…”

“Don’t, I’m like a grave” assured Alexander, with his usual cockiness.

Thomas gave him a smirk. “If only, literally”

“You’re wandering”

Thomas sighed. Even if Libby came back, or if one of his siblings interrupted the conversation, Alexander would make sure he was given his answer, one way or the other. Better give it to him in the privacy of his former bedroom.

“It was a few years after I renounce to the family money” he began to explain. “But not too much after my father-in-law died and Martha and I became responsible of his debts”
“That’s where part of your economical problems come from?” asked Alexander, frowning slightly.

“Yes. I worked for him, so when he died I had to look for another job, and James helped me to get it in King’s law firm” He sighed. “It was also during the time Martha’s health began to deteriorate. And when she became pregnant it didn’t get better, and after the labour…” He took in a breath. He hated to talk about this with anyone, especially with someone whom he didn’t know if he could trust completely.

“You tried to get her the medical help she needed” concluded Alexander, on his behalf.

Thomas nodded. “I know I shouldn’t have done it” he hurried to say, seeing the frown on his workmate’s face. “But, honestly, I’d do it again if there was a 1% chance for her to be better”

“Gosh, Thomas, I’m so sorry” said Hamilton, sounding genuinely bad.

“You didn’t tell or use it against me despite not knowing it” dismissed Thomas, with a shrug.

“No, I… I shouldn’t have said what I did the first time I read those papers” clarified Alexander, nervously. “I swear I had no idea. It didn’t even cross my mind…”

“It’s alright, Hamilton” assured Thomas, feeling surprisingly lighter after admitting it. “You weren’t the bastard who made me go to ‘a crucial meeting’ on her death’s anniversary”

Alex’s frown deepened. “That was why you went drunk?”

“Well, I was going to go inebriated anyways. I’ve got no other way to overcome my social anxiety”

“A simple research on Google can prove you wrong…” commented Alexander, at the same time.

“The date only made me drink a bit too much”

“I suppose…” conceded Alexander. “Why didn’t you try breathing techniques, as the one we used before?”

“Because when you don’t remember what’s to breathe, you can’t use those”

“Fair. So, you went to the meetings drunk?”

“Just a bit. I got enough practise from my college years”

“Are you serious right now?”

“Sue me”

“Well, if it makes you feel better, I’ll confess that I once went to do an important final test of Philosophy after having smoked a pot”

“What?” asked Thomas, in a laugh.

“True story” swore Alex, raising one hand solemnly. “The funniest part? It was the only test I ever understood, and with my highest mark”

Both men laughed at that.
“Okay, fair enough” admitted Thomas. “I’ve already dropped out once, I couldn’t do it again. As I told you, my mother wasn’t the nicest…” he explained.

Alexander gave him a sympathetic smile. “What you told me about your youth…” he began. Thomas looked expectantly at him. Alex sighed. “Thomas, have you ever…? Are you suicidal?”

Jefferson pressed his lips. “It’s a bit complicated”

“It’s a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ question”

“It’s a ‘sometimes’ question” argued Thomas. “I truly wish it’d been me. Sometimes I don’t know why it wasn’t”


Thomas looked at him as if he were crazy. “No, he can’t know” he said, in a warning manner.

“He doesn… Why not?” inquired Hamilton.

“Would you want to have that kind of conversation with Laurens?”

“No, but I did” confessed Alex, surprising the older man for the zillionth time. “I did it because I’d have wanted to know had the roles been reversed”

“I don’t want to worry him more, less for something that it doesn’t matter” argued Thomas.

“Doesn’t matter? The fact that you wish you were…?”

“Now, you’re twisting what I said” interrupted Thomas, rolling his eyes.

“Would you rather talk it out with my wife?”

“Excuse me?”

“Listen, I can see what you’ve got” explained Alexander. “I’m curious by nature, I’ve read Eliza’s college books, but I’ve got no empathy and psychology’s never been my field. But she does, and you need to talk this with a professional”

“No, I do not. I’m…”

“Thomas, I already let my cousin commit suicide though I saw all the signs that something was clearly wrong” blurted out Alexander, succeeding in shocking the older man yet another time. “You’re insane if you think I’ll not do something to help you with this problem”

“I…”

“Yes, it’s not that big of a deal” interrupted Alexander, giving his workmate an eye-roll. “Take a guess who was always telling me and my brother that”

“Hamilton…”

“Look, this time I can’t promise you I won’t tell” said Alex, sincerely. “If I start to sense something’s not right, I’ll go directly to whom I think I’ve gotta go to help you. I prefer you not talking to me ever again because you got angry at me than because I didn’t overreact on time, okay?”
Thomas looked at the immigrant for a moment. He knew Hamilton’d had to lose both his parents and lacked any other legal tutors to become an orphan, but he never suspected he’d lived such an experience. He sighed and passed a hand through his face.

“Just one session” he accepted.

“Thank you” breathed out Alexander. “And, Thomas?”

“Yes?” he asked, a bit upset.

“Please, even if you’re in therapy but there’s a moment when you’re having a very bad day, just call me, alright?”

He tensed at the younger’s petition. “Excuse me?”

“It doesn’t matter if we had a fight worse than the last ones we had” assured Alexander, his seriousness sending shivers down Thomas’ spine. “I can’t make you tell Madison yourself, but I already know. If you ever have one horrible day or even a horrible moment, call me”

“Alright…”

“Promise me” demanded Alexander, narrowing his eyes.

A déjà vu took over Thomas. “I promise I’ll try”

Luckily for him, Hamilton nodded satisfied at that.

“It’s going to get better” he said, all of a sudden, just when Thomas thought the conversation was finally over. “I promise you I’ll do all within my power to make it better for you, as better as I can” he assured, believing each word that came out from his mouth and making Thomas believe him for once in his life. “I’ll do my best, and a bit more of that to make it better for you”

That time, it was Thomas the one who started the hug. For concealing his second crying (pretending his sobs couldn’t be heard) or because he needed it today and was sick of ignoring these necessities, Thomas didn’t want to know or spend any time thinking about it.

Libby was told by Alexander to get ready along Thomas, because they were about to leave. The girl obeyed, for the first time enjoying her training of ‘just do as you’re told’. Though, when she saw the man marching to where she told him Lucy and her siblings were, she wished she could be at
two places at the same time.

When Lucy saw Alexander coming in alone, her facial expression was beyond angry. And when Alex interrupted her even before she started talking, her blood boiled in a way she didn’t know it was humanly possible.

“I only came to thank you for your invitation, as sickly planned as it was” said Alexander. “But I’ve got manners. So, thank you”

“Are you leaving?” asked Anna.

“The gathering is over, isn’t it?”

“But we still have issues to discuss” said Nabby, frowning in his direction.

“No, I’ve already taken care of all of them. Oh, miss Lucy…” He looked at the angry woman.

“Thank you for your recommendation. That story was truly revealing. And it was a domino effect that needed to happen”

“What are you talking about?” asked Lucy, her enraged expression softening a bit at her surprise.

“I already had my suspicious” admitted Alexander. “I’ve seen some behaviours I’m sadly familiar with. But it’s always better to know for sure, for the victim to admit it himself”

“Victim?” echoed Lucy, sharing a perplexed look with the rest of the group. “There are no victims in here, Mr Hamilton”

“Au contraire, miss” denied Alex, shaking his head. “What’s been happening here has been a total abuse. A top notch psychological and emotional abuse. And if you really thought I was going to not only do anything about it but even take your side on it, you truly don’t know me, ladies and gentlemen. But worry not, because you’re going to start to know me” He frowned darkly at each of them, especially at Lucy. “And believe, you’re not gonna like one bit of it”

“Are you threatening my client?” asked Nabby, taking a few steps forward.

“Yes, I am” nodded Hamilton, making them all dumbfounded. “I’m warning, threatening, all you want to call it” He looked directly at Lucy. “Now, your brother’s not gonna be the problem in here, that’s gonna be me. And I’m a nightmare come true when you push the wrong buttons. And, people, you pressed them all at least thrice this weekend”

“Mr Hamilton, I don’t know what my brother told you, but I’m sure…” said Lucy, faking a kind tone.

“He told me more than enough to understand plenty of things” interrupted Alexander, uninterested. “Now, if you excuse us, we’d love to go back home”

“We’re not over yet, Mr Hamilton” said Lucy, sternly.

Alex barely flinched, unlike the rest of the people in the room. “I think we did. For today, at least” He assured her, enjoying her irritated red face. “Oh, and by the way, Libby’s coming with us. Just in case you realise something was missing in this house”
“What do you mean she’s leaving with you?” jumped in Randolph, for the first time getting into the conversation. “She works for us”

“Well, you can let me see her legal contract and her papers, if you prefer. I like things well done” proposed Hamilton.

None of them moved. Lucy was too red to be healthy. Alexander enjoyed every second of her contained ire.

“So I expected” he said, nodding sarcastically. “Well, see you not soon” he said, turning around.

“If Thomas refuses to solve this on good terms, we’ll do it by foul” promised Lucy, her tone sharp.

“As if you ever approached your own brother by any kinder ways, miss…” dismissed Alexander, not turning around but waving one uninterested hand. “Worry not, from now on, I’ll make sure each is given what’s due” he promised.

He smirked when he heard Lucy hissing and Nabby trying to calm her down.

Alexander wasn’t realising how much he’d missed doing this.

Libby was almost bumping from happiness as she prepared her suitcase. When she was finished, she went to help Thomas, wanting to get out of that house as soon as possible and start the life she dreamt of when she first arrived to America.

“Eager, are we?” asked Thomas, when she managed to organise his big luggage.

“Pretty!” she laughed. With a soberer expression, she added. “I’m glad to see you’re feeling better, Thomas”

“Thank you…”

“I’m sorry Lucy had to use your daughter. Thank God Alexander’s a good man”

“Yes” he admitted, still a bit unwillingly. “It’s a great coincidence both she and you shared the same name, though” he commented, wanting to drift the conversation into another route.

Libby blinked perplexed at his words, then laughed. “Oh, no! I’m not called Elizabeth!” she explained.
“You’re not?”

“No! Libby is from Libertad*”

And Thomas laughed with her now as well, at the funny way the world had to work sometimes.

The front door opened and closed loudly. Hercules and Lafayette, cuddling on the couch, turned their heads to the hallway. Laurens appeared, bag of chips in hand.

“See how he’d come back?” complained Hercules, looking with tedium at Lafayette, who frowned at his commentary. “He’s like a dog. We need to move”

“Stop it, he just arrived” reprehended the Frenchman. “Johnny, what happened?”

John shrugged. “Meh. He’s too passionate for me. And I didn’t get along with his family” He walked to them and gave Hercules the bag he was holding. “Here, as a symbol of peace”

“Aaaw” said Laf, touched.

“What? You think you can come back to live in my house with a sad bag of chips as an apol…? Oh, this brand is good!” Hercules cut himself off when he read the brand on the bag. He took and admired it, then cleared his throat and threw it back to the coffee table, pretending to be uninterested.

“Alright, you can come back”

“Hm… Okay” said Laurens, walking to his room.

Hercules frowned at him. “Aren’t you going to say thank you?”

“I gave you a bag of chips, what else do you want?”

“This fucking man…” said Hercules, prepared to get up.

Lafayette pushed him back. “Leave him be, please”

Hercules groaned but did as he was told, crossing both arms upon his chest as a little kid. Lafayette gave him a peek and they resumed to watch TV. That was until they heard the water running inside the bathroom.

“Oh, for God’s sake!”

“Hercules…”
“He just came back and he’s already going to stink the house with his shitty shampoos”

“No, he won’t. Let me talk to him, alright?” said Lafayette, getting up the couch with a sigh. “Johnny…”

Lafayette stopped at John’s doorframe. The man had already taken out his coat, revealing three bags of chips he’d been hiding inside it the whole time.

“Yes?” said the freckled man, looking for some clothes to wear that night.

“And those bags?” asked Lafayette, forgetting why he’d come there in the first place.

“Those are mine. I won them” replied Laurens.

Lafayette blinked in confusion and stood there, not believing what he was seeing or hearing.

“The water!!!!” hollered Hercules, from the living room.

“I’m coming, you walking agony!” Laurens shouted back.

“Don’t turn it on unless you’re about to get in the shower, man, I told you!”

“It needs to get hot first!”

“It gets hot in one minute or less, don’t be a tattletale!”

“Gosh, this man is a nightmare!” the two friends insulted the other at the same time.

Laurens passed a shocked Lafayette by, bursting into the bathroom and slamming the door shut. Hercules started to punch the couch in fury back at the living. Lafayette shrugged and put a face of not understanding a thing.

“I need to buy myself a pepper spray to go for a run in the nights as well…” he decided.

Thomas hadn’t gone to work in the first week of the month. Alexander made sure nobody said anything about it and that both Angelica and Washington knew what the true problem was. The two heads of the company nodded in understanding, despite not knowing the whole story, and helped Alex to cover for the secretary until he felt better to come back.
Libby went to live with Thomas until she could find a place to stay on her own. She repaid the man by cleaning and taking care of the girls. And that week, by keeping his company.

Alexander, in the meantime, wished he knew what was troubling his wife, though.

Since he came back, Eliza had been very standoffish and avoiding him. And that was very strange when it came to her. Alexander tried to think of something he might’ve done wrong, but nothing came to mind. He decided to be patient. It paid off, as that morning Eliza came to him, a shy aura surrounding her.

“Alex?” she called, as he ate his breakfast calmly before going to work.

He raised his glare immediately. “Yes?”

“Can we talk?” she asked, rubbing her right arm nervously.

“Of course” he nodded, pointing at the vacant chair by his side.

Eliza took a seat and heaved a sigh. “I… I wanted to talk to you about… Those calls”

“Alright”

“Remember that time I went with my father to the foster home?”

“Yes”

“Well, I met a girl there and…”

“Fuck, are you cheating on me with a girl?” interrupted Alex, with a sour expression.

“What?” asked Eliza, perplexed.

“But because you wanted to try it out or because you’re a secret lesbian?” inquired Alexander.

“A secret lesbian? What in the hell… What are you even talking about?”

“I want to know if I still got a chance”

“A chance of what?”

“Of winning you over”

“You don’t have to! I…”

“Betsey, you knew about my unhealthy competitiveness before marrying me”

“I’m not cheating on you!” clarified Eliza, offended at the accusation. “She just wanted me to work there!”
“There where?”

“At the foster home!”

“What foster home?”

“The one I went with my father to the other day!”

“Aaaaah… Well, say it like that since the beginning! Conversations have an order!”

“I was explaining just fine! You started inventing half of the conversation!”

“Well, I’m sorry if I imagine strange things when my wife goes running to delete phone calls!”

“Because I was afraid of your reaction!”

“Why?! If you want to try and go back to work out of the house, good for you! It’s your decision!”

“Well, that’s good to know!”

“FANTASTIC, ALL SETTLED THEN!” started to scream Alexander.

“More than settled!” Eliza screamed back.

“I’M GLAD WE FINALLY SORTED THIS OUT!”

“Me too!”

“NEXT TIME, TALK TO ME!”

“I was afraid of how you’d react!”

“WHY?!”

“Because no one can ever be sure with you!”

“BETSEY, I’M HAPPY FOR YOU! A LOT! I’LL ALWAYS SUPPORT YOU!”

“That’s the most beautiful thing you ever said to me!”

“YOU DESERVE THAT AND MORE!”

“I love you so much!”

“I LOVE YOU MORE!”

“Have a good day at work!”

“WAIT, DO YOU WANT A QUICKIE?”

“A quickie now?!”

“IT TURNS ME ON WHEN YOU SHOW YOUR TEMPER!”

“I’m feeling very up to it as well, actually!”

“LET’S GO THEN!”
“Alright! But on the couch! I just made bed!”

“OKAY, BUT I'M THE ONE ON THE TOP THIS TIME!”

“In your dreams!”

Hamilton was late to work that morning, but with the anarchy that reigned in that law firm nobody told him anything. He was greeted with the image of Libby and Maria talking in the entrance. The first had two clothes tied to her shoes, used as the soles, and she was holding herself on the counter, a bit nervous.

“What are you two doing?” he asked, getting in the building and throwing a judgmental glare in their direction.

“Good morning, Alex!” greeted Maria. “I’m teaching Libby to clean faster”

“Or so she says” doubted the cleaner.

“Come on, trust me. I saw this on the TV the other day” encouraged Maria.

“Yes, it was a cartoon!” complained Libby.

“Be careful, girls” said Alexander, boringly.

“I think I’ve got it” said Libby, getting separated from the counter slowly.

“Gosh, imagine the normal people that live normal lives passing by this building and seeing this…” said Alexander, shaking his head in disappointment.

Maria hushed him, for not making Libby lose her concentration. The girl began to move slowly, sliding on the floor. She smiled brightly.

“Hey, I’m doing it!” she celebrated.

With regained confidence, she tried to go faster and advance, just to slip over her own feet and falling to the side. Maria ran to her aid immediately.

“You okay?” asked Alexander, as the receptionist helped her to get on her feet.

“Yea, yeah” she lied, rubbing her hip.
“I told you to be careful!” admonished the CFO. “Clean normally!”

Alex turned on his heels, rolling his eyes when he heard the two girls talking about different ways to try the experiment again. He marched to the secretary’s office, knocking on the opened door.

“Madison, can I talk to you for a…? Ah, good morning, Thomas” he said, clearly surprised to see the accountant accompanied by his friend. “I wasn’t expecting you here”

Thomas shrugged. “Good morning” he simply replied, returning his attention to his paperwork.

“Did you want something, Hamilton?” asked Madison.

“Yes, come with me, I want to talk to you about something” he instructed, turning around and marching to the elevator, no waiting for an answer. “How is he feeling?” he asked, when both were side by side, waiting for the lift.

“Better” replied Madison, right away. “Listen, Hamilton, thank you for what you did. I don’t know what could’ve happened if you hadn’t been there” hurried to say the accountant, before the immigrant could continue.

Alexander waved one hand, nonchalantly. “It’s nothing. I was doing my job”

“Yeah, about that… We were wondering if you could let us know how much it’ll be before we pay you the rent, because…”

“Madison, don’t worry over that. You owe me nothing”

“But you told Thomas…”

“Nothing” insisted Alexander, very serious. “Tell him to pay me normally around this week, if he can”

“Alright” said Madison, not very convinced.

“Now, what I wanted to talk to you about…”

Thomas had tried to ignore the bad feeling he had every time he saw Madison talking in private with Hamilton and then came back lying about the topic they’d been discussing. He tried to push his paranoid thoughts to the back of his mind, but they were very persistent. He’d started to regret having told Hamilton about how he felt most of the times, and though the man had never said anything about the money he took (even when he didn’t know why he’d done it) Thomas still had plenty of doubts. And those secret conversations he had with Madison didn’t help to the cause.
The afternoon of his birthday, Thomas was almost literally dragged out of his house by Gilbert, who showed up at his door, with the surprising company of Marisa and Angelica. The three of them were resolute to make him celebrate his birthday properly. Libby joined them and didn’t leave him alone until he said he was going to go with them, but just for a bit, as he was feeling tired.

Madison stayed back at home, claiming to be feeling bad.

“Are you sure you want me to leave? I can stay with you” proposed Thomas, a bit suspicious.

“No, no, go with them and enjoy your birthday” said Madison, sitting on the couch and throwing nervous glares to the front door.

“Sure?” insisted Thomas.

“Yes, go. They’re waiting for you” pressured James.

That strange behaviour didn’t help his doubts to calm down.

After four hours, they let Thomas go back home. Or, well, Libby let him go back home. The girl showed herself very reluctant to let him leave when he wanted to, which only made his paranoia to go worse. He even asked her, without beating around the bush, why was she acting so weird. The girl simply avoided his glare for the rest of the afternoon/night, but kept struggling to entertain him and abstain him of going home ‘too early’.

Libby drove him back. And, as Thomas wasn’t surprised to find out, she decided to always choose the longer routes.

“Are you going to tell me what’s going on?” he asked, for the zillionth time that night.

“Nothing” the girl lied once again, a bit upset.

Thomas sighed and decided to let it go. He just wanted to go back home and lie down on bed as he’d been doing for almost two weeks now. He was using already too much energy by getting out of bed and going to work all mornings. And he still had to fulfil the promise he made Hamilton about going to see his wife for a session.
Gosh, what had he gotten himself into?

“Let me open the door for you!” hurried to say Libby, as soon as she parked the car, running to the front door.

This time, Thomas simply let her do, ignoring, as best as he could, the sideways glares the girl threw his way. When she opened the door, she hit the person on the other side in the nose.

“Thank God you were going to come back on the long roads” complained Hamilton, rubbing his aching spot.

“I did!” the girl complained back.

“Hamilton, what are you doing in here?” asked Thomas, frowning slightly and making his way into the house.

“Preparing your two birthday presents” he replied, honestly.

Polly interrupted their conversation, running towards them. “Daddy, Daddy, come, look!” she said, happily, grabbing him by the wrist and dragging him to the living room.

“Alright, Polly, calm down” he said, smiling a bit at the enthusiasm of his daughter.

The girl stopped when they were at the door. Patsy was waiting for them inside, sat at the bench of the piano that now adorned the corner that’d been sadly vacant since they moved. Thomas felt a lump going up his throat and a million emotions crashing inside when he realised it was his wife’s piano, the one she used to play for him and the girls, the one where she taught Patsy to play a few notes and had dreamt to do the same with Polly and Elizabeth, given the chance.

“You didn’t catch us by a hair, Dad” said Patsy, getting up and going to hug him.

“Where did you take it from?” asked Thomas, unable to believe the instrument was real and was, once again, in his and the girl’s powers.

“From your former house” answered Alexander, shrugging. “You told me it was there. So I went and took it”

“Lucy gave in quite easily” added Madison, smiling at his friend’s surprised expression.

“You should’ve seen her face” laughed Patsy. “Wait, you can. Alex took a photo” she said, ending the hug with her father and fishing her phone out of her back pocket.

Madison frowned at him. “I told you it wasn’t necessary”

“Yes, it was” contradicted Alexander.
“Daddy, do you like your present?” asked Polly, now the one hugging him.

“I…” Thomas swallowed. He looked over at Hamilton. “You didn’t have to”

“I know” nodded the immigrant. Looking at the little girl, he added. “And this is not your father’s present”

“It is not?” asked Thomas, confusedly.

“No, this is something that’s yours and your daughters’” he explained, seriously. A bit hesitant, he added. “I… I kind of lost the books my mother gave me when I was little once I moved here. So, I know the feeling. You could get it back, so, I made you get it back”

“Thank you” said Thomas, completely sincere.

“What’s his present, then?” asked Polly, curiously.

Libby, who had got separated from the group for a moment, came back with a case in her hands.

“It cost us hell to find your old one without you knowing or catching me” explained Madison.

Thomas arched an eyebrow at his friend as he opened the case. The familiar sensation giving him a hint of what it could be, but he didn’t believe it until he saw it with his own eyes.

And not even when he saw the violin in front of his eyes, he could believe it.

“I remembered aunt Consuelo saying you loved to play the violin” explained Libby. “And that you had to stop after you broke your wrist”

“Then, we told Alexander that you learned to write and do things with your left hand” added Patsy.

“And that you kept the one your father bought you” said Madison.

“And I simply asked Madison and Libby to look for it, take a photo of it so I knew the brand, and buy it for a left-handed person” finished Alexander.

Polly’s eyes shone when she saw the instrument. “It’s so pretty, Daddy!”

Thomas bit his bottom lip. “You didn’t have to do it”

“Nope, but it was worth it” said Libby.

“And you deserve it after the weekend you lived” said Madison, getting closer to his friend.

“True, Dad” nodded Patsy, giving him another hug.
“Try not to play too late” joked Alexander, before he turned around and left the house, waving goodbye to the rest of the group.

“He’s quite something, isn’t he?” commented Libby.

“He is” admitted Thomas.

“Dad, the piano sounds odd”

“Gal, the poor instrument hasn’t been here for a week and you already broke it?”

“Hey, it wasn’t me!”

“Sure…”

Thomas heaved a sigh and followed his daughter downstairs. He found Libby and James on the couch, watching TV. Before entering the living room, he stuck his head out the dining room door, where he could see part of the kitchen. He frowned at the pile of dirty dishes and then at them.

“I just love how well you clean” he said aloud, in a clear sarcastic tone.

“Thanks, it’s a natural gift” said Libby, barely looking at him.

Thomas rolled his eyes and entered the living room, where his oldest daughter was waiting, arms crossed.

“If you broke it, you’ll pay it with you allowance” he warned.

“Yeah, and what else?” huffed the girl.

Thomas played a few notes, still with a bit of hesitation. He truly needed to put himself together and start coming closer to the instrument once in a while, as his daughters did. He frowned when he realised some of the keys sounded weird. He opened the lid and saw a notebook there, on the strings. Slowly and carefully, he took it out.

“What’s that?” asked Patsy.

Thomas curved his lips at the glossary he was holding, all written in the immigrant’s handwriting.
“Hamilton’s second present”

“Told you he always fulfils his promises” commented Madison from the living room.

Once Patsy understood what was happening, she burst out laughing and taunted him for days.

Thomas would make sure to add this common sense of humour between his workmate and him on the list Madison proposed him to write. And if he found it funny as well, nobody needed to know.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t want to be obedient, tamed and educated;
I don’t want to be modest, loved and deceived.
I’m not your property, because I only belong to myself.

And if I want the stars,
I’ll find the way to reach them myself.
I’ll grow up and learn while being true to myself.
I’ll fight before losing myself,
for I only belong to myself.

And if you want to tie me, I’ll abandon your nest
and dive into the sea just like a bird.

I’m waiting for friends and searching for security;
I’ll share my joy, I’ll share my sadness with you.
But don’t claim for my life,
for that’s something I can’t give you.

I only belong to myself.

—Verses from the song Ich gehör nur mir, from Elisabeth das Musical.

NOTES:

*Abigail "Nabby" Amelia Adams: John Adams' daughter.
*Libertad: Spanish word that means Freedom. Yes, it can be a woman's name as well.
The children's interlude

Chapter Summary

Fluff and humour.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

What is this? Me? Writing something relatively short?

I've been wanting to write something with the kids and I think this is the perfect moment, after all the angst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alexander loved Eliza.

No, really, he did.

True, maybe what he felt with Laurens was what people called ‘love at first sight’, but Alexander never believed very much in that. You just have to see what happened with that relationship in the end, or what happened to his mother, for example, though Alexander tried to never remember her in that sense.

And, true, maybe with Eliza the flame ignited more slowly, maybe they started as good friends and then the friendship grew into something more deep and beautiful. Maybe that was the way it had to happen for it to succeed.

Alexander wasn’t good at the matters of the heart.

But he understood that the fact that both Eliza and he overlooked the other’s flaws was a sign of true love. Not everybody could say they’d have stood waking up to a half empty bed most of the nights, or his outbursts of ire that brought him (and sadly, his family as well sometimes) more pain than good, or how bad he treated his wife at the beginning of their marriage. If forgiving him all that and still loving him the same, remembering him of his virtues and never let him fall into desperation
wasn’t what people defined as ‘true love’, then Alexander didn’t know what that thing was and he gave up in understanding.

And just as Eliza forgave him his flaws, he did just as much with her.

It was a bit difficult because Eliza was the patient of the marriage, but he tried. He tried to not get upset by the insistence of his wife of seeing good in everyone and, then, a few weeks later, seeing her heart-broken because some bastard had played with her friendship and trust. He overlooked all those times she refused to take part into something because sometimes it was better to let it go. He ignored her little drama moments he never comprehended. He bit his tongue countless times when she started daydreaming a bit too much, losing sight of reality and how things must be done.

They were little flaws she had. Nobody was perfect. Alexander coped with them because the virtues were more and a whole lot better…

But sometimes he just couldn’t.

Sometimes, when Eliza insisted on doing things wrong instead of listening to him, he could not. He simply could not. It was beyond him.

“Hey, Alex, could you please tell Herc to fix your daughter’s dress before tomorrow?”

Like when he’d bought Angie the costume she wanted for the last day of kindergarten, told her to try it on to see if it fitted her or needed another size or any other problem that could happen, both the girl and the mother ignored his words and let the days pass and then, on Thursday, at 7 pm, Eliza came to him with the damned dress in her hands, put it on his desk, and told him if he could ask his tailor friend, who happened to have his own life and plans as anyone else, to fix it before Friday morning.


The whole of them.

No one deserved to be spared.
The screams were guaranteed. He didn’t understand why Eliza looked so surprised.

“What the hell happens with the fucking dress now?” he asked, dropping the pen with vehemence against the table.

Eliza blinked once. Twice. “That it’s too long for her. It needs to be fixed around the hips and the skirt to…”

“And why are you telling me now?”

“Because she just tried it earlier and…”

“She tried it earlier? Earlier of today?”

“Yes, Alexander, earlier of today”

“Why?”

“Because I told her to do so”

“Why?”

“Because tomorrow she has to wear that to kindergarten”

“No! Why did you ask her today?!”

“… Because tomorrow she has to wear that to kindergarten” she repeated, drawling the words, with the patience of a saint.

“Aaah, okay” nodded Alexander, sarcastically. Eliza frowned in his direction, starting to get angry herself. “Well, thank you for doing that at seven pm of the day before, honey. Thank you for not doing it tomorrow morning, with only two hours to get a solution”

“I already have a solution. Asking Hercules to…”

“Hercules has his own life! What tells you he won’t be busy now?!”

“The fact that Lafayette has told us plenty of times that Hercules’ life is nothing more than lying on the couch, watching TV”

“His lazy behaviour is his problem! We cannot depend on him each time we need a favour, less with hurried demands!”

“It’s not hurried. You can go now and ask him”

“Ah, nice. I have to get out the house because my daughter and my wife have an obsession with doing everything at last hour!”

“It’s not last hour! It’s only seven pm! It’s not like I’ve interrupted you in the middle of the night to tell you!”

“Wait, she wants a medal for that great sacrifice…”
“Why are you so angry? You’ve got plenty of time to do it!”

“Because I don’t want to leave my house at seven just because…”

“You don’t want to leave the house at seven for your daughter, but you have left at 11 pm to have fun with your friends at the nearest pub” Eliza threw in his face, arms crossed.

“Hey, don’t start with your emotional blackmails…”

“It’s not emotional blackmail, it’s…”

“It is not? You do it for your friends, but not for your children. How does that sound to you?”

“It sounds like the truth! For getting drunk and overworking yourself you don’t mind staying the whole night out!”

“Why do you always have to open the drawer of shit?!”

“I do not! I was calm, normal, happy, asking you to simply help your daughter out with something for her kindergarten, and in a blink of an eye you’re screaming profanities!”

“Because it’s always the same soundtrack wherever I go! I’m getting tired of the same songs, change the repertoire, people! I’ve spent my whole youth standing my brother’s and Laurens’ incompetence and I refuse to live with a woman that’s just the same! And raising three children like that!”

“Well, I refuse to spend the rest of my days with a man that screams at the top of his lungs for each thing that happens to him! It’s because of you I’m embarrassed each time I cross paths with a neighbour!”

“All our neighbours can suck my balls, for all I care!”

“Don’t use that kind of language!”

“Those assholes don’t help me pay the bills or raise my children or anything. I don’t care about them, less about their unhealthy gossip nature! If they’re bored, they can get themselves a TV!”

“They don’t need one, with you they’ve got enough show!”

“This is my house, Eliza. I bought it. I pay it. It’s all mine. So, if I want to spend the whole days screaming, kicking and throwing things, I WILL”

“This is my house as well! And I don’t have any need to…”

“Care less about what the neighbours think and more about doing things right! Always doing everything at last hour, running and wrong!”

“It’s just to sew a few things, for the love of God!”

“And I should consider myself lucky she came to me now and not tomorrow, half an hour before the alarm rang, to tell me all this!”

“You’re making a fuss out of a thing that’s not that much of a deal…”

“Or is it that Philip’s costume has to be done at last hour tomorrow? Have you done a schedule to put me on my nerves each day of the week differently?”
“I told you I don’t wanna go dressed up to that!” Philip screamed from a distance.

“Philip, don’t eavesdrop!” admonished Alexander, already red in the face.

“I was not! It’s just that you scream too much!”

“And more I’m gonna scream if you keep bugging me around!”

“In all this time you’ve spent screaming and complaining, you could’ve easily gone to your friend’s house…” commented Philip.

“Even the kid knows…” agreed Eliza.

“The whole house is against me. This is a complot!”

“You’re starting to be an overdramatic King. I’ll leave now”

“No! You started this and you’ll hear each word I have to say about it!”

“Yeah, yeah, watch how much I’m staying to hear you ramble”

And with that, she left, closing the door at her backs and all. Alexander was left there, dumbfounded. He sprinted to the door, totally enraged, and swung it open. He saw his wife walking down the hall and entering the living room. He followed her, in time to see her sitting with their children and try to watch some TV.

“First and last time you leave me hanging” warned Alexander, deadly serious.

“More like the second time” chimed in Philip, zapping with the remote. “Don’t you remember your birthday?”

“Look, kid, what’s the matter with you?” asked Alexander, more annoyed at his son’s constant replies.

“That he got your sassy genes, that’s what’s wrong with him” answered Eliza, eyes glued to the TV.

“Well, then, we’re even. Philip got that from me, Angie got your ‘last-hour-shit’ gene, and John got your sister’s ‘To sleep or to keep sleeping, that’s the question’-gene”

“Don’t get Peggy into this!”

“What about me?” said the youngest Schuyler sister, appearing at the other door that connected the living with the entrance.

“Nothing, nothing…” dismissed Eliza.

Alexander narrowed his eyes when he saw his sister-in-law dressed up and prepared to get out. “Where are you going?”

“To Herc’s. Laf and John are going out tonight and asked me if I wanted to come over to watch a movie or something… He’s bored tonight” explained Peggy.
Eliza laughed with superiority. “Ha! Who was right now?”

“Hercules’ plans are unimportant” countered Alexander.

“Yeah, now that they don’t work to your advantage…”

“You can’t simply always think everybody is going to be free to help you!”

“Not everybody, my friends!”

“Betsey, can I borrow one of your hair ties?” asked Peggy.

“This girl minding her own business” complained Alexander, now also angry at the girl.

“And what business do you think I’ve gotta mind? Yours?”

“We were discussing something and you…”

“Agh, shut the hell up, man. No one wants to hear your idiocies, especially at night…”

“…”

“Peggy, don’t be rude” admonished Eliza.

“Rude? This girl is a fucking spoiled brat, that’s what she is”

“Alexander, stop it too”

Peggy frowned at him. “Fuck, you’re lucky you were born a male instead of a woman. You could’ve poisoned your children while breastfeeding them due to all your bad milk*”

“Aunt Peggy’s using the foreign expressions you taught her against you, Daddy”

“Philip, please…” kept begging Eliza.

“Betsey, your hair ties…” reminded Peggy, boringly.

“No!” exploded Alexander, red as scarlet, before Eliza had the chance to speak. “Don’t give her anything!”

“I can’t lend something to my sister either?” asked Eliza, upset.

“You can’t when she doesn’t stop losing her things!” He turned completely to his sister. “Where the hell are your hair ties?! I’ve bought you a whole bag of them the other day! Of different colours!”

“What do you want now? A medal?”

“No! I want to know where the hell they are!”

“Alexander, lower your voice!” pleaded Eliza, in a hiss.

“WHERE ARE THE HAIR TIES I BOUGHT YOUR SISTER!” screamed Alexander, doing completely the opposite of what she’d asked for him.

“I don’t know, but, please, the neighbours don’t have to…” started to say Eliza, keeping her cool.

“I DON’T GIVE A FUCK ABOUT THE NEIGHBOURS! DO THEY KNOW WHERE THE
HELL ARE THOSE? NO! THEN, THEY CAN GO FUCK THEMSELVES!"

“The only one in here who needs to get laid is you!”

“PEGGY…”

“Look the whole fuss you’re making because I asked my sister for hair ties!”

“IT’S NOT ABOUT THE HAIR TIES, IT’S ABOUT…”!

“I can hear you pretty well, stop screaming!”

“YOU DON’T GET TO TELL ME TO LOWER MY VOICE IN MY OWN HOUSE!”

Peggy sobbed a bit. “Yes, that’s it… You’re always attacking me with that, bad brother!”

“You made her cry!” accused Angie.

“Shut up, you started this…” complained Philip, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t talk that way to your sister” reprehended Eliza for the hundredth time.

“Why not? Dad does”

“See the example you are for your children?”

“Yeah, right. It’s always my fault. I’m the fucking worst” Alexander stretched out his arms as he shouted. “Put the crown of horns on my head and crucify me! Crucify me!”

Eliza’s cheeks grew redder than a tomato at his words. “Alexander, I don’t want blasphemies in this house! No blasphemies in this house!” she ordered, in a scream.

Alexander kept going, ignoring her. “Always the same. Always my fault. I am the number one asshole…” he insulted himself, with tedious fury.

“Well, you’re not being very nice now!” argued Eliza, starting to feel angry at the man’s behaviour.

“I was alright until the whole of you spoiled my day with…!”

“I only asked you to ask your friend if he could fix your daughter’s dress!” interrupted Eliza, jumping from the couch and hovering over her slightly shorter husband.

“At last hour!” Alexander fought back, standing on his tiptoes and raising his chin in pride.

The real children in the room contained a laugh at their parents’ behaviour.

“It wasn’t at last hour! They had to go there at eight the next morning! You’ve got plenty of time, I’ve told you!”

“And why don’t you go and ask Hercules for the favour?!”

“Because he’s your friend!”
“He’s your friend when you need someone to go shopping with!”

“Who am I going to go with?! With you?! Who only have time to work and work!!?”

“There you go again, then I’m the resentful one!”

“This is not resent! This is the truth! You can’t ignore me and the children and then complain…”

“I don’t ignore anybody in here! I wish I did! Maybe that way I wouldn’t be mad all day!”

“You’re always mad! You can’t be talked to! You can’t be told anything! You never want to do anything with any of us! Always with that bulldog face…”

“I’ve done things with you! With the children! I was the one who’ve been driving them to that fucking kindergarten for three weeks in a row because you had to go to that foster home soon in the mornings!”

“You told me you were going to support me!”

“I am supporting you! But you can’t ignore the fact that I…”

“That what? That you drove your kids to kindergarten three weeks in a row? I once had to drive them all year straight because the lord was too busy with his work…”

“Betsey, during that time I still had to…”

“That’s the only thing that can get through that thick skull of yours. Work, work, work, work… Screw my wife, screw my children, screw my family… Let them spend the whole summer alone because I’m to frigging busy fighting with my workmates over…”

“Betsey, I had to do it, alright?! I could’ve lost my job!”

“You’re always at the verge of losing your job!”

“You don’t understand, I…”

“No, of course I don’t. I’m stupid”

“I didn’t say that”

“I’m stupid. Peggy’s stupid. Angelica’s stupid. The whole world’s stupid. Because we’re not Alexander Hamilton” proclaimed Eliza, faking and imitating her husband’s voice and accent. “Make way for the great Alexander Hamilton (that’s me) and my powerful pen! I’m gonna cure the world from its pain with the skill of my quill! Paragraph by paragraph. Bewaaaaaare Historyyyy!”

The kids and Peggy giggled under their breaths while Alexander narrowed his eyes and moved the tongue inside his mouth in an annoyed manner, his cheeks growing redder as his wife kept mocking him, pretending to be writing something on the air with an imaginary pen.

“I’m not throwing away my shoooot! I wrote my way out of Nevis and that made me think writing is the only possible way I can solve my probleeeems, not talking them out like the adult I currently aaaam! Oh, what’s this that’s trying to cross my way? Life? No, thank you, I’d rather write like I’m
running out of time though I’m only thirty-ooneeee. I’m non-stoooooop”

“Well, that’s enough with the joke, don’t you think?” spat Alexander.

“It’s not a joke. It’s your life” said Eliza. “You’re the only one in here who can speak his truth or what?”

“No, but that’s not…”

“Don’t. Take your daughter’s Cinderella’s dress and make Hercules fix it! It’s very clear that he’s not busy today”

“No” refused Alexander, pouting like a little child.

“Gosh, he’s more stubborn than a mule…” complained Peggy.

“Are you gonna keep going?” asked Eliza, reaching the limit of her patience.

“Yes. Our children need to learn that every thing has its time, that they can’t wait for last hour to do it all…” He looked at his children. “Are you going to go to college like that? Studying at last minute?”

“We’re like six and three…” said Philip, with eyes half-closed.

“You’re going to start school when summer ends” lectured his father.

“Good for me, then. I was not the one who waited at last hour to try on a dress that’s been here for three months”

“I studied for all my texts the night before and I turned out fine” commented Peggy. “And all A’s and B’s. So, worry not, Angie”

“Don’t spoil my daughter!” complained Alexander.

“You’re the one spoiling them. Making this in-fighting so we don’t pay attention to your stupid acts” said Eliza.

“I’m the one acting stupidly?!” shouted Alexander again.

“Yes! In all this time you’ve lost picking up silly fights, you could’ve been to Hercules’ and with the dress fixed!”

“BUT CAN’T YOU SEE I’M TRYING TO IMPART SOME RESPONSIBILITY TO MY CHILDREN?!”

Eliza opened her mouth to tell her husband off one more time. Thomas beat her to it, screaming from his house next door.

“SHUT UP AND DRIVE AWAY ALREADY, CHIHUAHUA, IT’S TOO LATE FOR MORE OF YOUR BARKING!”

“See?” said Peggy, smiling smugly.
“Did he just tell me to shut up?!” wondered Alexander, indignantly and about to run to the nearest window.

Eliza grabbed his arm on time. “Alexander, no!”

“Alexander, yes!”

“No!”

“Yes!”

“No!” insisted Eliza, grabbing his collar and making their faces to be merely inches apart. “If you want to be a hooligan inside the house, I see I can’t stop you! But I refuse to let you do that outside!”

The marriage had a stare fight which Eliza ended up winning. Alexander got separated from her as she folded her arms upon her chest.

“Alright. But I’ll have my revenge” swore Alexander, marching to the front door.

“Don’t make an anonymous blog to badmouth your workmates!” warned Eliza.

“The Internet is free!”

“You’re forgetting the dress!”

They heard Alexander turning on his heels and walking rapidly to his workroom, muttering curses. Eliza kept standing there, waiting for him to be back.

“Put a jacket on. There’s a treacherous breeze tonight” she said, when she saw him about to get out with nothing more than a sleeveless t-shirt.

“Like my fucking family, it seems” whispered Alexander.

Eliza ignored him and kept watching all his moves. Alex took one of the coats from the clothes rack by the door and put it on. Peggy and the kids again contained a laugh at the sight of Alexander fighting against the zip which refused to go up. Alexander’s face began to be too red to be taken slightly. Eliza simply stood there, impassive.

In the end, Alexander took the coat off and threw it to the floor, totally frustrated and angry at the world.

“Fuck it. Maybe I’m lucky and catch a cold and die once and for all” they heard him whisper before
slamming the front door shut.

“He’s such a brat…” said Eliza, shaking her head with resignation.

“Isn’t it weird how he listened to you instead of going to fight Jefferson?” asked Peggy.

And just as she said that, they heard a loud thump. The four of them ran to the window where they could see the neighbour’s garden. Eliza passed a hand through her face when she saw the image and Peggy laughed loudly along with the kids. The flamingo figure Thomas had on his garden was passed over by their car, Alexander looked at it with an evil grin.

Thomas opened his door then, seeing the plastic animal, broken on the floor. He gasped and then looked enraged at the immigrant.

“Take that” said Alexander, childishly.

“Monster! Haydn did nothing to you!” said Thomas, heart-broken.

“Being yours, for starters” stated Alexander, flipping him off as he drove away.

“It was better when they didn’t talk to each other” said Peggy.

“That’s why I’ll never be able to do a barbecue with the neighbourhood as I always dreamt of” lamented Eliza.

“Thanks for helping us out, Herc”

“No prob”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t ask you with a bit more of time”

“It’s alright, it’s not that difficult. Besides, I’m not one to talk about doing things at last hour”

Bang.

“Hi, Herc” greeted Peggy, coming in the living room and dropping herself on the couch, right beside where Alexander was waiting for his friend to fix his daughter’s dress.

“Hi, there, Pegs” said Hercules, absent-mindedly, his eyes only on the clothes.
Alexander frowned at her. “Why didn’t you come with me?”

“Yeah, like I’m gonna put up with your rants on the way here” responded the girl, taking out her phone to entertain herself as Hercules sewed.

“Is that my hair tie?”

“Yep”

“Why did you take mine?”

“Revenge, sweet revenge”

“… Peggy, you’re aware that you live in my house for free, right?”

“And you’re aware that you lose a few points with Betsey today with your previous tantrum, right?”

“I…”

“And that I’m getting better and better at my crocodile tears, right?”

“… Peggy…”

“And that I’m not afraid of making use of my natural adorabilityness, right?”

“It’s either adorableness or adorability”

“Right?” pressured Peggy, now inclined so Alex’s and her face were almost touching.

“… … You just won one battle” replied Alexander, crossing his arms upon his chest and pouting.

“I won the war” retorted the girl, coming back to her initial relaxed position.

“In your dreams…”

“Aaron raised his glare from the newspaper as he heard Theodosia’s words. He swallowed his toast slowly.

“Why?” he dared to ask.

“Huh?” She looked up from her phone and, when she saw his panicked face, she laughed. “Ah, not us. I mean we’re going to watch a mess today”

“Well, the kids are little, but still…”
“No, no, I’m not talking about the kids. I’m talking about this”

Theodosia passed her husband her phone and Aaron took it, curious as to what his wife was referring to. He didn’t know if the answer left him more at peace or not.

Betsey [7:41]

*Guess whose alarm didn’t go off this morning* *Emoji of sarcastic/sadistic smiling face*

Aaron shook his head and returned the mobile to his wife. “And just last night Alexander complained about how he had to go to Mulligan’s because his daughter needed her dress fixed”

“Yeah, Betsey told me they had a huge fight…”

“I need to show you Alexander’s texts. Really, they’re priceless”

“I think Jackie sent me those, but it was so late that I didn’t have time to read them”

“Jackie?”

“Laurens”

“Why is he sending you texts?”

“I added them all to my phone. The more I’ve got, the more I’ll know about your crazy stories”

“… I’d want to be mad at you, but our receptionist’s currently writing a book out of our nonsense”

“I’d read that, no matter the price”

A few notifications sounded. Theodosia read the new texts and started to cackle. Aaron smiled at her joy.

“What is it now?”

His wife simply gave him the phone once again.

Betsey [7:46]:

*Now guess whose daughter’s dress has a huge juice stain?*

*Hahahaha, this seems like a bad sitcom*
I laugh cause I don’t see the point in crying

Besides Alex profanities are funny this morning

Aaron laughed more discreetly and let the phone on the table, resuming with eating his breakfast as Theodosia cried from laughter. His own phone buzzed, then.

**Alexander [7:48 am]**

Aron peace keep is a seat m6 fsm8ly is a fyyking mess

He showed that text to Theodosia, making her laughter a whole lot more intense than before and then he screenshoted it.

“This is better than Pennsylvania with a single N” he said, in the meantime.

“You must be fucking kidding me right now” laughed Theodosia.

---

“Then, you’d complain about my driving… You made me drive like this!”

“Alexander, you drove like this even before you had a license… Stop here, stop here”

“I fucking now. I see the light’s red”

“Stop I said!”

Alexander slammed on the brakes, maybe with a bit more of vehemence that it was needed.

“It’s for the sun, silly” said Eliza, looking out her window to ignore her husband’s grim face.

“And for the moon as well” mocked Alexander.

“What’s the deal? No one is behind us”

“The sun’s killing you now…” kept taunting Alexander, tapping one nervous finger on the wheel.

Eliza frowned slightly at him. “No. But it’s hot during the day and here, we’re under the shadow”
“Yeah, whatever”

“I’m doing it for you” countered Eliza. “The last time we stopped under the sun you started ‘Oooh, it’s so hot, so hot…””

“Yeah, I said whatever!” he complained.

Eliza looked at him for a moment. “Alexander, I want to have a peaceful day, huh?”

“Yeah, that’s why I had to clean that dress in five minutes and perform a ‘Wacky Races’ episode this morning” nodded the man, sharply sarcastic.

“What did I just say?”

“Alright, I said whatever!” said Alexander, raising his voice all of a sudden. The outburst cost him a fit of coughs.

“You’re always in a ‘Wacky Races’ episode when you drive, anyways”

“Fuck!” complained the immigrant again, when the fit finally stopped.

“Agh, Alexander, enough!” ordered Eliza, exhaustedly. “Do I have to talk to you as if you were one of the children? Enough!”

“No” retorted Alex, ironically childish.

Eliza sighed. “Really, can’t we go anywhere and behave moderately…? I’m just asking moderately…!”

“Are you this insufferable when you go out with your friends?” interrupted Alexander, tediously.

Eliza’s cheeks grew red with fury. “No. And you?”

“No. When I get out with my friends – thing that now I found out you despise – I don’t get this angry or act this way”

“I don’t despise that you get out with your friends. You know that. I’m angry at the fact that you’re awesome with them but then you treat me like this”

“Like this how?”

“Like this! Look at you! Look at that mood and that tone!”

“And what tone do you want me to have when…?”

“Are you really trying to make me buy that Jackie is not worse than your daughter on a bad day? Really?” inquired his wife, almost challenging. “When he’s way worse when it comes to do things on time and…”

“And I tell him off!” assured Alexander. “Of course I do! I’ve spent great part of our relationship telling him off because he made me be late for almost everything!”

“But you didn’t act this way towards him!”

“What would you know about how I acted? Did you live there with us or what?”
“But he told us”

“He told you his version”

“And when you were in front of people you contained yourself”

“What did you want me to do? To make a show?”

“Yes! As you do with me!”

“Yeah, what else!”

“And you didn’t scream as much either”

“Because back then I wasn’t that burnt out”

“I’m tired sometimes as well”

“Yes, Eliza, I know you’re perfect and awesome and everything”

“If I am, it could be because I don’t boast about it as much as some man I know”

“Shut up already…” muttered Alexander, as she talked.

“I won’t shut up” exclaimed the woman, indignant. “The last thing I needed to hear from you. You’re the last person with the right to tell other people…”

“Didn’t you want a peaceful morning?” spat Alexander. “Then, let’s drop it here”

“It’s always when you say so” kept arguing Eliza. “You’re so unfair”

Alexander sent a deadly glare in her direction. “Mmh, Eliza… Eh… Uf… I’m going to keep my silence”

“Yes, you better do that. You’ve said enough for the rest of the year…”

“Mmh…” he nodded, sardonically.

“Shut up, he said” whispered Eliza, offended. “Shut up, he said. Could this be possible?”

Alexander heaved a loud sigh. Eliza looked daggers at him with the corner of her eye. Angie and Philip exchanged a glare. John simply enjoyed his sleep. His two older siblings envied his lifestyle more than ever.

They arrived at 8.04. Alexander boasting about his driving skills and how thanks to them they could made it sooner than any of them had expected. When Eliza reminded him about that ticket he won the other day when he came from work late, Alexander shut his mouth immediately. If any of his workmates’d been there, they’d have started begging her to come once a week to use her
Philip and Angie guided them to their classroom. The marriage frowned when they saw it completely crowded with parents. Some of them, as they did, had a baby in their arms. Eliza passed their littlest son to her husband to tie her long hair in a ponytail, already feeling hot by just the image of being inside there in the middle of June. Alexander imitated her when she was finished.

“We’d need a miracle to get in the front when it’s our kids’ turn” commented Eliza. She threw a glare when she saw Alexander opening his mouth. “Do I need to remind you that other time when…?”

“Relax, woman, I was only going to say that I sent a text to Aaron asking him for keeping a place for us” explained Alex, rolling his eyes.

“Mr Burr’s there, Daddy” said Angie.

They looked in the direction the little girl was pointing at, seeing the Burr marriage also outside, a few classrooms away, talking among them as Augustine had eyes just for phone. Eliza was about to say a witty remark but her lips sealed once she felt Alexander trotting to his workmate’s side.

“Why did I ask him to come again?” she wondered, out loud, following her husband along with the children, who looked at the scene unimpressed.

“You’re the most trusting person on planet Earth, Aaron” they heard the immigrant saying, as a greeting.

The lawyer shrugged. “I try my best”

“Didn’t I tell you to save some seats for us?”

“I don’t know. That text you sent was more a hieroglyph than modern English”

“Well, thanks for the help” concluded Alex, sarcastically.

“Your mistake. You shouldn’t trust an amoral man”

“Resent doesn’t suit you, honey” commented Theodosia, rolling her eyes.

Alex’s face turned red. “I told you it was the sixth glass of wine talking, not me!”

“In vino veritas” countered Aaron, arrogantly.

Augustine gave an exasperated eye-roll. “There goes the prodigy of Princeton college once again”

Theodosia whacked him on the back of the head. “Kid, have respect. This arrogant ass pays the bills”
“I love this family so much” said Aaron, scrunching up his nose in disgust.

Eliza appeared behind her husband then. “Good to see we’ll not be the only ones in a bad mood”

“It’s this hot weather” complained Theodosia, spreading her fan noisily. “I’m not going to get inside that classroom unless it’s strictly necessary” she swore.

“There you’ve got your answer” muttered Aaron, throwing a glare to his workmate.

Eliza smiled down at their friend’s daughter. “What’s your costume about, Theo?”

“I’m a nurse from the World War II, ‘cause I’m going to help and health people when I’m older” explained the little girl, enthusiastically. She bowed when she received a series of ‘aaws’ from the adults.

“We were lucky we’ve got a child who knows what she wants to do with her future” said Theodosia, throwing a judgmental glare to her older son.

Augustine rolled his eyes once again. “Relax, Mum, it’s summer already…”

“Making kids dress up like people they want to be when they’re older when they’re five is a bit demanding, anyways” wanted to help Aaron.

The teenager frowned slightly at him. “And now he wants to pretend he gives a damn”

“I never do a single thing right with the boy…” lamented Aaron.

“There, there…” fake-comforted Alexander.

“What?” asked Eliza, in the meantime. She looked down at her daughter. “Then, why did you want to be Cinderella?”

“I’m not gonna go to the nearest store if she got it wrong” warned Alexander. Eliza shushed him right away. “Just saying”

“Because I want to be like Cinderella when I grow up: kind and optimistic no matter what” replied Angie.

“Huh, you could’ve easily taken one of your mother’s dresses and this joke would’ve come for free…” said Alexander, huffing with a mocking smile.

“Alexander, you’re playing with fire” warned Eliza.

“And knowing your wife, that statement is literal” laughed Theodosia.

“Don’t get in between this…” said Aaron.

“What’s the boy dressed up as?” asked Augustine, looking at Philip with a cocked eyebrow.

“He didn’t want to come dressed up” said Eliza, in a shrug, before the kid could respond.

“Hey, guys!” Peggy called them from the doorframe of the kids’ classroom. “This thing’s gonna start, come in”

“… Have you been there all this time?” asked Alexander, as confused as the rest.
“Yeah, I’ve saved your seats. Come” she hurried.

“Peggy, how did you come here?” asked Eliza, walking to the class with the group.

“I’ve stayed over Herc’s and he drove me before going to work with John and Laf” she explained, guiding them to the left side of the front of the room.

“You slept there?” asked Alexander, still lost.

“Yeah, thanks for leaving me there” added the girl, quite resentfully.

“Alexander” admonished Eliza.

“Hey, I remember leaving, but I don’t remember her staying or saying anything to me” Alex defended himself.

“I told you I had to go to the bathroom first”

“You’re so annoying with the bathroom thing…” complained Eliza, taking a seat when they arrived at their saved seats.

“Well, excuse me, but I’ve got to pee for two now” said Peggy, pointing at her grown belly.

“That’s not the way it works” said Aaron.

“What would you know…”

“Fuck, Peggy. I was joking about the bell-collar thing, but I see you need one” concluded Alexander, taking a seat beside his wife.

Eliza frowned. “Alex, don’t treat my sister like a cat”

“Why not? She acts like one. She sees food? She says: ‘Oh, food, tasty, I’ll eat it’. She sees shadow? She says ‘Oh, shadow, cool, I’ll sleep there’…”

“Alexander…”

“Oh, look, food!” said Peggy, interrupting the reprimand of her sister as she looked at one table at one corner of the room. As she went to it, she added. “Tasty, I’ll eat it” She came back, chocolate bar in hand and her eyes shone. “Oh, look, shadow!” she said, pointing at the little place where the sun didn’t reach from the windows. She dragged her chair – noisily, it must be added – to the spot, as she talked. “I’ll take a nap there!”

“… … …” Eliza could’ve felt the smugness of her husband from a million miles away. “Enjoy your victory in silence, Alexander” she concluded, barely looking at him.

Augustine laughed from the other side of the line, still with eyes glued to his phone. “Hahaha, that family is worse than ours and I love it”

Theodosia whacked him on the head again.

“Hey, Lex” said Peggy, when she finally opened the bar and began to eat it. “You’ve got a visit”
“Hum?”

His sister-in-law pointed with the chin behind him. Before Alexander could take in the sight at his backs, someone hugged him with all their might, while their companion patted him on the back, laughing.

“Alex, honey, how’s everything?”

“Lu?” said the financer, once he recognised the voice and the scent of the perfume he was now enveloped in. “Henry” he acknowledged the man, returning the smile sent his way. “What are you two doing in here?”

“Are you kidding?” asked Lu, finally ending the hug. “If my grandkids are going to do a show on their final day, I want to be there!”

“Don’t try to make her change her mind, boy” advised Henry.

“No, I…” stammered Alexander, a bit perplexed and with a warm feeling spreading across his chest. He looked down at his wife. “Was it you?”

“No, no” replied Eliza, with a sincerely happy smile on her lips at his flustered expression.

“It was Peggy” explained Henry. He looked at the direction the youngest Schuyler was, and his eyes grew wide. “Em… Is she alright?”

They looked the same way, seeing Peggy had already fallen asleep on the chair, half of the chocolate bar in her mouth, going up and down as she snored. All of them, but Lu and Henry, half-closed their eyes.

“Nothing, she was sadly born that way” explained Eliza, blushing from second-hand embarrassment. “Here, hold John for a moment” she told her husband.

Alexander obeyed, seeing the baby was also in REM sleep. “What a family, good Lord…” he commented, shaking his head in a bit of disapproval.

Eliza went to her sister and took the bar out from her mouth, slowly. Before she could complete the task, Peggy let out a loudly snore and jumped on her seat. She caught her sister red-handed and frowned at her.

“Whatcha ya doing, I was eating that” she complained, drawling the words and taking the bar back.

“Peggy, you were sleeping” explained Eliza.

“No, I was closing my eyes because this tastes very good” she made up.
“You’re drooling, Pegs” pointed out the older. “Please, this is the outside world, I told you to be like this back at home”

“You’re oppressing me”

Henry laughed louder than before. “I declare myself Peggy’s number one fan”

Lu whacked him on the head. “Don’t encourage her behaviour”

“You’re just like me!” cheered Theodosia, giving the woman a high-five.

“In the end, I earned one” complained the man.

“Brave face, Henry” laughed Alexander.

“Hey, where’s Angelica?” asked Lu, ignoring her pouting husband.

“She couldn’t come today. She had to go to Phil’s school to collect his final marks” explained Eliza.

“Huh, what can come out from that” said Henry. He held his hands in surrender when he saw his wife raising her opened hand once again. “I said nothing! They’re all marvellous children!”

The teacher walked to the centre of the platform and clapped her hands twice to call the attention of the adults and kids.

“Good morning, kids. And thank you, parents for coming. It’s the last day of kindergarten for the great majority of this class, they would be joining Primary School next Fall, and so, some of my workmates and I decided to do this little last exercise in which your children had to come dressed up as what they want to be in the future. I’m already seeing very interesting ones and…”

The teacher stopped her speech abruptly when her eyes fell on Philip, first in line and smiling up and her. Eliza and Alexander noticed immediately. She put a hand on her husband’s tight, as a silent ‘Don’t you dare… yet’ warning. Unwillingly, Alexander stood still, focusing on the sleeping baby in his arms.

“Philip” the teacher called, making the few disorientated parents to finally know who had caused the pause. “What happened? Did you have some trouble with your costume?” she asked him, though throwing judgemental glare to both parents.

Eliza cleared her throat to talk, feeling easily overpowered by the also straightened up postures of her sisters and in-laws. Philip beat her to it, surprisingly, replying with a short and simple:

“No”
The teacher simply blinked, more confused than before. “Then, what happened?”

“Nothing”

“… Then, why aren’t you dressed up as the rest of your classmates?”

Eliza was also starting to be angry at the sharp tone and frown the woman directed to her son, but still grabbed her husband’s arm and threw a warning glare to her in-laws. Lu muttered something under her breath while Henry simply kicked an imaginary pebble, frustrated. It was in those moments when Eliza was genuinely surprised to know Alexander shared no blood relation with those two stubborn and hot-headed persons.

“I did” kept answering Philip.

The teacher raised a challenging eyebrow. “Oh, you did?”

“Yeah”

“Then, I guess you wouldn’t mind going first, right?”

Philip shrugged. “You’re the boss in here”

And even Alexander passed a hand through his face when he heard that response.

Philip walked to the platform and the teacher walked a few steps away, to give the whole metaphorical spotlight to the kid.

“Can I start?” he asked, politely.

“Yes, you can” nodded the teacher.

Philip looked at the classroom, throwing nervous glares to his parents as any other kid would do in his position, before gathering the enough courage to talk as loud as he could. “Today I came dressed up like myself. Because, when I grow up, I want to be myself”

The Hamilton marriage heard a few giggles at their backs. They were silenced as soon as Alexander and Lu threw one of their threatening glares. Eliza enveloped her husband’s arm as tight as she could, feeling empathetically nervous for her son.

“I wanna grow up and learn, but remaining trustful at myself” continued Philip, fidgeting in spot after seeing the reaction of his classmates.
“True to myself, sweetheart” corrected Alexander, in a low tone.

“True to myself” repeated the kid, nodding and feeling a bit more secure at seeing the supportive smiles of his parents.

“I wanna find out my vir… virtues” he read his father’s lips, and nodded, loosing himself a bit more. “And I’d…”

“Philip, I think you didn’t understand the work” admonished the teacher, pinching the bridge of her nose.

“I…” tried to talk Philip.

“You had to come here as someone you want to become in the future. You know, someone you admire, or dressed as the profession of your dreams” explained the woman.

“And I did”

“No, you did not”

“Yes, I did” insisted the child. “I wanna be a writer, like my Dad”

“Then, you should’ve come dressed up as him, for example”

“No. I don’t want to be my Dad, I want to be my own writer-self” he defended himself as well as he could.

“Philip, not even in the last day of the year you can cooperate a bit with me?” complained the woman, arms in akimbo.

Alexander didn’t have time to feel flattered for the admiration his son seemed to feel towards him, as he was overwhelmed by the teacher’s constant reproaches. He leaned on his seat.

“Alright, let me tell you something, you god…”

He never finished his sentence, as Eliza stepped on his foot, maybe with a bit more of force than necessary. She rubbed soothing circles on his back, in juxtaposition.

“Honey, there are children in here, hehe” she whispered, smiling in the surface to pretend nothing had happened.

The teacher looked at them with a cocked eyebrow, and then returned her glare to the frowning kid. “Go back to your seat, Philip. I hope you don’t have any trouble next year” she instructed, with a clear mock in her tone.

It woke some past memories up inside Alexander’s head, from his time at the orphanage back
at Nevis, with that stuck-up principal and…

“Yo, let the kid finish, Rottenmeier” complained Peggy, with an offended look on her face. Some kids (and parents) laughed at the nickname.

“Yeah, he’s doing the work just fine” added Henry, immediately.

The teacher suffered a tic in her left eyebrow. “No. I gave specific orders as to how I wanted this to be done and…”

“He did what you asked for!” countered Alex, unable to keep his opinions inside his head any longer. This time, Eliza let him do. “He just did it in an original way!”

“Yeah, don’t be stung if you couldn’t think of that first” added Lu, jocosely.

“Listen, Mr and Mrs Hamilton” began to say the woman, ignoring the rest of the family right away. “Your son’s been giving a bad example, ignoring the instructions I give the class, throughout the whole year. I’m sorry if I’m too harsh, but I’ve got a limit…”

Alexander already had at least five responses to her statement, but, surprisingly enough, Eliza beat him to shut the woman up for good.

“Originality will never be a bad example, ma’am, but bad manners are” she explained, as gently sharp as only she knew how to. “Besides, I think the one in here whose work is educating children, is you, not Philip. So, please, do your work and let my children do theirs”

God, how much Alexander loved that woman.

A few parents nodded in agreement, and their children joined by encouraging Philip to go back to the platform and keep talking. Theo and Angie got up and dragged him there, when the flustered kid refused to do so.

The teacher was left in the background, forgotten as the kid kept explaining why he had chosen to do the work that way. In the end, Philip received a few applauses that only made him blush more.

“Great job, son” congratulated Alexander, ruffling his hair with affection.

“We’re very proud” added Eliza, tapping him on the head.

Philip simply looked down, red as a tomato. Eliza and Alexander shared a look and smiled,
flustered themselves. The woman felt someone pulling on her skirt. The couple looked down, seeing a frowning Angie.

“Mum, I don’t want to be Cinderella anymore” she stated. “Now, I wanna be Philip”

“Copycat” said her brother, playfully.

That made not only the Hamilton marriage, but the Knox, the Burr and Peggy to laugh whole-heartedly, ignoring the looks they received from their interruption.

“Your kid surely takes after you” commented Aaron, once the day was almost over.

The kids and the parents left the classroom as soon as the last child was done and they had decided to spent the rest of the school day under some tree that gave them enough shadow for the whole group and the perfect view of their playing kids.

Alexander nodded, absent-mindedly, as he watched his children playing with Aaron’s.

“Yeah, he does… Sometimes, I’m afraid no one will ever love him because of that” he admitted, knitting his brows.

“Don’t talk that way!” Lu was fast to admonish.

“True, man, if Philip’s like this while being six…” started Peggy.

“Look out world! He’s got more than enough to survive and get the right people to be by his side!” finished Eliza, hugging her husband by the shoulders, with a bright smile.

Alexander allowed himself to smile at their enthusiasm. “If you say so”

“We know so” added Henry, taking the last sip of his Coke. “We know you”

“And I’m sure there’s a little Eliza out there, with the patience of a saint to put up with his stubbornness” added his wife, giving him a peek.

“Philip, come back to play!” they heard Theo half-complaining in the distance. They looked up to see the girl dragging a Philip who only had eyes for something he was writing down on some small notebook. “Come on, take a break, you can write later” she insisted.

“Theo, I’ve got it fresh!” complained the boy.
“But it’s your turn!”

“You can take it”

“No! Come on, pretty please?”

Philip rolled his eyes but gave the girl his notebook and pencil. “Alright, I trust you with this”

“Great choice!” laughed the girl.

Philip did just as much. “You’re the best of girls and friends, Theo”

Henry cackled, startling the whole group of adults. “I think the boy already found her, Betsey!”

The adults erupted into a laughter, except from Aaron and Alexander, who frowned and curved their lips at the sight and then exchanged a rapid glare, before they muttered at the same time:

“Oh, shit…”

Chapter End Notes

NOTES:

*To have bad milk: Tener mala leche. It's our way to say someone has a bad temper.

I'm thinking about posting this chapter as a one-shot, randomly and separatedly... But I'm so lazy I don't know if I will.
Diametrically opposed; foes

Chapter Summary

Angst, because why not.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

I'll take advantage of this little unplanned chapter to let you know the reason why the next episode would take more time than normal to update it's because I've been taking a break for the last couple of weeks. I've not been in the best emotional condition lately and my will to write along with my inspiration is basically 'gone'. Except for angsty bad and hurriedly written things like this one.

So, thanks for the patience, the support and I hope you still enjoy this chapter (sorry, anyways XD). BTW, half of the conversation Alexander and Thomas are having in this were like cut parts of the talk they had back at "Blood ties (P3)", because I couldn't add it up naturally or I simply forgot while writing it and didn't remember until the episode had been uploaded for a week. My fish memory attacked again :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thomas had always had a very good memory when it came to dates. For outsiders, it was a bless. For passing History, for remembering all your relatives’, friends’ and partner’s birthdays or special anniversaries. They also could see it as a funny thing to entertain themselves. They would tell him a random date, he’d respond what relevant thing had happened. Half of them would be amazed, the other half, freaked out and trying to find the way he’d cheated. Jen and James were always part of the first group, while Adams, Jay and a few others they’d told belonged to the second. The rest of his siblings never knew, as he started to be more cautious with what he said to whom as he grew up. He was already the quiet and odd kid, he didn’t need to be the free library of occurrences when the rest didn’t want to make a little effort and remember events for themselves.

But, as cliché as it sounded, each gift could be also a curse. And for Thomas, this memory-thing was that most of the times. For example, he despised the fourth of September, especially when the dark night came, because it was Jen’s death’s anniversary. He loathed to have to wake up early in the morning on March 31st, because he remembered the cold, short and straightforward text of Lucy, informing him of the death of their mother. He’d have to make a triple effort to get out of bed when it was September 6th, the day when he had to add one more year without Martha by his side. He totally tried to avoid acknowledging it was the 13th of September, refused to remember how he should be having to raise three daughters instead of two. The date was the reminder of how such a failure he was as a father, and he didn’t want to think about it more than necessary. Paradoxically, his struggles just made him think about how undeserving of parenthood he was and how it was pointless to keep
fighting with his sister over his daughters’ custody. That day, Thomas’ insecurities really took the upper hand in his life and didn’t give him a break, trying to convince him the best for the girls was to go with their aunt, who had the wealth and the enough means to raise them properly.

September 13th really won the prize for being his most hated and difficult day to live.

The silver medal went for September 17th, when his father abandoned the world (and him. While he was miles away from home despite being the one to blame for his premature passing).

So, yes, no wonder why he despised his so called ‘gift’ so much.

Though maybe it was his fault for just focusing on the dates that brought him pain more than on the happy ones.

Let’s say September was the month in which the only thing Thomas wanted to do was to get under the covers and don’t get out until October rolled over. That was why he chose that month to be his vacation time. Or more like no-obligation-to-go-to-work time. He had the luck that everybody usually chose the summer months to go on vacation and so it was always easy for him to get September for himself without anyone objecting or having to negotiate with some workmate for it.

But all machines had its flaws and moments of collapsing and failing. Sometimes, Thomas forgot about a date because he’d pushed it in the back of his mind, wanting to erase it for good. And, for some time, it worked, and he could be relatively happy, with those unwelcomed flashbacks unable to spoil his day thanks to his weak filter.

Today, the filter broke. The trick didn’t work. The day was about to go to hell. And the worst part? Thomas knew. Thomas realised it and decided to keep going, despite being fully aware that he wouldn’t be able to count with James’ company as the man had fallen ill and was in no condition to put up with whatever crazy shit that could happen at the law firm. Thomas had seen the date a couple of times (in his phone while checking the hour and in the calendar hung cruelly above the coffee machine) and still decided to bid farewell to his friend and daughters and leave to work.

August 17th. The date resonated inside his brain repeatedly, in a taunting rhythm Thomas was used to. But he ignored it. He ignored the tingling and the lack of hunger that accompanied him throughout the whole day, he didn’t pay attention to the red flags that waved insistently, the knots that made his empty stomach to hurt, the nausea that prevented him to feed and calm it.
For once, the constant bickering and movements and unprofessionalism of the law firm played to Thomas’ favour, and instead of worsening his migraine it actually made it better to cope with. The external noise quietened the internal turmoil of mixed emotions that collided against each other in his mental palace, where he once found the peace and safeness he longed for in his childhood, and where now he only found ruins of what he used to be and dreamt to become.

Thomas hated to spend any time there nowadays. He feared to come across the future his mother had planned for him as a lawyer there, in trampled pieces, or any promise broken he’d made to someone important to him that was no longer by his side, or that time when he made a fool of himself by mispronouncing one word in front of the whole class, or that period when his marks dropped because he couldn’t find any motivation to do anything, or that other day when he said what he shouldn’t have and had hurt someone and he didn’t comprehend it well enough to know what he ought to do next to fix his slip-up.

Or like on this same day, thirty-one years ago, when his father had decided to take him out on a walk to distract him from his nerves of having to go back to the boarding school in less than a month. The day Thomas saw his father falling to the grass, hand on chest, drops of sweat running down his pale face, his breathing erratic and shallow. The day the only thing Thomas did to help was to freeze for a considerably amount of time, time he could’ve used to alert somebody or take action himself, asking his father what he needed (as Peter would’ve done without a second thought, had the roles been reversed) and make it better for his sick father.

The day his mother dedicated him a glare filled with so much hatred and repulsion Thomas still doubted to this day if it’d been real, if there was a possibility for such an inhuman stare being dedicated from a mother to a son.

Thomas shivered in his chair, stopping his writing abruptly. He focused his attention on his handwriting, struggling to keep his eyes opened. He feared to see those icy dark eyes that tormented his nightmares and regressions, that still exerted plenty of power when he had to make a choice or that clouded his objective judgment.

His mother had presented him with a lot of glares throughout their relationship, but that day… That day Thomas was truly glad the idiom ‘deadly glare’ was that, just an idiom and not a fact.

Or maybe he wasn’t. Maybe he truly wanted it to be true and having died that day, before Peter, before Jen, before having met Martha just to lose her, before having had his daughters just to complicate their lives, before having turned his back on Elizabeth, very hypocritically… Maybe he wasn’t that glad and thankful, maybe he resented his mother for not having enough power to have fulfilled what had crossed her mind in that moment. Or maybe she did and had just let him live because living was way harder than dying, and she knew and wanted him to pay for what he’d done.
Alright, now Thomas was thinking crazy things. That didn’t mean he wanted them to be true, though. That didn’t mean he still wanted his fantasy to come true. That didn’t mean he completely agreed with his mother. He should’ve been the one to leave first, before his father, Jen, Martha or Elizabeth. He deserved it. It wasn’t like he had changed someone’s life or given anyone something else but trouble for putting up with him. He was glad James hadn’t come to work today and wasn’t able to sense something was wrong with him. The man hadn’t had a break with all his troubles lately, and Thomas had been an incompetent to return the favour. He didn’t know why the man still stood by his side.

He tapped the desk with the pen, nervously. Thomas could feel the beginning of an anxiety attack coming at full force in his direction. He inspired a few times through his nostrils, wanting to control his breathing and calm his pounding head. The tapping of his pen became quicker, and his breathing exercise was eclipsed by it, following its accelerated pace instead of the relaxing one he’d been taught several times and still didn’t master.

His chest ached at the same time his throat closed, and Thomas tossed the pen aside, in an almost child-frustrated-kind of behaviour. Against his best judgement, he closed his eyes, wanting to concentrate only on the Spanish numbers he repeated persistently in his head. Slowly, the image of his mother evaporated, and one of Consuelo, doing Jane’s job by comforting and supporting him replaced it. She gave him some peace that helped him get over his nerves and take control over his body again.

Thomas let out a shaky deep breath and fanned himself with his hand. Looking at his right, he saw the window was opened, but no breeze was coming in whatsoever. It was then when he realised he was sweating. If he’d felt hot, Thomas wouldn’t worry so much over his perspiration.

He unlocked his phone to see the time. It was almost lunchbreak. Now that the episode was over, Thomas could hear the chattering of his workmates from outside his office door. He saw a few unread texts from James, which he replied concisely in fear he could give any of his discomfort away, and then put the item down before he could reach to see the date on the screen again.

Thomas sighed exhaustedly, took his pen and resumed his writing.

He wasn’t in the mood to eat. Or to interact with humans, honestly.
Without knowing when or how, night came. Thomas only realised the passing time when he had to get up from his chair to turn on the lights. He rubbed his aching back and shook his left hand, almost numb for the several hours he’d been holding the pen without a break or stopping his task. The building was in complete silence. Surely everyone had gone home. Maybe even before the established hour, taking into account it was a Friday.

Thomas opened his door slowly, though, just in case. He stepped out and found the break room with its lights off and totally deserted. Yes, nobody was there. Better for him.

He walked to the elevator, feeling a bit light-headed, to go to the last floor and get in the restroom before he took the car to go back home.

Or so he thought before taking a look at the place when he was about to leave. The mirrors had a few stains here and there, the soap dispenser could need a wash and some checking, and the same went for the hand drier… And now that he paid attention, there were a few stalls that needed to be fixed, and the floor wasn’t that perfect either.

Gosh, that place was a mess…

<<Like your life>>

Well, at least Thomas would have a companion while he fixed the restroom. It’d take only a little bit of time, it wasn’t that big anyways. He went to fetch a few cloths, the mop and the bucket and started to clean the restroom.

“Wonder what Libby’s doing in here all day if this place’s like this” he complained, under his breath, at some point.

The name reminded him… Where was she? They had come together to work and there was nobody there. Did she knock on his door and he hadn’t heard it? Did she carpool with someone else? Did she take the bus? Did she make it back home safely?

Maybe he had unread texts from her, he hadn’t wanted to check on his phone before leaving his office. Thomas scoffed. What a friend he was. Leaving Libby going back home alone without talking to her in all day and without making sure James was feeling better.
<<Why do they put up with you again?>>

In all honesty, I don’t know.

And what about the girls? What if Polly had hurt herself somehow? What if Patsy had gone out with some friends and wasn’t home yet? What if James had called him to let him know and he hadn’t picked up the phone because he was too busy working?

<<You truly take after me>>

The thought made him feel disgusted with himself.

He hadn’t realised he had started to clean the mirror with a little bit more of energy than was necessary.

Thomas stopped the action suddenly, heart rate racing. Why didn’t he take a look at the phone before leaving the office? Why did he ignore his surroundings for more than six hours without making sure everyone that mattered to him was okay?

<<Because you can’t love. You don’t know how to>>

In a blink of an eye, Thomas sprinted out the restroom and ran downstairs. By the time he reached his office, he was gasping and his hands were trembling as he tried to unlock his phone, as if eager to see the proof of how he was the most horrible parent and friend that ever walked on Earth.

The phone dropped from his hold a few times, and Thomas took a few seconds to try and calm his breathing, which was out of control. He knew he had to count and take deep breaths if he wanted to go back to normal and do things properly, but his sudden dizziness wanted the spotlight all for itself.

Thomas was fast enough to turn the swivel chair so he could drop himself on the top of it, before his legs failed him. Alright, maybe skipping all meals wasn’t his best idea, but there was nothing he could do now about it but try and remember how to breathe.
It took a big moment to finally be in control of his actions again. Thomas lowered his head; an old advice Consuelo gave him when he was younger and this vertigo began to assist the parties his anxiety organised. Slowly, his vision became clearer and that helped his breathing to be steadier. A sigh of relief went out his mouth, then.

It didn’t last much when there were two knocks on the door. He jumped in his seat and looked forwards, his vision taking its time to come to focus.

“I heard a noise” the person at the door stated, in a casual tone. “Is everything alright?”

It took Thomas some more time to finally recognise the voice as Hamilton’s. Great, now he’d have to pretend to be fine so the immigrant would leave him alone while fighting to maintain the composure and not having another start of anxiety attack in front of the least person he wanted to show such a shame scene.

<<You already made a fool of yourself in front of him, crying like a spoiled brat because you can’t face your own problems>>

“Thomas?” Hamilton called once again. “Are you alright?”

He’d only need to tell him ‘yes’, to lie to the financer in the face shamelessly, despite the possibility that Hamilton would see through him and call him out on it. Well, ‘possibility’. It was going to happen that way. And Thomas was glad because of it, because that way he could give the immigrant a sharp response and Hamilton would make use of his infamous pride and leave him there for good, without putting too much of a fight.

It was a fool-proof plan.

Alas, not a fool-like-Thomas-proof plan.

He opened his mouth but nothing came out. His throat escorted his words back to his head. Fantastic, just perfectly and freaking fantastic. The last fucking thing Thomas needed right now and in front of Hamilton.

 Fucking again.
“Thomas, can you talk?” asked the financer, and his straightforwardness just made Thomas angrier at him.

In an act of pride, because there was no way in hell he was going to pass this with Hamilton again, Thomas tried to talk one more time, but now he couldn’t manage to separate his lips. In fact, and in a cruelly ironic manner, they remained sealed. For the love of God, what had he done to deserve this to happen to him in the worst of times?

Hamilton threw him a judgmental up and down glare before finally taking a step backwards.

“I’m gonna make you an infusion” he explained, crashing the little remains of hope Thomas had for him to leave.

<<Well, at least you waited five months to release the sequel>>

Thomas sighed frustratedly at the other companion that also refused to go away. Why didn’t he go directly to his car and drive back home?

<<And you didn’t even finish cleaning the restroom>>

For fuck’s sake…

Things didn’t get any better after Hamilton came back. The financer deliberately took a seat by Thomas’ right and stayed there as the Virginian sipped the hot beverage he’d made for him. It was nice to feel something warm in the stomach, he’d give the situation that. Though he wasn’t going to admit it out loud.

<<Not that you’d be able to talk, anyways>>

Thomas threw an almost inaudible groan under his breath. That, of course, in the silence that
reigned in the law firm right then, was the loudest sound he’d performed in the last eight hours. And Hamilton also saw it as an invitation to try to start another conversation.

“Are you feeling better?”

A quick shrug. He didn’t want to think about how he was feeling, that always led to disaster. And he’d fought enough for one day.

“Is the infusion any help?” continued Hamilton, oblivious to when was the proper moment to simply be silent. Or to be gone.

Thomas gave him the same response.

“Can you talk?”

That was an interesting question. One Thomas wasn’t very thrilled to prove wrong or right any minute. Less in front of him. The immigrant sighed and looked the other way, for once seemingly unable to maintain eye contact.

<<You exhaust everybody. And you don’t even show an ounce of gratitude>>

“Libby told me you didn’t go out to have lunch today” Hamilton talked again, returning his gaze on the top of him. “Did you eat?”

A shake of head. A slight turn of the head. A blush of shame. The worry coming back again.

Thomas took his phone and unlocked it, this time more easily than earlier, and saw two simple texts from Libby informing him that she’d carpool with Maria and the other one assuring him she had made it safe to the house.

<<So much show for nothing… You paranoid lunatic>>
“Do you want something? There are a few snacks there…”

Hamilton clicked his mouth shut when Thomas gave another shake of head. If it weren’t for the embarrassing moment and his shameful incapability to talk, Thomas would’ve teased him about how he’d have done this a long time ago if this was all that was needed for him to finally shut up.

Of course, the victory couldn’t be long.

“When was the last time you ate?” inquired the financer, with suspicion lingering at the end. Hamilton seemed to realise he’d formulated the question wrong, and corrected himself. “Did you eat breakfast before coming?”

Hamilton’s sharp glare softened a bit when he received a nod this time.

“So, around seven…” he stated, hesitantly and leaving the number hanging there, waiting for approval. Thomas nodded again, and he continued, more secure. “Around seven was your last meal”

Thomas nodded once again, finishing the last sip of the infusion.

“Alright…” nodded Hamilton, in the meantime, absent-mindedly. “And you aren’t a bit hungry?” he insisted.

Thomas rolled his eyes, quite dramatically, overwhelmed for the persistence of his co-worker. He moved his hand in circles in front of his stomach.

“You’re nauseous?”

He nodded. Well, at least Hamilton was clever and smart enough to understand his vague hand gestures. The only good thing to have to re-live this with him.

“Well, now you’ve drunk the infusion, you’ve got something warm in the stomach” commented Hamilton, more to himself than to Thomas.
That didn’t mean Thomas couldn’t hear him and take offence. He was feeling like a child who still needed his parents to look after him after a bad day in school.

<<Like you’re not like this because you miss your father too much>>

Thomas avoided his workmate’s glare again, feeling a lump going up his throat. If he was like this for a thing he did (horribly, terribly, unforgivably) wrong, how would he react when September came? What would he do? How were James and Libby going to put up with him? With this behaviour?

He heard Hamilton calling his name again, but this time it sounded so distant Thomas gave him no mind. His whole attention was on trying not to hyperventilate in front of the immigrant and make this night to go any worse.

But, of course if there was a way to make this situation more embarrassing for him and more hilarious for Hamilton, Thomas was going to take it. Unwillingly, but take it, nonetheless.

Suddenly, the lump felt like it had jumped and wanted to get out. He turned the opposite direction from where Hamilton was sat, and benched over himself, gagging and coughing. When nothing came out, Thomas proceeded to even his strangled breathing, still anxious at the sensation of something blocking his larynx.

His ears were ringing, and so, he didn’t hear the chair at his backs and the steps that approached him. He barely minded Hamilton when he knelt in front of him, a couple of papers in his hands. Hamilton began to fan him with them, his free hand hesitant about if touching him or not. Thomas shook his head when he was almost fully aware of his surroundings, and Hamilton withdrew his hand, passing to simply give him air.

They stayed like that for a moment, time seemed to freeze inside the secretary’s office, only running again when Hamilton talked. How unusual.

“Are you okay?”

Thomas reciprocated his originality by lying with a nod. Hamilton didn’t believe him but, hallelujah, let it slide, and kept fanning him. Thomas reclined in his seat, avoiding looking Hamilton in the eye at all costs.
“Shut the hell up” he muttered, between gritted teeth.

“Beg your pardon?”

Thomas looked at him with the corner of his eye. He was so tired of the critical voice inside his head that didn’t even realise he had finally talked. But Hamilton, oblivious to it all, did. And the relief in his face was worse than a mock.

Why did Hamilton have to be such expressive, such an open book?

“Are you feeling better?” asked the financer, when he saw Thomas was not going to repeat himself.

Hamilton curved his lips when he received another non-verbal response, a simple shrug.

“Can you try to talk?” he asked, a bit gentler than Thomas was expecting the petition to be made, than anyone ever asked him for.

“I’m alright” managed to say Thomas. He cleared his throat when he noticed how raspy it’d sounded.

“Are you still feeling nauseous?”

Thomas frowned his lips. Instead of the nasty comment or the mockery of how he’d gotten his voice back, Hamilton kept asking him questions naturally, to make sure he was feeling better, even if so slightly. It made him sick and enraged him for reasons Thomas couldn’t put his finger on.

“No” he lied.

This time, Hamilton didn’t ignore it. Thomas felt good for the sharp reaction he received. “If you want me to help you, you should stop lying to me”

“I didn’t ask for your help” retorted the secretary.

“You never asked for anybody’s help”

“For a reason”
“What reason? Not you having total control over yourself, that’s for sure”

Thomas threw him a deadly glare. “Don’t you have a house to go back to?”

“Yes. Just as much as you do”

“Then, go back to it and leave me alone” ordered Thomas, fast enough to prevent another wave of paranoia concerning his daughters and friends to wash over him.

“I won’t leave you alone like this” argued Hamilton, as impossible as ever.

“Like how?”

“Dizzy, nauseous, anxious, nervous, with an empty stomach…” Hamilton all but counted, with his fingers and all.

Thomas blushed from both embarrassment and anger. “I’m alright, it’s not the first time”

“You don’t seem to have a lot of experience, honestly…”

“I don’t need your pity” snapped Thomas, finally looking at him.

Hamilton frowned, irritated. “I don’t pity you. I thought we let that clear a long time ago”

“Then, what’re you still doing here?”

“I’m still here because I care, jackass” spat Hamilton, getting up and tossing the papers he’d been holding on the desk, in a way to let out his fury and distract the attention from what he’d just said. “They’re two different things” he added, in a more normal tone of voice.

Thomas stiffened in his seat and abstained from looking in Hamilton’s direction, not wanting to see the Caribbean showing his frustration by passing a hand through his face.

<<That is the reason why everybody ends up abandoning you>>

Thomas tensed in his chair at the imaginary reprimand. He was starting to be better than his mother at them. He tried to offer an apology to the immigrant but found himself unable to. That time, Thomas wished it’d have been his strange inability to talk that took over him sometimes the true reason why he couldn’t speak. It’d have meant his mother hadn’t been right all that time about his dreadful personality.

“I haven’t talked to Betsey yet” Hamilton interrupted his trail of thoughts again. It was the first time Thomas was happy for the immigrant’s difficulty to be silent. If only he could choose another topic to talk about. “I was actually waiting for you to tell me when you wanted to start. She told me to give you a bit of time, and I gave you five months to take the first step, but…”
“I’m alright” assured Thomas, stubbornly.

Hamilton scoffed at his response. “Yes, I’m seeing it”

The Virginian frowned, though feeling slightly better at Hamilton’s usual taunting demeanour. “It was just a one-off moment”

“One hell of a one-off moment, if you ask me”

Thomas shivered at the same words James had said to him a few months ago, when he found himself having another anxiety crisis in the middle of the workday. After a clear of throat, he retorted: “No, I don’t ask you. If you excuse me, I’d love to go back home. Some of us like to sleep at night”

<<Yes, like you’re gonna have any sleep tonight>>

Hamilton talked right after the taunting voice, and Thomas began to formulate the unrealistic theory that he knew about it, somehow.

“Well, I did ask you to let me know if your sister did or said anything” he reminded Thomas, as if lecturing him.

“This has nothing to do with Lucy” replied Thomas, rapidly, as he kept his belongings inside his briefcase and ordered his desk.

Hamilton gave him another up and down look, as if considering if he should believe him or not. “I also asked for you to let me know if you were having a horrible day at some point” continued Hamilton, thankfully letting his suspicions aside.

That time, it was Thomas’ turn to laugh. “Horrible? This is an average day for me”

The silence that followed his statement fell on the top of his shoulders like two bags full of dry cement.

<<Looks like your friend is not the only one who doesn’t know when to shut up>>

Actually, he’s not my friend… thought Thomas, as a weak comeback.

<<And can you blame him?>>

“Does Madison know you were having one of your ‘average’ days?” asked the financer, finger-
“No” answered Thomas, being honest without knowing why.

“Then, I’m not sure ‘average’ is the word you were looking for” insisted Hamilton.

“I’ll buy you a dictionary for Christmas and you can search the correct word for me” joked Thomas, exhaustedly.

“I already have a word in mind, but I’m not sure you’d want to hear it”

“I never want to hear anything that comes out from your mouth…”

“Good for you, then, because I came here with the intention of hearing you out”

“Will you let me go and stop being a nuisance if I tell you?”

“Maybe”

Sadly, Thomas’s learnt that Hamilton was both true to his word and persistent when it came to stick his noses in somebody else’s problems.

“This day, thirty-one years ago, happened something that makes me uncomfortable” he admitted, very unwillingly, but his wish of going back home was stronger than his best judgment.

Hamilton eyes widened considerably before he blinked a couple of times, slowly. “Alright?" he spoke, in a foreign unsurely manner. “And what’s wrong? You forgot to buy it a present?”

Thomas narrowed his eyes. “Alright, have the decency to laugh at me when I’m gone” he spat, as he tried to make his way out of the room.

“No, no, sorry…” hurried to say Hamilton, holding both hands up in surrender and hesitating about if it was okay to touch him now or not. After receiving an unclear response, he simply put his arms in akimbo. “C’mon, keep going”

“Still don’t have enough jokes for the next time you talk to your friends?”

Hamilton matched his upset expression. “I won’t say anything about this to anyone” he swore.

“Sure”

“Hey, I’m sorry if you only got to be friends with people like Adams, who sold you down the river, but I won’t let you compare me with him” spat Hamilton.

“Apology accepted. Now, let me get through”

Thomas stumbled over his own feet at the rapid movement, trying to get out of the office. Thankfully, he could grab the doorframe on time. Hamilton made a gesture to catch him, but stop a few inches away from him, surprisingly respecting his instruction of not wanting to be touched.
“Do you really think taking the car like this is a good idea?” asked Hamilton, a glimpse of worry in his jocose tone.

“Not one of my bests” conceded Thomas, putting one hand against his pounding forehead. “And this migraine doesn’t help” he added.

“Are you sure you don’t want to eat anything?” inquired Hamilton, still with hands prepared in case he could lose balance again.

Thomas nodded. “Just thinking about it makes me nauseous”

The financer frowned. “In that case, let me drive you back”

“I don’t know which of the two choices is worse”

“I take full offense at that”

“Mission accomplished, then”

Hamilton had gone to collect his things before leaving with him. Thomas decided to go up as well, to finish cleaning the restroom. Well, ‘decided’, he just did it so it couldn’t be used against him later. He already had enough unfinished tasks and things done wrong in his list of failures. He thought he could do it on time before Hamilton got out, but that day turned out to be one of his most unlucky ones.

“What’re you doing?”

“I’m cleaning this”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want to leave it like this”

A pregnant silence. Thomas refused to turn to the door, despite the window being clean enough.

“Need help?” offered Hamilton, with an emotion in his tone Thomas didn’t want to name.

“No, thanks”

“Do it at your own pace” instructed the financer. “You could get dizzy again”
I’m alright” repeated Thomas, as a trained parrot.

He finally turned around to mop the floor, seeing Hamilton was simply waiting for him, back against the wall and glare fixated on his phone, as he talked to someone. They fell into a rare comfortable silence. If only Thomas’ mind could imitate the exterior world sometimes. As he cleaned, his brain worked a thousand miles per hour, thoughts crashing against each other, messy and blurry. His mother’s reprimands whipping him mercilessly and wearing him out. Maybe because of that, he spoke without thinking very well if those were the two wisest words to say right then.

“I’m sorry”

It took Hamilton by surprise. Both the fact that he broke the silence first and for saying that. Surely the latter shocked him a lot more. The Caribbean threw him a rapid glare before returning his attention to his phone easily.

“After all you’ve done to me, you go and apologise for the only thing you have no control over” he commented, humorously.

Okay, that wasn’t the response he was expecting. Again.

“Not everyone stays, especially after seeing I don’t talk to them” justified Thomas.

“Well, most of the people are either disrespectful or ignorant, or a dangerous mix of the two” kept dismissing Hamilton.

“Why do you know how to act?” asked the secretary, taking the bucket with the mop to one corner once he was finished.

Hamilton shrugged. Thomas curved his lips as he took the cloth again to start cleaning the sinks and the mirrors for the second time. He couldn’t remember which ones he’d taken care of before running out. Just when he thought he wouldn’t receive an answer, Hamilton spoke.

“Since when have you been doing that?”

“What?”

“Not talking”

Thomas tensed at the query. “It’s rude to answer a question with another question”
“If you cared so much about that, you’d have admonished me sooner”

That fucking know-it-all… “I can’t recall” he replied, in the end.

“Did you do it when you were little?”

“Why does it matter?”

“Because when you don’t take care of selective mutism at a young age, you’ll simply carry it your entire life”

“Selective mutism?” repeated Thomas, finally looking directly at him, arching one eyebrow.

Hamilton shrugged again. “I’m only guessing”

“I’m not a riddle”

“You don’t get to be anything else when you don’t answer any questions and refuse to talk to people”

“I think you talk enough for the two of us”

“Because you’re silent for the two of us” retorted Hamilton, looking up at him with a frown of irritation.

Thomas clicked his tongue and returned to his cleaning task, seeing the conversation would go nowhere. Hamilton heaved a deep sigh.

“I’ve been working with children since my mid 20’s” he informed, a bit defensive. “And though the final part of my career as a lawyer didn’t include children, Maria being the only and last case…” he added, in a hurry full of bitterness. “…I still remember them”

“Good for you” said Thomas, cleaning the first mirror of the line with preciseness. “What do I have to do with your unsuccess and nostalgia?”

Hamilton had to bite his tongue, literally, to not turn the conversation into a heated fight. After breathing in and out a couple of times, he replied. “I’m telling you this because you seem very interested on how I know how to talk you down or on why I know what to do when you can’t talk to me for another reason that’s not your broken pride of a wash-up”

Balanced enough.

“You’re one to talk about pride” complained Thomas, under his breath. “If I don’t talk to you, it’s because I don’t want to talk about any of this” he explained, in a louder tone, that let see his bother.

“You need to talk it out with someone” lectured Hamilton, phone totally forgotten, screen black.

“Not with you” retorted Thomas, rapidly.
“Why not?” Hamilton demanded to know, clearly offended.

“Because I don’t want to think about how miserable and more difficult your life was while I complain about mine, alright!?” blurted out Thomas, dropping the cloth vehemently inside the sink.

Both the action and the words were enough to shut the immigrant up. Thomas wanted to leverage the strange occurrence to collect his things and leave, but another part of his brain, the stronger one, obliged him to stay there until the task was finished. Grumpily, he took the cloth again and resumed cleaning the mirror. At least that way he didn’t have to look at the shocked form of Hamilton at the door.

“Thomas, you didn’t want to ask me for work for you because of that?” he asked, incredulously. Then, with a sharper tone, he added: “Are you really one of those people?”

“What people?” asked Thomas, not sure if he wanted to hear the response.

“Asshole people that are programmed to belittle somebody else’s problems by using people like the ones I grew up with as a kid, but then want everyone to pay attention to their overly-dramatic lives” explained Hamilton, a bit disgusted.

“People who grew up with you and yourself, Hamilton” corrected Thomas, passing to clean the second and penultimate mirror.

Hamilton’s frown just deepened at his words. “Do you really think I could’ve worked as a lawyer if I truly gave a damn about that? I am not a relief for other people’s problems and situations” he added, raising his voice considerably.

“No, you’re just the living proof that my mother was right” argued Thomas, going to the last mirror. “Maybe if I’d spent my time doing something instead of complaining because I couldn’t speak in front of the class, I wouldn’t be here, having this conversation with you, having to depend on you for not losing my own daughters”

“No, I am the living proof that people like your mother don’t give a fuck about people like me. If they did, I wouldn’t have had the childhood I had!” retorted Hamilton, now screaming and gesticulating as a form to show his impotence. “Those people only remember people like me when they don’t want to help somebody out! I never asked her to talk on my behalf, I never knew her!”

“She knew you” muttered Thomas, throwing the cloth into the last sink once he was finished and stormed out of the room, before he could find some flaw.

“Well, I didn’t know her” insisted Hamilton, in the meantime, miraculously letting him leave the restroom, but sadly following him. “So forgive me for doubting the information she might’ve had about me”

“Forgiven. Now, drop the issue”

“No, I won’t, because you’re putting words in my mouth I haven’t spoken”

“I did not, I’m only letting you know how the world works” argued Thomas, waiting for the elevator to arrive. Now he truly was regretting not having eaten anything, trotting downstairs would be way faster than this.
“Well, the world’s wrong” retorted Hamilton.

“I wasn’t expecting a more mature response from you” mocked Thomas, stepping in the lift, still with the annoying immigrant by his side. “I’ve never wanted the elevator to not stop abruptly more than now”

“I surely expected a smarter reasoning from you” admitted Hamilton, ignoring the last taunt. “Be honest with me, do you really think your life had any effect on mine?”

“No” responded Thomas, after a while.

“Then, stop using that as an excuse for bottling everything up” spat the financer, finishing the sentence at the same times the metal door opened. “That’s what’s truly offensive to me” he added, before storming out the elevator.

Thomas looked at him, standing there for a moment, before talking again. “I think I could use the ride”

Hamilton stopped in front of the glass doors. A small part of Thomas wished the Caribbean would be too stubborn and prideful and leave without another word. It disappeared as soon as it saw Hamilton opening the door and waiting there, indicating him to walk out first.

“What about your car?” asked Thomas, when Hamilton had taken them out the parking lot.

“I carpooled with Angelica this morning” he explained, as he paid most part of his attention to the road. “I was planning to stay the night for finishing a few things and she went back home with my car”

“Ah” Thomas took his time before adding: “What did you say I have?”

“A broken pride of a wash-up”

“No, about the not talking thing, you idiot” clarified Thomas, though the humoristic gleam in Hamilton’s eyes let him see he knew.

“Selective mutism” he answered, returning to the seriousness of the conversation.

“What’s that? That I select when I don’t want to talk?” he asked, half-jokingly.

“To put it in very, very simple words, yes” shrugged Hamilton. “It’s a thing that happens to children that, in most of the cases, have social phobia or anxiety”

Thomas curved his lips when the definition seemed to fit his younger self like a glove.
“That’s why I asked you when it started to happen” kept explaining Hamilton.

“When I started school, I think” answered Thomas, feeling slightly more relaxed than back at the office. “Though they were times when I didn’t want to talk to my mother either”

“But what do you feel?” asked Hamilton, throwing him small sideways glares. “Is it like you want to talk, you know perfectly well what you want to say, but can’t?”

“Yes”

“Then, that might be it. Again, I’m not a therapist”

“Way not to be one…”

Hamilton gave him a simple smile. “Thank my curiosity and Betsey’s vocation”

Thomas returned the gesture quite easily. “Back in my time, they just call it ‘extremely shy’”

“Yeah, well, we can say that selective mutism is a thing that happens to those that are in the most far away extreme of the shyness spectrum” conceded Hamilton. “I admit that now everything has a name”

“True…”

“They called the same to some friends I had when I was younger” continued the financer. “For some reason, I attract quiet people”

“Because the motormouths like you get bored waiting for their turn”

To his surprise, Hamilton gave him a small chuckle. “That might be… The case is I know the issue first-hand, not only for my clients’ children”

Thomas tensed again at the latter’s mention. “Were they part of the most complicated cases you took?”

“If you’re asking me if it’s a thing reserved only for mistreated children, no, it is not” replied Hamilton, a bit sharply. “Sorry for crashing your chance to feel more unnecessarily guilty”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “I didn’t mean that”

“Yes, you did”

Now, Thomas remembered why he hated this man.

“For example, I’ve got this girl friend when I was little, that had a nice family, lived quite well, and she suffered from this. She told me that when she started school she wouldn’t talk to any of the children or her teachers, and that she threw tantrums because she didn’t want to be there” recalled Hamilton, stopping at a red light. “Separation anxiety”

“See how everything has a name…” joked Thomas. “Did she get better?”

“Yeah, her parents helped her through it, and she could put it under control”
“Did you ever meet an adult with it?” asked Thomas, unsurely.

“You” answered the younger man, right away.

“I expected so”

“That doesn’t make it less serious”

“What’s the difference? You were older and more independent. You could already do whatever you wanted”

“Huh, it’s so clear you never knew my mother”

“No. Which reminds me, how in hell could she know me, then?”

“She knew Mrs Knox adopted you and rumours fly”

“Lu never adopted me. She and her husband fostered me” corrected Hamilton, defiantly.

“What’s the difference?”

“When you adopt a kid, you take it as your own. Your biological parents and relatives lose all power over you, as it passes to the adoptive parents. The contrary happens when you foster a child. The birth parents have to take the important decisions, and if they can’t for some reason, the state does it on their behalf. And you’re only their responsibility until you’re legal”

“You surely know that by heart” observed Thomas.

“Millions. Millions of times I had to hear that explanation to adults back at Nevis and when I came here” said Hamilton, exhausted only by remembering. “So, you knew about me already before I ranted it all to you?”

“I know the surface of what happened, and I can’t be entirely sure it’s true” admitted Thomas, shrugging. “But I never knew it was you until you say it yourself. I would’ve never associate Mrs Knox with you”

“There was a reason why I refused to be adopted” said Hamilton, under his breath. Before Thomas could ask for a clarification regarding the statement, he continued. “So, we were talking about the great professionals that gave that great advice to your mother”
“A couple of years later she sent me to a boarding school” explained Thomas, pretending it wasn’t a big deal.

“We don’t know how to take care of the issue, so we’ll send it away. Nice” summed up Hamilton.

“Yeah. It wasn’t like she ever liked me much”

“And your father?”

Thomas felt a lump going up his throat. “He never agreed with that decision”

“Then how did you end up going there?”

“Again, you did not know my mother” repeated Thomas, with a nervous laugh in the end. “Lucy is a bad copy of her, she doesn’t hold a candle up to her” he added, before Hamilton could ask something else.

“The favourite, I guess”

“Yes”

“Some parents have them”

“They shouldn’t”

“Does the whole feud come from that?” asked Hamilton, receiving only silence at first. “I remember you told me, that time when we went to Shadwell, that…”

“It’s been thirty-one years since my father got worse” finally admitted Thomas, his voice shaking noticeably. “He was sick but still take me out for a walk in the garden, to make me feel better because I didn’t want to go back to the boarding school”

“It didn’t work as expected, I presume” commented Hamilton, slowing down.

Thomas let out a sardonic laugh. “That’s an understatement… He wasn’t feeling well, but still take me out that afternoon to distract me. He wasn’t feeling well but did it for me” he repeated himself, as if he couldn’t find the proper way to explain it. “And I couldn’t even go to look for help when he fell” he finished, his voice breaking at the end.

“He fell?” asked Hamilton, pulling over when he saw his attention needed to be focused on something more important.

“He was hurt and I didn’t even…”

Thomas took in a couple of breaths, turned his head to the side, shaking in spot as he struggled. He missed seeing Hamilton throwing a silent sigh to the air, as he tried to comprehend the story and the reactions of the people Thomas was supposed to count on the most when he was little. Hamilton took his briefcase and opened it to take a packet of kleenex out.

“If you need to cry, cry” he told him, very secure, passing him the packet. “You’re not the first client I have who cries while telling me why they need my assistance” Thomas saw the tissues with the corner of his eye and took them, unwillingly, still not meeting his glare. “If you want I can go and
cry with you. We can throw a party of sadness here in the car” To his relief, Thomas laughed a bit at that. “We’ve got the security that nobody will bother us to join it”

The laughter of the Virginian began to be mixed by a bit of crying. Both couldn’t be told apart until the tears won and Thomas bent over himself, taking a kleenex out and taking advantage of it to cover his face.

“Can I touch you?” asked Hamilton, stopping his hand midway. It completed the route when he received a nod, and he began to rub the man’s back, to show him physical comfort. “There, it’s alright”

“I’m sorry” managed to say Thomas, when he had the crying a bit under control. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me”

“Nothing’s wrong, you’re just going through a rough patch. It’s alright, it’s got a way out, you’ll see” encouraged Hamilton.

“I’m not seeing anything right now” admitted Thomas.

“I’ll help you see it” promised the financer. “Is that story why you were having a bad day today?” he asked, receiving a non-verbal affirmative answer. “Okay”

“I couldn’t go to his funeral” revealed Thomas, surprising the immigrant. “My mother just called to inform of his passing. She never called to let me know he’d gotten worse or came to take me home to say goodbye. She didn’t even fucking ask for me to be on the phone for her to inform me, she told my tutor and she told me on her behalf” explained Thomas, growing more frustrated and bitter as he did so. Hamilton couldn’t blame him. “I only got to go back home because Jen fought teeth and nail for it”

“Your older sister?” asked Hamilton, wanting to have all well tied up before it was his turn to talk.

“Yes” Thomas took in a deep breath. “She and my mother never got along”

“She was your partner in crime” joked Hamilton, glad to see the older man laughing slightly.

“It’s a good definition, yes” He waited a bit before adding: “She was the black sheep you were sure my family must have”

It took Hamilton a while to understand what Thomas was referring to. “Actually, I think this flock had two of them”

The Virginian let out a humourless laugh while Hamilton frowned.

“I’m sorry for all that. A few things were totally uncalled-for” he apologised.

“I sowed that all by myself” admitted Thomas, massaging the left side of his forehead.

“I still understand if you don’t forgive me” said Hamilton, shrugging one shoulder.
“I already did” said Thomas, surprising the financer.

“Ah…” was all he could say at first. “For real?” he asked right after, unbelieving.

“You apologised, so, as long as you weren’t lying…”

“I was not” Hamilton was fast to say.

“All good, then”

“If you say so. I’m a harsher forgiver” confessed Hamilton. “See? You’ll always be the worst and hardest critic to yourself”

Thomas gave him a weak smile. “I guess so”

“Look, I once went to a therapist…”

“What were you doing there?” asked Thomas, taken aback by the new information.

“You really can’t guess it by yourself?” asked Hamilton, half-closing his eyes. “Anyway, they told me our mind is like a computer. Sometimes, it accumulates too much unnecessary data and you have to restart it” he explained. “Or, also, that sometimes we use our tools in the wrong way, and we need to focus them in the right direction or lower their level. Don’t you think there are plenty of people out there that’d love to have that easiness you have to associate dates with their correct events?”

“I’m not liking it very much now” said Thomas.

“Because you’re using it the wrong way” replied Hamilton, with the same vigour he held each time they’d fought. Seeing him using it for something else was very strange, and Thomas didn’t know how to feel about it. “You need to redefine its task. You’re in charge there”

“Doesn’t seem like it” said Thomas under his breath.

“And that little voice you hear sometimes,” continued Hamilton, frowning at the whispered words from the other man. “make it like you, the sooner you do that, the sooner things would get slowly better”

“That’s easier to say than to do” huffed Thomas, non-comically.

“I know” nodded the financer. “It cost me hell to do it at one point” He half-closed his eyes again when he saw Thomas’ arched eyebrow. “I also hurt people I care about when I didn’t feel well, I acted like the most absolute son of a bitch a few years ago, I blamed myself for things that were out of my control as well. I lost my time punishing me mentally because of it all too. So, if you’re only gonna believe me once in your life, believe me when I tell you that I understand you perfectly well when it comes to this”

“That’s why you’re so persistent and annoying?”

“No, that’s because I’m this nice”

“I don’t think you’re supposed to say that” pointed out Thomas.

“I can. It’s one of the few good things of not being an actual therapist” said Hamilton, with a mischievous smile.

Thomas laughed a bit. “How much will the therapy be?” he asked, jokingly.
“It’s always on the house when it comes to my clients or friends” explained Hamilton, in all seriousness. “It wouldn’t be fair, as I’ve got no studies in psychology whatsoever”

“You seem to know more about the field than any of my relatives, and some of them took classes of it back at high school and college” commented Thomas.

“Yeah, well, for the tiny bit you told me today, your family is infested by assholes. And this is me talking, I mean, I come from a long lineage of great sons of bitches” he assured, making the other man to laugh slightly again.

“Well, then you’re also the black sheep of the flock” said Thomas, wanting to return a bit of all his workmate had told him that night.

“I had my suspicions” replied Hamilton, spoiling the mood with ease. “I’m the only one who made something useful with his life, along with my mother”

“A true underdog” observed the Virginian.

“Yeah, someone should really write a movie about me”

“With that big ego, you should write it yourself”

“I already wrote a few children’s books once”

“You’re kidding…”

“I didn’t like any of the store for my children”

“You’re one of a kind”

“Yeah, well, being normal is overrated”

Thomas finally turned his head completely to the immigrant at the familiar words. That time he didn’t try to control his laughter.

“What?” asked Hamilton, a bit surprised at the sudden change of mood.

“Nothing, you reminded me of something” answered the older man, ambiguously.

“Well, glad to know it was something nice” commented the financer, turning around to resume the driving. It was then when Thomas realised he’d been soothing him by rubbing his back all that time. “You know I was serious when I told you I care, right?” asked Hamilton at last hour, withdrawing his hand from the keys. The silence he received as an answer spoke louder than any words. “Just because I don’t pity you means I don’t care about you. I stand for what I said, I think you kind of deserved it, but there are limits, and your family exceeded them very shamelessly”

Hamilton sighed and began driving them in the direction of their houses, taking the little ‘hm’ Thomas gave him as enough answer.
“Come to me when you need it” he offered Thomas again. “My door’s always opened. We’re cool” he assured.

“Does that mean you forgave me?” asked the secretary, arching one curious eyebrow.

Hamilton chuckled at that. “No, no. I’ll never forgive you that. I told you, you’d have to be a close friend or having done it with no ill intention, and none of the two are true” he explained, lightly, as if it wasn’t that big of a matter despite his lack of forgiveness.

It stung something inside of Thomas, but he let it go for that night. Being civil with Hamilton was already more than any of them could’ve expected their relationship to be defined as.

“Despite knowing this will be one my worst mistakes, I admit, in front of you, that you were right”

Gilbert raised his glare and focused his attention on something else than the table of the oddly deserted break room. Well, not as oddly as it was Saturday morning.

“Of course I was, I tend to be” replied the Frenchman right away, just to add later. “About what this time?”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “About Hamilton. Which friendship with you I understand now with that cocky attitude”

“You’re one to talk about cockiness” falsely admonished Gilbert. “What happened with Alexander?”

“I just saw you were right about the whole thing you keep telling me about him being a good friend” explained Thomas, taking a seat beside his colleague. “Even with the ones who are not his friends”

Gilbert gave him a look, wanting to know more about what Thomas was referring to, but the Virginian was too hermetic sometimes, even for the Frenchman’s almost infallible radar.

“He truly is reliable” Gilbert ended up saying. “You know you just give me another reason to tell you ‘I know best’ next time you doubt my instincts, right?”

“It’s a price I’m willing to take” assured Thomas, solemnly.

“Good” nodded the Frenchman, imitating his demeanour and sharing the playful gleam his friend had in his eyes. “Do you know why I call Alexander petit lion?” he asked, after a comfortable silence.
“Because he’s little but spends his whole life growling ill-temperedly?”

Gilbert laughed. “Oui, but the other reason is because he’s not afraid to show the claws to whomever fool enough to think they can hurt somebody he cares about and go scot-free” he explained, fondly.

Thomas could only expect he’d have to admit to Gilbert how right he was about Hamilton. He wouldn’t mind to do it, despite the price.

Chapter End Notes

"Being normal is overrated" is what Thomas told his mother on his first day of school at the beginning of the episode "Of frogs and scorpions"
Chapter Summary

Maria gives Libby a present for her birthday, so she gets to know her new workmates better.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Despite the last chapter happening in August, this chapter is happening on July 5th.
Chronology, what’s that, right?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Libby didn’t know how Maria knew today it was her birthday, but somehow the receptionist knew and decided to give her a few sheets stapled in a way that make you read the document as a book.

The girl waited until she was home, alone at night after everybody had gone to sleep, to read it. When she realised what it was, she couldn’t help but let a giggle escape her lips.

Compilation of the best quotes. 2015-2018 (so far), by Maria Lewis.
Especial thanks to Angelica’s never-ending work at recording.

Well, this is gonna be good, Libby thought, passing to the next page.

I don’t know if this is my best idea ever or my worst mistake. All I know is that I’ll comfort myself by thinking I only have eleven years to retire, which is nothing in comparison of whoever my successor might have — George Washington, the philanthropic, 2015.
Last night, I dreamt I was eaten by a hamburger. When I woke up I was dying for eating a hamburger. I made a stop in McDonald’s before coming to work. It’s been a good day so far — John Laurens, making his dreams come almost true, 2015.

The only reason you’re here is because you’re the best of the cheapest laziest we can afford by now — Angelica Schuyler, cheering the staff, 2015.

Stop laughing like that, Peggy, you sound like Woody Woodpecker — Angelica Schuyler, the supportive older sister, 2015.

What day is today? — John Adams in his first appearance, one month and a half later since the law firm was founded, 2015.

I’m not angry, I’m just upset because I’m seeing we’ve spent almost the entire hour talking about stupidities and absurd things we all know about and have discussed already, and that time is running by, running by, and nobody talks about my debt plan. This meeting was to talk about my debt plan and we’re not talking about my debt plan at all! It hasn’t even been mentioned once! And I’ve been here, waiting patiently, until it was my turn but the meeting is about to be over and we’ve not talked about my debt plan! We either talk about my debt plan, or I’ll leave! — Alexander ‘I wasn’t born to stand your bullshit’ Hamilton, 2015.

I’ll throw my water bottle to the next person who dares to interrupt their workmate while they’re talking! — The birth of George Washingdad, 2015.

There he was, talking bullshit with a condescendence proper of someone who just discovered the meaning of life. The fucking wet gremlin with Napoleon complex. Little through and through would-be dictator — Thomas Jefferson, the loving workmate we all want and long for, right after his first meeting with Alexander Hamilton, 2015.

I don’t wanna fight. But if I have to go there and call him out for his crap, I will — Alexander ‘He doesn’t wanna fight. No, really, he doesn’t’ Hamilton about Thomas Jefferson, 2015.

You’ll have to do all within your power and a bit more, if that ‘bit more’ is possible, and also do the impossible if the impossible is possible to get your plan through — Peggy Schuyler advising her brother-in-law, Alexander Hamilton, 2015.
That meeting room is the circus of horrors — Lafayette, the only normal person in the building (by now), 2015.

I put on a circus, and my dwarfs will grow up 6 feet tall, for sure — George Washington, the jinxed, 2015.

When I drink alcohol, everybody calls me ‘alcoholic’; but when I drink Fanta, nobody calls me ‘fantastic’ — Hercules Mulligan, the misunderstood, 2015.

Talk less, Alexander. Unless you want a premature death. In that case, talk all you want, it’s not like someone will hate the silence your absence would give — Aaron Burr. Good advisor; better friend, 2015.

Sometimes, I’m on my own, just thinking about my life and always come to the conclusion that if I let all my potential loose, I could be King of the world. Without a shadow of a doubt. So, you’re welcome Humanity for my laziness — John Laurens, the humanitarian, 2015.

I don’t wanna play Secret Santa because I’m fucking sick of everybody always giving me perfumes. Especially when they stink like cotton candy. That shit could not only be smelt but eaten as well — Peggy Schuyler, not a fan of perfume or cotton candy, it’s not very clear, 2015.

He comes here, says two shits, and he leaves thinking he’s done something of value. It’s annoyingly impressive — Alexander Hamilton about John Adams, 2015.

Where’s my pen? — Aaron Burr, right before a meeting about to start, 2015.

And now, where’s my paperwork? — Aaron Burr right after finding his pen, 2015.

Are you this stupid or are you going to classes to improve your imbecility? — Alexander Hamilton, always making friends, 2015.

Drop a couple of drops of alcohol in your drink if you wanna survive this hell — Angelica Schuyler, giving advices about how to get through a meeting, 2015.
I’ve seen dog’s shits talking more eloquently than you — Alexander Hamilton to Thomas Jefferson, 2015.


Everything is laughs and fun, but at end of the year, when you see no trace of the Christmas bonus because you’ve done nothing, tears will come — Alexander Nostradamus Hamilton, 2015.

The fucking break room always like a freaking mess… Of course, they’ve got the servant who cleans for free, why would they move a finger? — Alexander Hamilton, the social worker, 2015.

What these people need is going through the military service — George Washington, the General, 2015.

I can’t make it all add up.

You can’t make it all add up because you’re stupider than a rock! — James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, great workmates, 2015.

C’mon, we just started, next year things will get better — Lafayette, the dreamer, 2015.

I’d love to have a bed in my office. I’d just need to get rid of the desk, it’s not like I’m using it… — Peggy Schuyler, the hard worker, 2016.

If the door doesn’t open, it might be because it’s locked — James Madison, the logical, 2016.

If he worked more, he wouldn’t need to talk that made up crap about anyone else. A fishwife, that’s what he is. Doorman just out from a ghetto — Thomas “Friendship is Magic” Jefferson about John Adams, 2016.

You’re stupid. There’s nothing wrong with that, nobody’s perfect. But stupid you are, you’re very stupid — Alexander “Friendship is Magic II” Hamilton to Aaron Burr, 2016.
I’ve seen cemeteries with more life and passion than this law firm — Angelica Schuyler cheering the staff up, Part II, 2016.

If these walls could talk, Stephen King could write a never-ending book series of terror. ‘The Wall, a story of silent survival’ — Aaron Burr, the reader, 2016.

The law firm’s still working not because of one, but thanks to the many heads and hands of everybody that works in here. But, let’s be real, my part of work is clearly better than the rest’s — James Madison, the humble, 2016.

This law firm is like Game of Thrones but with 100 points less of IQ. This is ‘Game of Teletubbies’ — Hercules Mulligan, the tactful, 2016.

There’s nothing in this world that enrages me more than being called ‘liar’. Especially when I have not lied — John Laurens, the honest liar, 2016.

From now on, you’ll be like world poverty and hunger for me: I know you exist, but I’ll ignore you and keep going with my life — John Adams, another humanitarian, to Thomas Jefferson, 2016.

Sometimes, I’m bored in the meetings, drift my attention to the door and think: ‘If a crazy man with a pistol just came in and held us all hostage, what will happen?’

I imagine that sometimes too — Aaron Burr and Hercules Mulligan, the ones who would most likely survive the end of the world, 2016.

Stop looking at the clock and listen to me, this is important and I won’t repeat it — George Washington, in any meeting, in any year.

The only reason you’re where you’re is because you’re better at oral contracts than at written ones — Thomas ‘I don’t understand why he hates me that much’ Jefferson to Alexander Hamilton in a heated argument, 2016.

You used to be the child that ate the play dough back at kindergarten, right? — Thomas Jefferson to John Laurens, 2016.

I wonder how many times you’ve got to have been hit in your head as a baby to reach that level of
mental retardation — Thomas Jefferson about John Adams, 2016. (The man was clearly having a bad day that day)

What’s that man’s problem? Didn’t his parents love him when he was little or what? — Hercules Mulligan, the savage, 2016.

You’re the living proof of why prophylactics had to be invented at some point — Alexander Hamilton to John Adams, 2016.

Really, Angelica, the day you die, the owner of the pub across the street is gonna be the one who’s gonna cry the most — Peggy Schuyler calling out on her sister, 2016.

I’d want to make a trip to France this summer. I really miss it.

Bring me a souvenir of the leaning Tower of Pisa, then — Lafayette and John Laurens, the geographic, 2016.

The list of absences is bigger than the one of the achievements — George Washington, reconsidering his life, 2016.

I’m gonna pretend I didn’t hear you, so I don’t have to add it to your disciplinary record, which is starting to look like a terror novel — Angelica Schuyler, the forgiving, 2016.

Thank you for letting me know the date of the business meeting two days prior, Madison, fucking and annoying crafty — Alexander Hamilton, the thankful, 2016.

I can’t do the fucking photocopies because one of you, toddlers, broke the machine — Thomas Jefferson, the apprentice of teacher, 2016.

In the basement of your incompetence, there’s always one floor more — George Washington, the metaphorical, 2016.

When I’m talking normally, I’m talking to him [Madison], but when I simply say ‘Shut the fuck up’, I’m talking to you, alright? — Alexander Hamilton to Thomas Jefferson, 2016.
You’re more useless than the Police in Sesame Street — Hercules Mulligan to John Laurens, 2016.

Adams, time called. It told me it’s sick of watching you acting like a clown — Angelica Schuyler, the sassy sister, 2016.

I’ve got children back at home, I don’t need more in here! — Alexander Hamilton, the dedicated father, 2016.

Am I selfish for taking a few days to rest? — John Adams, the self-proclaimed selfless, 2016.

I didn’t doubt for a millimetre of a second — Aaron Burr, the mathematician, 2016.

That’s like looking for a needle in a honeycomb — Lafayette VS English, 2016.

Things happen for a reason, okay? This is not like the rain, which falls without we know why — Charles Lee, the meteorologist, 2016.

I wouldn’t mind immigrants stealing my job if they at least didn’t come from another country — John Adams, he just likes the immigrants from within, 2016.

You’re an opportunist, man. You love confrontations just because of that. For you the worst is the best for everybody, the worst for everybody is the best, the best for you, the ideologies of yourself — John Adams, the orator, to Alexander Hamilton, 2016.

This is not a small matter. On the contrary, this is a very big matter — Aaron ‘Let’s repeat it, but not quite’ Burr, 2016.

Do you think before talking or do you talk after thinking? — John Laurens, doing as he reprimands, 2016.

We should be nicer to each other. We see each other eight hours or more per day. We are all feelings with human beings! — Lafayette VS English, Part II, 2016.
What I’ve done, which you have not, is lying — Alexander Hamilton to Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 2016.

If you don’t behave in a meeting, it means that you’re misbehaving in a meeting — George Washington, the coherent, 2016.

What do you mean ‘You’re doing everything you can?’
I’m doing everything I can means exactly what ‘I’m doing everything I can’ means. Nothing more, nothing less — Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, 2016.

You’re more lost in life than an octopus in a garage — George Washington to his employees, 2016.

One thing is one thing, and another thing is another thing — Alexander Hamilton, the philosopher, 2016.

I’ll do it later — John Adams’ catchphrase.

If you’ve got a trauma, go get it fixed, but don’t take it out on me. Life’s not about stealing from the rich to give it to the poor, like Robinson Crusoe did — John Adams and his general culture, 2016.

Who was the idiot who told you that paperwork was for next week, when next week is Christmas already?
You did.
… And you couldn’t tell me or you don’t know in what day you live in either? — Charles Lee and John Laurens, 2016.

You’re a bunch of hypocrites crafty from Hell! Hypocrites crafty, hypocrites crafty, that’s all you are! And you’ll never get to be anything else! — Alexander Hamilton, starting the year giving love, 2017.

There’s something out there. Call it God, call it energy. But there’s something out there — John Laurens, the occultist, 2017.
Sometimes, I like my bed more than some people — Peggy Schuyler VS Humanity, 2017.

The house is not wide enough for that wanna-be-fortune-teller and me — Hercules ‘Friendship is Magic III’ Mulligan about John Laurens, 2017.

I don’t hate you. It’s just that the fucking idiocies that you sometimes say put me on my nerves — Alexander Hamilton, the no-hater, to Thomas Jefferson, 2017.

With the fauna that works in here, this looks like more like a farm than a law firm — Aaron Burr, the animalist, 2017.

That man thinks he can make me look bad. What he doesn’t know is that I’ve got it all saved in my phone. Texts, voice messages, screenshots, everything — Angelica ‘Fight me, bitch’ Schuyler about Charles Lee, 2017.

I’m not asocial; I’m social selective — James Madison, 2017.

Someone’s stealing the roll of toilet paper. The thicker I buy them, the faster they disappear — Angelica Holmes Schuyler, 2017.

Why don’t you tell the joke out loud, so we all can laugh? — George Washington, the frustrated teacher, 2017.

Alright, whose is this nameless paperwork? — Alexander Hamilton, any time, any year.

I do things at last hour because the other way around is not funny at all — James Madison, living on the edge, 2017.

If I bring a medical certificate, can I skip that? — John Adams, 2017 (Nobody’s seen a medical certificate for him, ever)

If you were any stupider, you wouldn’t have been born — Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 2017.
Do you want me to bring you some coffee and cookies, so you can be more comfortable? Sit properly! — Alexander Hamilton to anyone in any meeting, any year.

In the 35 years I’ve been working, I have never seen a staff lazier and slower than this one — George Washington, 2017.

What do you want to be paid for!? For warming up the chairs or what!? — Alexander ‘Let’s chairs freeze to death’ Hamilton, 2017.

If I wanted to stand brats, I’d stay at home all day with my daughter — Thomas Jefferson, devoted father, 2017.

I don’t want to get angry and you surely don’t wanna see me angry — Lafayette warning about his Hulk side, 2017.

If you see a yogurt with a paper attached to it that reads ‘Peggy’, it means that only Peggy can eat it — Peggy Schuyler and her yogurt-drama, 2017.

You move less than Elmo in a world made of Velcro — Alexander Hamilton about his workmates, 2017.

From now on, it’s gonna be me, me, me, me, me, and if I’ve got a little time left, it’s gonna be for me as well — James ‘I’m trying to love myself’ Madison, 2017.

I don’t look back. Never. If Snow White had turned around to get her glass slipper back, she wouldn’t have saved the Beast and become a Princess — Peggy Schuyler VS the Grimm Brothers, 2017.

I can’t turn the other cheek when someone wrongs me. I break their cheek, so they learn you don’t fuck with John Laurens — John Holyfield Laurens, 2017.

I love to work, but when I come here and see this scene, I don’t even want to get out of bed — Alexander ‘I’m done with life’ Hamilton, 2017.
Wait until the workmate comes back to go to the toilet — George Washington at the beginning of any meeting, any year.

The Warrens come here and retire after five minutes of knowing us — Lafayette after a meeting that took three chairs’ lives, 2017.

I sleep until I’m hungry, and I eat until I’m sleepy — Peggy Schuyler explaining the true meaning of life, 2017.

Desire it so much that the Universe has no more remedy than give it to you as it tells you ‘Here, take it and stop bugging me’ — Hercules ‘Fight for your dreams’ Mulligan, 2017.

I don’t lie, I hide certain truths — John Laurens, the honest liar II, 2017.

Put off until tomorrow what you can do today if today you found something better and funnier to do. You only live once — Aaron Burr educating the staff, 2017.

You’re faker than a 2 dollar bill
The 2 dollar bill exists

I’m an angel, but what can I do if the world just wants to know my demon side? — Alexander Hamilton, the helpless, 2017.

The only reason I don’t hit you is because I’m against animal cruelty — Hercules Mulligan to John Laurens, 2017.

Being lazy is exhausting — John Adams, he was born tired, 2017.

When you die, you lost an important part of your life — John Laurens, lover of life, 2017.

I’ve got an appointment today with the doctor. I’m so nervous, I don’t like when they use their
If I could, I’ll sleep the 30 hours of the day — Peggy Schuyler, rounding but not quite, 2017.

I don’t understand why they call you gremlin when you don’t hate Christmas — John Laurens to Alexander Hamilton, 2017.

One thing is to be solidary and another thing is to be solidary in exchange of nothing — John Adams, the smart solidary, 2017.

I make decisions when I make them — James Madison, the organised, 2017.

When I say ‘yes’, it’s ‘yes’; when I say ‘no’, it’s ‘no’; and when I say ‘I’ll think about it’, it means that I’m still not very sure and I’ll tell you in five — Alexander Hamilton, the one with the clear ideas, 2017.

I don’t wanna know anything more about him. The two days he comes to work and because my salary depends on him as well, but nothing else. When I say it’s over, it’s over and that’s final — Thomas ‘Enough is enough’ Jefferson, 2017.

Everybody minding their own business but me; I only care about my business — Peggy Schuyler, the original, 2017.

As soon as the clock says it’s half-past, I’ll lock the doors and the person who doesn’t make it on time will have this day cut off their salary — George Washington on the same day the batteries of the clock died, 2017.

The Government not giving us an economical help for having you all idiots as employees is unfair — Angelica Schuyler cheering the staff, Part III, 2017.


If you had fought in the War of Independence, we would have stayed British — George
Washington, reaching the limit, 2017.

I haven’t insulted anybody, I have defined you — Thomas Jefferson, the walking dictionary, 2017.

It was an accident — Aaron Burr after doing anything, any year.


He fell like a Playmobil — James Madison about Alexander Hamilton while he was in the ER for being shot, 2017.

I still remember when one could smoke in here — George Washington, the nostalgic, 2017.

If Pennywise came here, he’d run away, totally terrified — Aaron Burr, the reader, Part II, 2017.

That man has the same face of that kind of guy whose photo one day appears on the News, while you hear all of his neighbours saying ‘I don’t understand how he could’ve stabbed that person thirty times; he was a nice guy who always said good morning’ — Hercules Mulligan and his radar for bad people, 2017.

Sometimes, the best decision is to not make any decisions at all. And that’s also a decision, a good decision sometimes — Lafayette, profound thinker, 2017.

 Fucking Monstro, let’s see when he finally eats Pinocchio and goes to hibernate — Alexander Hamilton to John Adams, 2017.

It feels so good when someone talks nicely about someone because that someone deserves it, as well as of a someone whom everybody talks nicely about because that someone deserves it — Peggy ‘Now try and analyse what I just said’ Schuyler, 2017.

The only serious matters in this life are the ones which are serious — Charles Lee, he’s only serious when he’s serious, 2017.
In all the time you’ve been working in here, I’ve only heard you talk twice.

And I’ve still said more interesting and intelligent things than you have — John Adams VS Thomas Jefferson, 2017.

You like to procrastinate more than dumb people love colour chalks — Alexander Hamilton, 2017.

The only good thing about a Christmas party with the workmates is that you’ll be able to stand them drunk for once — Hercules ‘The optimistic’ Mulligan, 2017.

I’m gonna try to not get mad as much this year.

[5 minutes later]

Do you want to shut up, you fucking imbecile?! I’m talking! — Alexander ‘It’s the intention what counts’ Hamilton, 2018.

Spending my days writing memos that you wouldn’t even see at preschool. What kind of life is this, Lord? — Thomas Jefferson, desperate though the year just started, 2018.

He applauds himself, like seals do — Hercules Mulligan about John Laurens, 2018.

See, something very funny happened: I can’t read my own handwriting — James Madison VS his doctor’s calligraphy, 2018.

You’re a rascal-type Pokémon. There are water-type, ghost-type, fire-type pokémon and you are a rascal-type — Alexander Ketchum Hamilton to John Adams, 2018.

But he [Lee] wants to come to talk to you in here — John Laurens the parrot, 2018.

I bought a cookbook the other day but I burnt it while trying to do a recipe. The worst part is that the food was undercooked when I finished… — Lafayette VS food, 2018.

You’re more useless than an ashtray in a motorbike — Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 2018.
I know I should start looking for more personnel, but seeing the ones I already have, I’m afraid of what could come — George Washington battling his fears, 2018.

All day up and down, up and down, up and down… When the elevator breaks, I’m gonna laugh — Alexander ‘Smile to the bad weather’ Hamilton, 2018.


Sometimes I’d like to know what the clouds taste like — Peggy Schuyler, the wonderer, 2018.

Just write a single and clean line on the word you wrote wrong — Alexander Hamilton, the scholar of Columbia, 2018.

Maria, I told you to stop with the swinging already! You’re going to fall and smash your skull and then your death will be my fault! — Alexander Hamilton, strict but caring, 2018.

He’s like a whore: you get close to him and you end up being fucked up — Hercules Mulligan about Charles Lee, 2018.

[To Laurens, playing with a loose handle of one cupboard]. Stop playing with that! You’re gonna break it and then you’ll put on a stupid face to pretend it wasn’t you — Thomas Jefferson, 2018.

I once dated a guy who stole my heart, and thank goodness I got over him soon, because he almost stole my wallet as well — Alexander Hamilton and his experiences, Vol. 1, 2018.

Ugh, today Lee came. I can’t stand him, he’s such an annoyance.

I have to stand him more times than you do, so stop complaining — Angelica Schuyler and George Washington without realising Lee was just behind them, listening, 2018.

I’m so fashion that they make cologne out of my sweat — John ‘I love myself’ Laurens, 2018.

It’s hotter in here than in Charmander’s communion — Peggy Schuyler, 2018.
You were French or Italian?

French

That’s right beside Portugal, right? — John Adams to Lafayette [He clearly studied in the same Geography class that Laurens], 2018.

I once had a dream in which people clean the room they just were in before leaving — George Washington, the dreamer, 2018.

I’m gonna redact a memo which will read: being tidy is not detrimental for the health — Thomas Jefferson, the doctor, 2018.

The only reason cockroaches haven’t invaded us yet is because even them are disgusted by this place — Angelica Schuyler cheering the staff, Part IV, 2018.

I’m a leaf moved by the wind

Let’s see when the wind blows you to your own house — John Laurens and Hercules Mulligan in ‘Friendship is Magic IV’, 2018.

The only thing I’m faithful to is my bed — Peggy Schuyler, a girl with principles, 2018.

I haven’t lied in my entire life, and if I have it was because I needed it — Aaron Burr, he can’t even decide if he lies or not, 2018.

I only have [insert number] years to retire — George Washington before every meeting.

I miss the pub across the street so much — Angelica Sheen Schuyler, 2018.

Libby laughed as she reached the end of the book, and the smile lasted as she thought about how much her life had changed and how glad she was for being where she was today. She blinked a
bit at the last sentence that she found there, with Maria’s sign right below it.

Welcome to the office, Libby.
Expecting your quotes for Part Two!

There were a million things Libby still had to do, but she would enjoy the way to them now that she had a good company to walk with.

Chapter End Notes

Two things:
The past day 12th the EU voted for Article 11 and 13 to pass. As long as I know, they're not very friendly with content creators. Though this time it did pass, we still have until January of 2019 to stop it. Learn more about it with #saveyourinternet.

On a more positive note, I'm doing better, so thanks for the support and the patience. This was a silly idea I once had because of a joke I have with a few friends and decided to use it.

Also, I hope school/college is going well so far for everybody! Wish you a good school year :D

(I have the feeling that I've forgotten a few quotes. Damn this fish memory...
“Please, Alex, take a break”
“I’ve got so much on my plate”

Or: a lot of shit could’ve been avoided if Hamilton had only taken that break, right? Right...

“Please, Alex, take a break”
“I’ve got so much on my plate”

“I’m sure you’ll work on it more easily if you relax and rest!”

“I don’t think ‘relax and rest’ can be added if your father’s in the equation”

“Alex, he rented the cabin upstate just for us”

“Lovely”

“Besides, it’s not only him! I’ll be there, your children will be there, Angelica will be there, her husband, your nephew… And Peggy!”

“I’d love to go, but…”

“Run away with us this summer!”
“Betsey…”

“There’s a lake I know…”

“I know, you’ve talked about it endlessly since last month…”

“It’s gorgeous! It’s in a nearby park!”

“Aha…”

“We can go there when the night gets dark!”

“Well, the night’s not gonna get bright”

“Alexander”

“Okay, okay, it was just a joke”

“Please, Alex…”

“Betsey… … I’ll try to get away, alright?”

The whole month of July passed, and the issue was never discussed. Alexander spent the nights at the office, coming back pretty late or not at all. Eliza knew she should be used to this by now, but it still put her on her nerves. She was starting to see her husband more irritable and stressed. She was sick of living the same all summers. But she was sicker of Alexander’s habit of overseeing it or dismissing it as if it were nothing. As if living off of coffee and lack of sleep was healthy and normal.

Well, this year things would be different. Eliza swore it. And she was determined to fulfil her self-made promise.

She knew who she had to call.

“Alexandeeeeeer”

“Angelicaaaa”

“What’re you doing??”

“Why don’t you drop the formalities and go straight to the part where you beg me with your sister to go with you to that cabin by a lake?”

“It’s by a park, actually” corrected Eliza, coming into view and standing beside her sister, who now
had both arms crossed.

“Alexander, I don’t beg” she said, offended. “I order, and people do my will because I’m always right”

“The world’s not wide enough for two stubborn asses like us, Angel” joked Alexander, his eyes glued to nothing else but his paperwork.

“Actually, it turned out to be wide enough for our whole law firm” she shrugged.

“Alexander, please, take a break!” pleaded Eliza once again, frowning in concern at the dark half-moons that adorned her husband’s eyes.

“Yeah, let’s spend the summer with us upstate!” agreed Angelica.

“Hey, that rhythmed!” pointed out Eliza.

“True. Maybe we should write a song about it and play it on repeat” teased Angelica, throwing a funny glare to her brother-in-law.

“Gosh, no” whined Alexander, rubbing one eye.

“Then, come with us!”

“Angelica, I can’t” he said, finally raising up his stare. “We’ve spent almost five months without a proper meeting, without resolving anything. I want this done for when December comes. It’s gonna get worse if I don’t do this now!”

“Come on, man, we got over a building falling down, what else could happen?” dismissed Angelica.

“The building falling up”

“Those horrible jokes you’re making? The definitive proof that you need some sleep”

“No, I’m okay. I’m used to this”

“You teenager-self was used to this” Angelica took his pen away from Alex’s hand, and tapped his nose playfully with it. “You’re not as young, petit lion”

“Your French’s horrible” criticised Alexander, taking his pen back.

“Teach me. This Summer. In the cabin”

“Angelica, no”

“Alexander, yes”

“Come on, Alex” chimed in Eliza, her worry more audible than her sister’s. “We’re not even banning you for bringing work. We just want you to change of airs and take it more easily”

“I’m taking it fine. And I don’t need a change of airs. I don’t like changes in general…”

“That’s not healthy. Two out of three doctors recommend changes in life” made up Angelica, solemnly.

“Well, I go to see the other one, the spare…”
“Change of doctor, as well”

“No, I like this one”

“I don’t even know what we’re talking about anymore” admitted Eliza.

“About your stubborn husband’s unhealthy habits” explained Angelica.

“Look, I like the attention, but this is too much even for me” declared Alexander, pinching the bridge of his nose, tiredly. “Please, leave, I’ve got too much work to do!”

“Alex, you don’t need to…” tried to say Angelica, finally with a gentler tone.

“Please” interrupted Alexander, sharply.

Eliza sighed and grabbed her sister by the arm. “Come on… At least, come to dinner, Alex?” she asked, before closing the door.

“Mmh…” was the only response the man gave.

The two sisters exchanged a glare before leaving him alone.

“What’s that cabin you two were talking about?” asked Peggy, standing at the end of the hallway.

“Oh, Peggy, you scared us!” said Eliza, with a hand on her chest.

“What’s that cabin you two were talking about?” she asked again.

“The one Dad rented and wants us to spend the summer there with him” explained Angelica, with a raised eyebrow.

“Since when??”

“Since… …” Eliza and Angelica shared a glare. “Um… Yesterday”

“LIARS!” hollered Peggy. “I’ve been hearing Betsey trying to convince Alexander since July!”

“Then, why did you ask?!”

“NOBODY LOVES ME!” sobbed the youngest, running to her bedroom and locking herself up there.

“She’s more annoying than usual” commented Angelica.

“It’s the pregnancy. Don’t you remember yours?” said Eliza, walking with her to the living room.

“You once threw all of your husband’s clothes out of the window”

“Oh, yeah, he got confused with the ice cream I wanted… Hahahaha, good old times…’’
“Are you sure you’ll be fine on your own?”

Eliza stood at the front door, suitcase in hand and concern in her tongue. Alexander looked sleepily at the coffee machine, his hair dishevelled and clothes not as ironed as he wanted them to be, as he had changed them at last minute that morning. Eliza bit her bottom lip when she received no immediate response and thought about repeating the question when the voice of her husband stopped her.

“Yeah, positive”

“Pretty, pretty sure?” she pressured.

“Pretty, pretty sure” he echoed, drinking half of the coffee he’d just poured inside the mug.

“Because you still have time to change your mind” proposed Eliza, hopefully. “We’re not in any hurry, we can wait for you until you’re ready to…”

“Betsey”

“Yes?”

Alexander came to her, gave her a weak smile that stabbed her heart and then kissed her. “I’ll be fine” he assured once again, crashing her faith. “Go have fun with the family, I’ll try to call at night”

“Alright…” she gave up, with tiny voice. “Remember to sleep as well”

“I’ll do my best”

For any other couple, it might’ve sounded as a joke, but for Eliza… For Eliza it was a true promise that none of them knew if Alexander would fulfil.

Hercules should’ve known something was going to go wrong that day when it was Lafayette the one upset at Laurens’ behaviour.

“John, c’mon, I still have to take a shower!”

He heard his boyfriend telling their friend for the third time, the knocks on the door becoming more insistent. Hercules simply kept drinking his coffee, as a series of muffled complaints came from
the other side of the closed bathroom door. Lafayette threw a groan of frustration as he made his way to the kitchenette, and dropped himself on the stool in front of Hercules.

“Why does he have to be like this?” he grumbled, his accent becoming thicker, clear sign of his deep annoyance.

“Let him be” replied Hercules, throwing his partner’s words against him. He smiled a bit when he saw Lafayette’s enraged expression. “Read the newspaper, keep your mind busy”

Lafayette sighed and decided to give it a try to pretend time was running faster. Hercules, in the meantime, turned around and saw the growing pile of dirty dishes and glasses waiting to be cleaned. He scrunched up his nose as he looked at his mug. He really hated to see things like that, but he was never in the mood to put a remedy to it in the morning. He decided to simply place the mug on the counter.

“Hey, Laf, you can do the dishes if you want while you wait” he tried, in a little laugh.

“FILS DE PUTAIN!” exclaimed Lafayette, hitting the table with one punch.

Hercules turned around, afraid, eyes wide as he saw the enraged expression on his boyfriend’s face. “Alright, alright, I’ll clean it…” he said, with shaky voice.

“No, not you!” clarified Lafayette, showing him the new that had ignited his anger. “This! This is outrageous!”

Hercules read the article that had upset his boyfriend so much, arching one curious eyebrow. “This TV contest?” he asked, fearing to give the wrong response.

“Not the contest, the contestant. Noah Simmons”

“Hey, isn’t that guy the one who studied with us back at college?” he asked, casually.

“Exactly” nodded Lafayette, his accent becoming thicker.

“This is outrageous to you?” asked Hercules, blinking dumbfounded. “Have you ever heard about poverty, hunger, wars…?”

Lafayette narrowing his eyes let him see he said the wrong thing. “You don’t get it, right?”

“The fact that you almost gave me a heart attack for a guy we haven’t seen in more than ten years? I fear so” he shrugged, letting the newspaper aside.

“A guy who passed with no more effort than getting every teacher in his pocket!” countered Lafayette, crossing both arms upon his chest.

Hercules gave him a look. “Laf, we can’t have two Hamiltons in here”

“Hercules, I hate the guy because he never worked for anything he got. This is not about a worrisome obsession over a legacy because of childhood traumas”
“Thank goodness you love him…”

“I love Alex, of course, he’s like my little brother. But he has psychological problems, we can’t deny that” He grabbed the newspaper again and narrowed his eyes in concentration: “All luck runs out at some point. Maybe this is a sign of the Universe…”

“You’re spending too much time with John…”

“I’ve made up my mind: I’m gonna watch this tonight and laugh when this guy loses” declared the Frenchman, nodding in reaffirmation.

Hercules gave him another up and down glare. “I didn’t know about this dark side of yours, Laf…”

He seemed to falter a bit at the comment. “I know, it’s just that…”

“No, no” hurried to say his partner, totally serious. “It’s turning me on, you should be like this more often”

A wee smile made its way onto both men’s lips before they closed their distance in a kiss.

“Wonderful” Laurens’ voice interrupted their moment. They looked in his direction, seeing him with his hair completely wet, a hand on his hip while he took one towel from the pile that lied on the couch. “I’ve been asking for a towel I-don’t-know-for-how-long, but nothing, the guys making out in the kitchen. Alright” he complained.

“Our kitchen” emphasised Hercules, upset.

“Now, I’ve gotta start all over again” he explained, pointing at his hair. “I don’t mind, huh? I’m not the one who’s in a hurry for going to work!”

“You should, you work with us!” shouted Hercules, receiving a slam as a response. He looked at Lafayette, pleadingly. “When will you take your dark side on him?”

Lafayette rolled his eyes, still upset at their friend’s behaviour but deciding to let it go, and peeked his partner on the cheek.

Maria should’ve known something was going to go wrong that morning when Adams came in the law firm with a bright smile on his face.

“Good morning, Mr Adams” she said, automatically, as she threw him an up and down glare.
“Good morning, Maria” he greeted back. Between his joyful tone and the use of her real name, Maria’s guts kept warning her to be ready for whatever. “Hey, is the staff in the break room?”

“Huh, that’s an understatement” she joked, wanting to keep the mood lightened.

“Hahaha, true, true!” laughed Adams, as he turned to walk to said room. “Come with me, darling” he ordered, rather sweetly.

Maria felt shivers going down her spine at the foreign sound. She decided to follow the man, a bit hesitant, but curious as to what was happening. She tapped her pocket a couple of times. Her knife for self-defence was there. She was safe if this was the day Adams finally went completely nuts. In all honesty, she was expecting that to happen to Alexander, but knives don’t discriminate.

“Good morning, guys!” said Adams, as soon as he was at the doorframe.

Each conversation died down and all pairs of eyes were on him, then. Even Alexander forgot his beloved coffee to look over his shoulder at the strange tone of voice his colleague used. The action didn’t go unnoticed by the lawyer.

“Ah, Hamilton, good to see you here as well with everybody else!”

“What’re you planning, Monstro?” spat the financer, narrowing his eyes. Lafayette nudged him on the arm, reprehensively.

“Look, I was coming to work this morning…”

“Fourth day in a row. Prepare the trophy” joked Madison, under his breath and making Thomas – who was closer and the only one who heard him – to hold his laughter.

“…and I passed in front of the same store I see all mornings…”

“Abuse of the word ‘all’” warned Hercules, in a fake cough.

“…and I said to myself, ‘Hey, let’s get in and see what’s in there’…”

“Maybe that way it gets too late to come to work and I can let it for tomorrow” Aaron joined the in-jokes. Alexander gave him the thumbs up.

“…and there I saw they were selling this lottery, that’s for Friday, that is, tomorrow…”

“He knows in what day he lives in” gasped Laurens.

Adams had taken out lottery tickets from his pockets in the meantime. “And I decided to buy one for each of us. You know? Like a group lottery, or something like this. We all can win!”

“That’s very thoughtful, Mr Adams” complimented Libby, who’d been hearing the jokes with a frown of disapproval.
“And who are you?” asked the man, a bit perplexed.

“… Libby, I’ve been working in here for five months now”

“Ah… Well, I don’t know you, so I didn’t buy you one”

“…”

“That’s what you get for being nice to Adams” lectured Thomas.

“Well, what I was saying” kept talking the lawyer, ignoring the sulking girl. “I bought this for each one, so we can all play. I recall my parents doing this in my old neighbourhood, and thought it could be fun doing something together, apart from bickering and insulting each other”

“Well, I think it’s a great idea” said Lafayette, on time to silence whatever retort his friends were about to say. He walked to the man with a thankful smile. “This is a very nice detail, Adams. Thank you for it” he said, as he took one ticket.

“Sure!” joined Maria, taking one herself. “Hey, no one ever knows!”

“Let’s try it out” nodded Laurens. “If it’s the winner number, I can get money for the summer”

“Oh for a house” said Hercules.

“Stop embittering every moment I live!” complained the HR manager.

Adams stretched out one hand. “It’ll be two dollars per head” he explained.

“I knew it” said Thomas, shaking his head, unsurprised.

The members of the staff who’d taken a ticket huffed and laughed in the lawyer’s face, throwing the papers back at him.

“Yeah, tomorrow, man!” added Laurens, in between the shared laughter.

“Adams, can’t you have a normal idea?” asked Alexander, sipping his coffee slowly.

“What? You were all for it a few seconds ago!”

“Man, no one’s gonna pay you a dime for that hoax” said Laurens.

“Said the loser who reads the horoscope” he spat, venomously.

“At least, that gets it right sometimes” supported Madison, on the quiet.

“He even wants us to pay” kept commenting Hercules, in a laugh.

“And I’m sure he wasn’t going to give our money back if we lost” added Alexander.

“Of course I wasn’t… The people at the store won’t do that either”

“Ah, there was the trick” said Aaron.
“You hustler… And here I was, defending you” admonished Lafayette.

“You’re too nice, Gil, I told you” said Thomas.

“Well, you know what?!?” exploded Adams, red in the face. “I’ll keep them all myself! And if I win, I won’t share it with anyone!” he declared, turning on his heels and running to the elevator.

“Anyone!” he shouted again, in the distance. He tapped his foot on the floor as he waited for the elevator to arrive. When it did, he looked at them again. “Anyone!” he repeated, before jumping in.

“Don’t get in the lift like that! You could break it!” said Alexander.

They saw Adams’ hand, flipping Alexander off, getting stuck in between the two metal doors. Adams screamed in pain as he tried to open them and get the hand back in. He succeeded eventually, hearing the mocking laughter of his workmates.

“Hey, Alex” spoke up Libby, with a frown adorning her soft features. “Are you alright? You look like death”

Before the financer could calm her concern, Hercules threw a laugh. “Ha! If you get worried over Alexander when he’s just like that, God have mercy of your mental health”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Always so supportive, Hercules”

“That’s my job as best friend” said the man, raising his mug with pride.

“I’m his best friend” retorted Laurens, childishly.

“No, you’re the ex who cheated on him”

“Always coming back to that!”

“Don’t fight!” reprimanded Lafayette, rapidly.

“Libby, you can’t have such a big heart while working in here, it’s not worthwhile” advised the secretary.

“Thomas” called Alex.

“Why did I speak?” lamented Jefferson.

“Can I talk to you for a moment, in private?”

“I haven’t done anything now”

“I’m not saying that. Come” instructed Alexander, walking out of the room.

“Let me live, boy”

“Come here a goddamned moment, Jefferson!” ended up screaming the immigrant.

“Gremlin, when will you have your holidays?” asked the secretary, following his workmate unwillingly to his office.
Alex gave an un-humoristic laugh in response. “Like I’m gonna leave you alone, with all the work we’ve got behind schedule”

“99% of that delayed work is not even yours”

“I’m flattered by your concern…”

“It’s not concern. More like me wanting to keep you out of my sight for two good weeks” corrected Thomas, greeting Hercules back with a polite nod as the man got into the elevator.

“Whatever… I just wanted to know if you’re willing to go see my wife when she comes back. She already told me she doesn’t mind at all”

Thomas stiffened considerably at the reminder. “I’ll think about it”

Alexander frowned. “Thomas, you promised me you’d try one session”

“I know, I need to find a proper day” he excused himself.

“If you’re gonna lie to me, at least respect my intelligence enough to do it fine” spat Alexander. He sighed exhaustedly. “Listen, it’ll be just one session. If you see she and you understand each other well, you keep going; if you don’t, then I’ll help you get another one until we find someone who can help you the way you need it and feel more comfortable with. Alright?”

“Alright” nodded Thomas, not very content with the attention he was given by Hamilton.

It was drifted away, thankfully, when the elevator doors opened and Hercules got out in a hurry. The CIO stopped dead in his tracks when he saw them still there. He pretended to be at ease as he passed them by, throwing nervous glares in their direction.

“Are you feeling any better?” Alexander asked, after overcoming the surprise.

“It seems so” shrugged Thomas.

“If you feel bad at some point come to me”

“Will do” he promised, between gritted teeth.

“Thank you” said Alex, giving him a look Thomas decided to ignore.

They were distracted once again when Hercules went out the break room, this time with Madison by his side. Both men ran to the elevator and tried to avoid their questioning glares while the doors slid closed. Alexander sighed, tiredly.

“If you change your mind, you know where I am” he proposed.
Thomas nodded, desperate to go back to his office and forget this conversation.

“Do you know something about your sister?”

“No” Thankfully.

“Tell me if something, anything happens, please”

“Nothing did” assured the secretary.

“I don’t know if that’s a good sign or not, but let’s leverage the peace until it lasts” commented Hamilton, as optimistic as always.

The elevator dinged opened again. Hercules and Madison inside it, with distressed faces.

“Em… Thomas, can you come with us for a moment, please?” asked Madison, avoiding Alexander’s stare.

Thomas exchanged a glare among the three. “What’s wrong?”

“Just… Could you come?” pressured his friend, urgently.

“Alright” shrugged the secretary.

“See you, Thomas” said Alexander, as he went back up by the stairs.

“Goodbye” replied the older man, a bit taken aback by the politeness.

Alexander spent around ten minutes hearing the elevator going up and down. He tapped his pen against his desk, in annoyance. The damn thing was going to break, he knew since he saw they were going to have a lift this time. In fact, Alexander was surprised at how long it’d lasted, but that didn’t make the mental image of how much it’d cost to fix it to hurt any less…

He sighed in exasperation when he saw he was missing some part of the work Madison had to give him back at May. He got up and stepped out his office. Maybe if he’d paid a bit more of attention to his surroundings, he’d have felt the suspicious silence that reigned in the hallway. And in every floor of the building.

But Alexander was oblivious most of the days, especially when he was tired. And right now, he felt exhausted, despite his best efforts to ignore his body’s demands to rest. He walked, rubbing
one eye, to the secretary’s office, seeing it completely vacant. Frowning, he went to the break room. Totally empty.

Alright, even he in his current state could feel something was not going well.

He decided to search each floor. It wasn’t until he reached the last one when he finally heard voices. He saw part of the staff gathered at one door – Hercule’s office, to be more exact – whispering among each other with terrified faces. Even Adams was there, looking genuinely afraid. When they saw him there, they paled.

“Is Madison there?” he asked, ignoring their expressions. He didn’t have enough strengths to care, as cruel as it sounded.

The people at the doorframe nodded, exchanging nervous glares. Alexander waited for them to move, but with no avail.

“Would you let me come in, please?” he asked, sharply.

“Eeh…” they said, anxiously.

“We’ve gotta tell him” Alexander heard Thomas saying from inside the room.

“No, no, please” begged a very scared Hercules.

“He’s tired and more unpredictable than ever” Maria whispered.

“What’s going on in there?” asked Alexander, loud enough to be heard inside the room.

The hallway fell into complete silence. Then, a small quarrel came from the office. Eventually, Thomas appeared at the doorframe. The people that’d been there the whole time threw him a pleading glare he ignored.

“Hamilton, can you come in, please?”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to do” spat the financer, finally making his way to the door.

“Our deaths will be your fault, Lemongrab” said Maria, crossing her arms angrily.

“I’ll live with the guilt, I’m an expert” joked Thomas.

Alex threw him a glare and then looked for Madison, who was hunched over himself, a hand over
his mouth and a thoughtful expression.

“Madison” he called. Alexander cocked an eyebrow at the little jump Hercules made when he heard his voice and how his hands began to tremble afterwards as he typed. “Do you have the reports from May, dear? I cannot find them within mine” he explained, shaking his head to keep focused on the main matter.

The accountant swallowed slowly. He looked at the rest of the staff, who were watching him in frightened silence. Eventually, he looked at Thomas. His friend made a gesture of ‘go on’, but he still had his doubts.

“Eh… I…” he coughed a couple of times, feeling his anxiety growing.

“Jemmy, don’t” said Maria, completely afraid.

“No, no, he has to tell him” contradicted Thomas.

“What’s wrong?” asked Alexander, his tiredness turning his words sharper than usual.

“They got lost, Alexander” admitted Madison, starting to shake in spot.

“Lost? What do you mean ‘lost’?”

Alexander took one single step forward. The simple action made Aaron to start praying under his breath.

“Em… They… They’re not in the database anymore and… And I don’t have them physically, em…” he struggled to explain.

“They got erased?” concluded Alexander, opening his eyes in surprise.

“They… Yes…”

“Don’t you have copies of it? Didn’t you print it?” he asked, concerned.

“N-No…”

“Gosh, dear, I’m sorry… If you want, I can stay with you one day and we compare it with mine and…”

“No…” interrupted Madison, the air caught in his throat. “T-They… They’re not there either…”

“What? Mine?”

“No, em…”

“We’ve got it all in the database, I’m sure they had to be there, somewhere” dismissed Alexander,
feeling bad for how nervous the man seemed.

“No, Hamilton” Thomas stepped in when he saw the state his friend was in. “What James means is that there’s nothing there”

“There, where?”

“In the base”

“Well, maybe they’re just in another folder” proposed Alexander, still not understanding where the drama was. “I can look for it later, don’t worry over…”

“No, no, Alex…” chimed in Lafayette. He threw a glare at the people at his backs and swallowed, nervous. “There’s nothing in there. Not yours, not Madison’s…”

“Wait, we lost our work of this year?” asked Alexander, whipping around to face the people at the door. They all took a step back, in fear.

“Eh…” struggled to say the Frenchman. “Oui… B-But…”

“Well, damnit…” cursed the financer, a bit calmer than anyone was expecting. They exchanged confused glares at his unexpected reaction. “Well, it’s alright… We can make a schedule and re-do it while doing each month. It’s just a bit more than half a year, so it’ll be no difficult to balance it…”

“No, Hamilton” interrupted Thomas, more sternly than before when he saw what the immigrant had understood. “There’s nothing. Zero. Not a single thing” he explained, more concisely.

Alexander turned to him and stood there in silence for a moment, before muttering a disbelieving: “… I’m sorry, what?”

“All the things that were in the computer are gone” explained Hercules this time, fearing to make eye contact with his friend. “There’s nothing…”

“Nothing?” parroted Alexander, with that strange quietness that was putting all his colleagues to more at edge.

“Your work, mine, James’, your friends’… All gone” concluded Thomas.

“All our work of three years gone?”

“Almost four” added Laurens, in a low tone. Aaron and Lafayette shushed him.

“Ay, Dios mío [Oh, my God…]” muttered Libby, feeling horribly bad for her new workmates.

Alexander kept being there, as if his brain couldn’t process the explanations he’d been given. He fixated his glare on the computer, which Hercules kept working on, trying to fix the mess. He became a trembling mess when he saw his friend wouldn’t stop looking in his direction.

“I’m sorry” he finally said, almost hyperventilating. “I… The PC told me it had to do one thing, I thought it was to re-start, you know it’s old, and I simply pressed ‘yes’ without reading…”

“What an informatic” complained Laurens, rolling his eyes.
“Jackie…” reprehended Lafayette.

“What? For once I didn’t mess up…”

“I’m sorry” repeated Hercules, terrified and mortified, and growing more anxious before the silence of the financer. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I don’t know why it did that. It’s never done it before! I… I…”

“Alright” Finally, Alexander talked, and his voice made everyone stiffened, especially because he was still using a normal volume. “Alright… It’s alright, Herc… You said it yourself. The PC is old… Let’s… Let’s turn it off and on”

“We already did that” said Aaron.

“We’ll do it again!” retorted Alexander, sharply, making the lawyer to hide behind the cleaner. “Hercules, please” begged the financer.

“Alright, okay…”

The CIO did as he was told. Everyone waited expectantly until the monitor turned on again. Hercules typed and clicked a few times, his pale face not coming back to its natural colour. They all, except Alexander, shared a worried glare.

“They’re still not there” Hercules told him.

“No, no, no” Alexander shook his head with an unsettling smile, refusing to believe his friend’s words. “Nope. They have to be there”

“Alex…”

“They must be there” he corrected himself. “Please, let me”

Hercules got up from the chair immediately and leveraged the action to stand as far away from the financer as possible. Madison and Maria scratched the back of their heads, nervously. Aaron had clasped his hands back together, mustering another silent prayer.

“They have to be there” Alexander rambled on the meantime. “They have to be there. Where can they be but there? Here’s their place, they can’t go anywhere, they have no legs” He hit the keyboard repeatedly, starting to be frustrated.

“Don’t pound the keyboard” said Maria, with tiny voice. “We already tried that”

“And screaming at it as well” added Laurens.

Alexander had begun to gasp then, passing a hand through his face and hair (which started to be more dishevelled as the minutes passed) several times.
“Alright, Alright, Alex, calm down, mind of steel…” the financer advised himself, taking a few deep breaths. “Let’s try to unplug and plug it”

Libby was the first one to move (more likely, the only one who wasn’t petrified for the strange self-control Alexander was showing) and knelt down, doing as Alexander had proposed. When she was about to plug the computer again, Alexander put a hand on her shoulder.

“No, no, wait. Let’s give it a few seconds” he said.

“Yeah, right” nodded the girl.

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine…” counted the financer, evening his (and everyone else’s) breathing in the meantime. “Alright, now”

Libby gave him another nod and plug the PC. The people at the door dared to step inside, wanting to watch the monitor coming to life. They held their breaths when they saw the screen completely blank, unused, as if the computer had just been bought and needed to be filled by its owner.

“… Let’s try it again”

“Alex…” said Libby, starting to feel bad for the man.

“Do it again!” he urged.

Libby obeyed, though not believing it would ever work. This time, everyone joined the counting.

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine… … …”

“Now” ordered Alexander.

They repeated the same agonizing wait. The re-lived the same disappointment when they faced the same result. Alexander begged Libby to try it again. That time, they counted to twenty.

And the next time, to thirty.
And the next one, to forty.

And the next one, to fifty.

By the time Alexander wanted to try it one more time, presumably to sixty, Laurens spoke.

“Alexander, it’s not gonna work”

“No, no, we just have to…”

“You’re in denial”

“No, I’m not, I just know this time’s gonna be the…”

“The work is gone, Alexander” stated Laurens, harshly, and looking him in the eyes though his ex refused to do as much, glare glued to the monitor. “The work is gone. And there’s nothing you can do to fix it”

“Pikachu, have you never tried to study for psychology? You’d get rich…” spat Maria, with sarcasm.

“Hey, not everything’s lost!” tried to cheer Libby. “All computers have a security copy nowadays”

“True, true!” joined in Lafayette. “The… The… The Cloud thing” he struggled to say, wanting to see a silver lining in all this darkness. “Don’t we have a Cloud, Here?”

“A very dark one is coming our way right now…” said Thomas.

“We don’t have one…” said Hercules, with watery eyes.

“We’ll buy one!” proposed the Frenchman.

“But the paperwork is gone” said Madison, frowning in worry.

“My God, three years have gone down the drain” sobbed Hercules.

“Wait, but what about the physical paperwork?” asked Adams, for once sharing the dread of his workmates.

“We decided to get rid of all that before the summer started” reminded Aaron, supporting his weight by the wall.

“But didn’t you keep some copies or something?” kept questioning the lawyer, now looking enragedly at his former friend.

Thomas was fast to raise one hand. “Eh, eh, I tried to tell you it was a horrible idea to simply throw away all the physical work just because Mulligan passed it all already on the computer. And nobody listened to me”

“All my hard effort in vain” complained Laurens, throwing a deadly glare to his flatmate. “You just
outdid yourself today, Hercules”

His friend immediately returned the hostility. “Oh, yes, because it’s my fault. Not yours for using the poor machine for playing Ludo online”

“So, saucy, John!” muttered Lafayette, overwhelmed by the situation.

“Well, at least I was not the one who simply pressed ‘yes’ without reading what the whole shit was about first!”

“He’s right there…” said Libby, nodding in agreement.

“Thanks, you almost passed the test of my trust” informed Laurens. “One last thing, though, when’s your birthday?”

“Laurens, not now” complained Aaron, in a groan.

“For sure the poor thing had a virus with those on-line games webpages!” continued to reprimand Hercules.

“Doesn’t the computer have an antivirus?” asked Madison. “Are we that sad?”

“It does, but none of you ever let it do its thing!” said Hercules.

“Because the PC works too slowly!” said Laurens.

“Then, when the fuck do we use it?!”

“I don’t know, man, but using it while the antivirus is running is torture!”

“We need more than one PC, especially if we want the law firm to grow, anyways” commented Thomas.

“God have mercy of the poor innocent souls that are hired in a future…” said Aaron.

“My God, we’ve got nothing, it’s like we’ve never existed” commented Madison, sickly worried.

“If Dobby doesn’t dramatize life, he’s not Dobby” grumped Adams.

Thomas heaved an exhausted sigh. “How many times did I have to tell you all: print it. Just in case, print it?”

“You’re not helping with that, Lemongrab” admonished Maria.

“The situation’s helpless, anyways” said Aaron, distressful. Then, he threw a moan of realisation. “Oh, no, the cases of Mr Green and Maria! They were the best of my entire career and now there’s no evidence of that!”

The receptionist frowned at him. “That’s what I’m to you? An evidence of how good you can be at your job?”

“My career’s in flames, woman, I’m sorry if I can’t pamper you right now”

“Everybody’s careers…” added Madison.

“Gosh, shut up already” complained Adams, pacing in desperation.
“Why, God, why?” sobbed Aaron, face buried in his hands.

“No, not God. Hercules” accused Laurens once again.

“Oh, alright, I did it wrong by not reading the fucking warning and clicking anyways, but we’re all to blame in here” said the CIO, opening one of the drawers and taking one item out of it. “Who says the computer wasn’t slowly deteriorating because certain someone…” he began to expose, throwing an incriminating look in Laurens’ direction. “…lost his USB, took the one we’ve got in there, that was everybody’s (and without asking for permission, I must add), and then lost it as well? And so, we had to put up with this one that, each time you plug it, the PC says it’s not compatible?”

“Oh, yeah, Maria’s a tight-fisted, that’s why she bought it with her own money. And nobody paid me back!” said the receptionist, offended.

“Hey, it’s not my fault Maria bought that shit in the first Chinese store she saw, the fucking little tight-fisted”

“I’m not gonna pay for something this idiot lost!” exclaimed Adams.

“You don’t pay for anything, Robespierre” spat Lafayette, between gritted teeth.

“What did he call me?” asked Adams, enraged. He looked at Thomas. “What does that mean in French, what did he call me?”

“It means ‘take a History book and study’, that’s what it means” mocked the secretary, though so fed-up that there was no trace of humour in his voice.

“It’s not the USB’s problem, it was the computer” insisted Laurens.

“No, it was these two idiots’ fault!” contradicted Adams, pointing at Thomas and Maria. “We’ve got them here for them to do nothing…”

“It’s everybody’s fault” accused Madison, starting to get angry. “Let’s be responsible for once, we mistreat everything in here!”

“I’ve tried to print it a few times, but every damn time I tried, someone wanted to do something on the computer, or there was no ink, or toner, or anything!” complained Maria.

“Besides, we’re very busy writing memos that look like they came out from a day care for stupid kids” added Thomas.

“I proposed to buy new stuff in every meeting, but nooooo, nobody listens to me!” said Hercules.

“That’s another thing, we’ve been almost five months without a proper meeting” said Aaron, shaking his head. “All screaming and fucking prides, but not a single solution”

“Oh, like you were going to propose a lot, chatterbox” Thomas threw in his face without hesitation.

Oddly, Aaron turned around rapidly. “At least I don’t waste my saliva talking bullshit about my workmates!”

“Please, don’t fight!” said Lafayette, frustratedly. “If there’s a less appropriate time to hate each other, it’s this one, people!”

“Alexander?” Libby’s tiny voice saying that name made everyone to turn in the strangely silent man’s direction. They saw him sat in front of the monitor with a lost glare. The cleaner took a
cautious step forward. “Are you alright?” she asked, concerned.

“The creole broke as well…” commented Adams, his fear clear in the joke.

“Alex?” called Laurens, more urgently at the lack of response of his best friend.

They exchanged a glare of worry and dread when the immigrant refused to answer or move. Aaron was the first one who saw the slight tic on his right eyebrow, and step backwards, protecting himself with the wall in case of an explosion.

George Washington knew something was about to go wrong when the building sunk itself into the most absolute silence for more than five minutes. His suspicions were proved right when he heard a loud war-cry followed by a racket from the other side of the hallway. The CEO sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, prepared to get up and go fix whatever mess his employees were in this time.

True, maybe he was tired of their childish behaviour, but this was his job and he was a responsible man.

“Alexander, are you crazy?!” he heard Aaron screaming, in horror.

... ... ... ...

George dropped himself on the chair again.

It was also true that his employees were all adults and if they needed him, they’d come to him. He was both responsible and wise.

“Hamilton, I know you’re angry, but remember that killing people is illegal!” shouted Adams, with a terrified voice.

George locked the doors with his clicker.
Libby saw in shock how the first action Alexander did when he was out of his trance was to scream in frustration and anger, take the monitor, pulling it up from each wire that was plugged in in the back, and then throw it to the other side of the room, almost hitting Madison, Maria and Thomas if they hadn’t been fast enough. The screen broke into pieces that fell to the floor, among the exclamations of the staff and Maria’s screams of terror.

“My baby!” cried Hercules, trying to get to the broken monitor.

Lafayette crossed the room in a run, to hug his boyfriend and prevent him to get closer to the crime scene. “No, Herc, it was destined to happen. Let it be” he advised, as his partner cried in his arms, inconsolably.

“Alexander, are you crazy?!” screamed Aaron, horrified. He hid behind the wall once again when the immigrant threw him a murdering glare, as he gasped for air.

“Hamilton, I know you’re angry, but remember that killing people is illegal!” shouted Adams, terrified when he saw the thirst of blood in his workmate’s eyes.

Alexander shook in spot, clenching his fists in ire. “Are you incapable of doing one single thing right, you bunch of idiotic jackasses?!” he screamed, becoming redder in the face as he did so.

“Aaaaw!” interrupted Alexander, with hurtful mockery. “The little ones’ve spent three fucking years doing nothing but being more useless than a red light in the GTA, but noooow they are trying to come with a solution! I can’t be mad, then!”

“Alexander, we know it looks bad…” chimed in Aaron, wanting to maintain the peace.

“Like your fucking lack of moralities and beliefs in the real world”

“… That has nothing to do with the issue at hand”

“C’mon, take a deep breath, Alex” advised Libby, calmly.

“Yeah, your face’s red as a tomato” pointed out Adams.

“The only thing that’s red in here are your balls, for so much scratching*!” screamed Alexander.

“Alright, we’ve not been the most hardworking lately but…” tried to say Hercules.
“Lately? You’ve never been hardworking. The fucking law firm’s still alive and on the run thanks to me! THANKS TO NOBODY ELSE BUT ME!” exploded Alexander. “I HAVEN’T SLEPT IN THREE WEEKS, TRYING TO DO ALL YOUR SHIT OF FIVE MONTHS. FIVE FREAKING MONTHS. THAT’S THE TIME WE’VE SPENT WITHOUT A PROPER MEETING, DO YOU THINK THAT’S NORMAL?!”

“I’ve tried to talk to Washington about it, but…” began to say Thomas.

“Don’t get Washington into any of this! You’re to blame for all this shit! The poor man doesn’t wanna get in the fucking meeting room because he knows is useless!”

“Huh, like you don’t pick up fights when somebody tries to contradict you” huffed Adams, with an eye-roll.

“Well, at least I do my fucking job, mister! At least I have all my paperwork ready and in order! Do you think I was doing my own job in a hurry for the past few weeks?! No! I was doing AAAALL WHAT YOU SHOULD’VE HAD DONE! ALL OF IT! YOU BUNCH OF UNGRATEFUL LAZY ASSES!”

“Hamilton, you’re hyperventilating” pointed out Thomas, with a slight frown.

“Now you fucking care?” spat Alexander, facing him completely and getting closer to him. “This is not even a quarter of the half of the stress I had three years ago!”

“Resentful midget…” insulted Thomas, under his breath.

“When will you stop with the fake-caring? When your life’s solved and you don’t need a lawyer stupid enough to put up with all your bullshit?”

“Alexander, please, that has nothing to do with…” tried to say Madison.

“The same goes to you, Dobby. Are you gonna wait another three months before backstabbing me again?”

“Hamilton, I’m just trying to help!” complained the accountant.

“Do you wanna help me? Choose one of your fictional illnesses, make it real for a change and then die of it already!”

“That was totally uncalled-for!” jumped in Maria.

“What’s uncalled-for in here is your presence. Honey, if you wanna keep this job, you’re gonna need more than pure pity because you married an abusive asshole”

“Alexander!” exclaimed Aaron, horrified.

“Aaron, be careful, you’ve already said too many syllables in one fucking sentence!”

“For the love of God, calm down, you’re gonna say something you’ll regret later!” said Laurens, looking in shock at his friend, who was now grinning evilly.

“You know lots about regrets, you fucking cheater. Hey, John, why don’t you stop pretending you do a shit in here and go get drunk and laid with the first bitch you cross paths with!”

“They dropped something in my drink!” sobbed Laurens.
“In which of the twenty-one, you sad drunkard?!”

“Alexander’s out of control” whispered Libby, scared, as Laurens began to cry.

“Hamilton, your anger’s legitimate, but you don’t have to throw past mistakes that have nothing to do with this” spat Thomas, still angry for the previous outburst.

“What else do you want me to do, Jefferson? To throw false accusations? That’s more your thing”

“You…”

Alexander interrupted him, now as close to the taller man as possible. “And another thing, part-time ombudsman, my anger is more than legitimate. I’ve spent almost a month surviving only by coffee and not even blinking in fear I could fall asleep. All my sacrifice just so this shit happens now!”

“Wait!” exclaimed Maria, her tone strangely hopeful in the middle of all the distress and anger. “What about the applications forms and the documents the clients fill when they first come? We put them in the storeroom, they must be there!”

“True! If we read those, we can re-do what we lost!” agreed Lafayette, smiling brightly.

“Have any of you gone there lately?” asked Thomas, less optimistic. “It’s a box mess…”

“No, no, I remember where they are!” insisted Maria. She put two fingers against her temple, as if by that she’d see the exact place in her mind. “I remember I brought the box from home because we didn’t have a storeroom in our previous office, and I say ‘hey, I’ll never need this old piece of carton’”

“Us being as fancy as ever” complained Adams.

“Like you offer plenty of better solutions” spat Laurens.

“Maria, what kind of box was it?” asked Alexander, desperately.

“It was… Black? Or maybe navy blue?”

“Those two colours are not even the same!” said Hercules.

“Yes, they are. I barely tell them apart” said Madison, as a support for Maria.

“Not everybody in here is dyslexic, Dobby” huffed Adams.

Libby looked at the lawyer, confusedly, as Thomas shook his head.

“He outdoes himself each time he opens his mouth”

“Could shut up already?!” demanded Alexander, before hurrying the youngest in the room. “Maria, please, think!”

“I’m trying! It was… It was… From a second-hand shop? It had a very catchy name, but I can’t recall right now…” struggled the girl, snapping her fingers.
“Don’t be so concise, Betty Boop…” complained Adams.

“I haven’t seen it in three years, alright?!” said the receptionist.

“Very professional”

“Adams, do you want me to go fetch the absence sheet, and we see who’s the most professional in here?” threatened Thomas.

“Well, it’s an old box” concluded Alexander, throwing a hateful glare in the two ex-friend’s direction. Maria nodded, nervously. “Good. Everybody go look for that!” he ordered, sprinting out of the office.

They all ran after him, a whole group complaining and fighting because they were too many people wanting to get in the elevator. Thomas and Aaron were the only ones who kept their cool as they watched the commotion and heard the accelerated footsteps of Hamilton running to the first floor. Thomas decided to follow him in the staircase, the screams of their workmates in the distance.

“Are you serious right now, Hamilton?” he asked, as he saw the immigrant storming into the small storeroom.

“I’m more serious than a hear attack!” screamed the financer, his voice accompanied by a series of boxes being thrown to the floor and opened unceremoniously.

“You’re losing your mind for a few documents we haven’t needed in all this time” said Thomas, calmly. “Relax, nobody died”

Alexander stuck his head out the doorframe at that statement. “You’re wrong. What about Mrs Jenkins? She was one of our first clients ever and now we have no evidence of that. She’s gone. And that couple who wanted to divorce? Gone as well with the wind. And Mr Robinson, who wanted to hire somebody for his inherence? Disappeared too”

“Well, he was about to die the last time we saw him…” commented Aaron, darkly.

“That’s not the case! The case is that there were millions of documents and we lost them!” argued Hamilton, kicking the floor like a furious toddler.

“Of this law firm? Why? It’s like you want to collect those so you can open a museum of uselessness and unprofessionalism in a future that’d never come”

“It’s not about that! We need those things done and organised in case of an inspection”

“And inspection of what?”

“Well, Lee could…” Aaron tried to support his friend.

“Lee barely bothered to learn this new address, he doesn’t care. Nobody cares about this place” he stated, coldly.

“I do care!” screamed Alexander.

“He does care!” supported Laurens, running from upstairs and going directly where his ex was.
“Honestly, if an inspection came here this could be the last thing they’d be paying attention to…”

Thomas’ last statement was rudely interrupted by the elevator’s doors dinging opened and the group of workmates (which somehow had found a way to get in there completely) ran out of it, talking and arguing with each other.

Aaron ended up sighing and going to the group to help as well. The secretary simply leaned on the wall and saw the chaos unfolding before him, impassibly. Papers and boxes were thrown out of the little room when they were declared as useless. Maria ended up kneeling on the floor, checking them out a second time just in case. Thomas decided to take a look inside the storeroom when the shouting almost disappeared.

There, he saw the whole place with papers covering the floor. He licked his teeth slowly, swearing inside his brain that he was not going to tidy that site up once this insanity was over. Hamilton moved so rapid that Thomas had to literally bite his bottom lip to prevent himself from saying a few jokes concerning a famous immigrant mouse from old cartoons. He’d save it for another moment.

“Why is Burr knelt on the floor?” exclaimed James at some point, his face flushed frustratedly. “He’s taller. You should leave the low places to me!”

Hamilton groaned under his breath and dedicated the lawyer a glare of pure hatred. “Really, Aaron?! Look on the high shelves! Do I have to tell you even that?!” The islander sighed of exasperation and kicked the nearest box. “Gosh, what if we threw those away the day I made you all clean? That’d be so fucking typical in here…” began to complain Hamilton, passing a distressed hand through his now dishevelled hair.

His face contorted in one of pure anger as he threw his arms into the air, his voice volume increasing. “People around the globe is organised, work when they have to and don’t need their bosses to fucking go after them reminding them THEIR responsibilities! And this is my freaking fault…” he admitted, in a dark whisper, just to burst out in another screamed rant. “This is all because I’ve spoiled you! I FUCKING SPOILED YOU ALL AND NOW I’M PAYING THE DAMN CONSEQUENCES! NOW WE DON’T HAVE A FUCKING DOCUMENT!!”

Lafayette threw a worried glare to his friend and went to him. “Mon ami, calm down. It’s not your fault…” he began, calmly.

Alexander turned so fast the Frenchman winced and shrunk in spot, afraid. “True. This is not my fault. At all”

The CFO turned around to be able to look at everybody as he said:

“Organisation in this building is a lost battle, a lost war, a lost everything. We’ve spent 73 weeks
reading that window on the main computer about if we wanted to make a security copy of our documents and the response was always the same: I’ll do it later! I’ll do it later! This whole law firm is a big and stinky LET’S DO IT LATER! BECAUSE WE’VE GOT ALL TIME IN THE WORLD TO TAKE FUCKING LIFE SERIOUSLY!!”

Hercules had gone to his boyfriend to put an arm around his shoulder and bring him close to him, both sharing a scared look at how red Alexander’s face was turning. The immigrant had begun to hyperventilate all of a sudden, burying a hand in his messy raven hair that started to pull on it for pure powerlessness.

“God, what’s wrong with me, God!” he wondered, out loud, his voice shaking. “What’s going on with me, Lord?! I used to be the best at what I did, I used to be the most perfect and organised. I wrote 51 papers just to convince people my way of organising our money was better! And now I can’t even put five idiots under control and keep our documents saved! I’m doing it all wrong!” he insulted himself, as he began to sob.

“It’s alright, Lexi!” hurried to say Laurens, also sharing a glare of worry with his friends.

“We love you just the same!” supported Maria.

“No!” exploded Alexander. “Don’t come to me with that shit now, you bunch of abusive assholes! You’ve taken advantage of the fact that I’m not half of who I used to be! The whole of you wouldn’t’ve lasted a millisecond if I still were that way! I would’ve put you all in your rightful places! You’d be stiffer than a candle*! You shameless pieces of shit! Faker than a bill with the face of Popeye on it! You haven’t done anything else than being a group of lazy and worthless narcissistic! I’m sick of your selfishness and I’m not going to put up with it anymore! Are you all listening to me?! Can you do that at least?! Listen!? I WON’T TOLERATE THIS BEHAVIOUR ANYMORE, I WON’T ACCEPT THIS TO HAPPEN EVER AGAIN!

“I’ve spent all this time making effort after effort, after effort, giving and giving and giving without wanting something in exchange and how do they repay me? All day badmouthing me, calling me names, nicks! ‘Someone feed the chihuahua, so he stops barking’. Hahaha, you’re all so funny in here…” he fake-laughed, looking at the floor for one second before snapping again, startling a few workmates. “BECAUSE THAT’S ALL THEY DO IN HERE: EATING, SLEEPING, FAKING THE NEED TO GO TO THE TOILET AND INVENTING INSULTS!!!”

He breathed in and out a few times. Alexander buried his face against his hands muffling helpless sobs. The whole staff exchanged a glare, except from Thomas, who kept looking at the immigrant stoically. Eventually, the CFO ran his hands through his hair, revealing his tired face, shaking his head.

“I don’t think I deserve this. Any of this…” he declared, in an even tone that sent more chills than his previous screams. “Am I asking for too much, Lord? Am I being too demanding? Is it really a lot to ask for a bit of responsibility to grown-up people?”

And, then, he snapped once again, kicking the floor in fury as he shouted: “BECAUSE THE ONLY
THING I ASKED FOR YOU TO DO IS YOUR FUCKING JOB, PEOPLE! THAT’S ALL I WANT AND DEMAND! YOU DOING YOUR FUCKING JOB! BECAUSE HERE, EACH OF US HAVE THEIR FUCKING JOB! AND IT MUST BE DONE BY EACH OF US, NOT ONLY BY ONE PERSON!

“I’m not saying you should welcome me all mornings with a red carpet… Or maybe you must. Maybe you must start doing that. Maybe I deserve it. More than this shit, for sure. I never asked for eternal thankfulness, or for any of you to kneel as I pass… A bit of respect would be nice, I persist on that, but nothing more, that’s common politeness…

“Now, when they need something, they kiss my ass shamelessly. When they need a favour, oh, boy… And those same people call me a whore. What are you, then, assholes? Able to drop their pants* when they’re in need, but when it’s me I have to crawl and not even like that they’re satisfied. And they mock me and all, while I’m in distressed… You don’t know what true comradeship is. You know no loyalty or have any morals.

“And I’m so stupid that when my moment came I helped them for the sake of it, because I thought it was the right thing to do. And I’m so fucking stupid that I lifted them up when I saw them on the floor, when I should’ve let them there, begging and when they felt like they could trust, kick them in the mouth.

“A good kick in the mouth like the ones they gave me when I most needed their aid. And turn my back on them as I mock them. Rascals. You have no shame. Not an ounce of shame in your organisms. I’m an idiot, I’m where I am because of favourable treatment, I’m useless… But when problems arise, everyone come running to me to fix them. Something odd is going on in here. I’d never let an important issue in the hands of an incompetent.

“They only love me when something’s wrong. When there’s a problem everyone learns how to talk politely to me, they’re kind, they’re nice, they even praise me. Damn, if I weren’t married, I’m sure more than one would’ve fucked me right in the office. But the whore is me. Okay. Thieves think everyone’s like them. Alright. Fine. Perfect. Ideal.

“Abusers. You’re all a bunch of abusers. You’re abusing me, you’re leveraging the fact that years have calmed me down to abuse me endlessly. And I tolerated it. ‘You should be quiet more often, Alexander. You have no filter’ … Ha! If I talked all I know. Ha! That day will be a bigger deal than God being the Christ*. In the end, Burr was right, I’m worth more for what I keep to myself than for what I say…

“If I simply opened my mouth now, and started to say all the things I know about all of you, about all the things I kept in secret because I have a sense of respect and humanity, as poorly as it is, but it’s there… If I did any of that, more than one in here would have to start anew in another country with a new identity. I’m only saying that. Don’t push me. Don’t pull on my tongue. Don’t. For your own good, don’t.

“Everybody in here doing nothing but let time pass by and let others do their work. Well, others… That plural was so kindly used. Other, in singular. Me, for being more exact.

And they still get angry when something goes wrong concerning their holidays, they turn into demons… And my holidays? When will they come?

“From home to work; from work to home… Sometimes I don’t even go back, and spend a sleepless night in here to save all this circus. Because this is nothing more than a circus. With my apologies to the respectable world of the circus. This is just a bad parody of it, because it’s not fucking funny. But that’s my life, ladies and gentlemen. I’ve known no other”
Silence fell suddenly, as Hamilton looked at the ground, his hands clasped at his backs, his head shaking in denial and his mouth frowning in disgust. All eyes were on him, some of them a bit ashamed for the rant they took personally but refusing to accept it or say anything to the immigrant in his furious state. Alexander snapped once again, his tongue clicking as the only warning.

“I HAVE NO LIFE, I’VE NEGLECTED MY FAMILY, I’VE WORKED NON-STOP FOR THE WHOLE OF YOU TO NOT TAKE IT INTO ACCOUNT AND TREAT MY WORK CARELESSLY ON THE TOP OF IT ALL!!!! DAMN YOU TO…!!!”

His rant was interrupted when Alexander, blinded by anger, kicked the floor covered by papers and that made him lose balance and fell against his side. He hissed from pain, holding his left arm as he closed his eyes tightly and curled into himself. His sobs turned into slight crying.

“It’s not fair” he whined, as a little child who was denied from a promised lollipop. “It’s not faaair. I haven’t slept in three weeks… Only little unplanned naps and I reprimanded myself for them. All for this to happen, it’s not faaaair”

Thomas and Adams had to bite their bottom lips to prevent a laugh to escape. The taller man decided to leave the place, trotting. The rest looked at the crying form of Alexander, on the floor, not knowing how to act. Libby was the most surprised one, and a part of her also wanted to laugh at how surreal the situation had turned, but decided to control herself when she saw the serious expressions of her new workmates.

Maria crawled a bit to be nearer Alexander and her hand hesitated on the top of the immigrant, doubting if touching him was a wise option.

“Alex?” she called, softly.

“I’ve turned down my holidays just for you to treat me like this… For my left arm to hurt and my throat to ache” kept sobbing the CFO. He sniffed, and something changed in his sad eyes, a spark of ire crossed both violet-blue irises like a thunder. Alexander got himself up from a jump, scaring Maria, who shrunk in a wish to be unnoticed by the unexpecting man. “Now, you’re gonna learn a lesson” he swore, vindictively, before walking firmly to the staircase.

“Alexander?” called Laurens, terrified. “Alexander, where are you going?” he asked, raising a bit his tone, just to be ignored again.

The whole staff shared a glare of uneasiness. Laurens ran behind his ex, this time in total silence and with a frown of worry. Adams scrunched up his nose and threw a narrowed glare to the break room. He strode there, being followed by the rest. There, they found Thomas at the table, serving himself a cup of hot tea. His tranquil behaviour in juxtaposition of the nervousness of his
workmates. Maria threw a glare to James, who simply shrugged.

“Thomas” called Adams, before anyone else had the chance. “Aren’t you going to do anything?”

Only Aaron and Madison understood, then. Jefferson was the antithesis of Hamilton. Whenever the immigrant started one of his rants or wanted to pick up a fight, the secretary would be the only able to respond him and, in a few occasions, make him quiet thanks to a cutting remark that was too personal. Of course, Hamilton’s response to the offense would come the next day, that man didn’t let anything go, but everyone thanked the peace Thomas had given them for the rest of the day.

_Huh_, thought Aaron, almost jocosely, _and then he acts like he doesn’t get anything of what happens in here…_

Thomas was silent at first, maybe for the sake of putting Adams on his nerves. He grabbed his cup, took a seat in front of a design magazine and leafed through a couple of pages, before giving the cutting response.

“No”

It was a single word, two letters. But still fell on the top of them like a cold shower.

“I’m sorry, what?” inquired Adams, putting both arms in akimbo. Some arched an eyebrow at his out of character behaviour.

“No” drawled Thomas, almost mockingly.

“But you have to do something”

He waited until he’d drunk a little gulp of tea to ask: “Why?”

“Because this is serious”

“And if even Adams is worried, we all should be panicking” added Hercules.

Thomas moved his glare away from the magazine, almost lazily. “Look, you seem new around here. We’ve lived this a hundred times already. He makes a drama out of a thing that later it’s demonstrated wasn’t such a big deal” he stated. Then, mimicking Hamilton’s accent, he added: “‘Where are the keys? When are you gonna have that written down? It’s midmonth already. We’re going bankrupt’ … And in the end, nothing happened and everything’s done as properly as you can expect from any of you by the end of the month and the year, alright?” he elaborated, tiredly.

“Wondering where he’d parked the car when he’d come to work by bus… I’m sick of this, okay?
I’m not going to do anything about it”

“But…” tried Lafayette.

“No, I don’t want to know anything about this”

“But this concerns you as well” said Hercules, crossing both arms upon his chest.

“No, I’m sick of it all. I can’t do this anymore. I’ll simply drink my tea and go back home when the hour arrives” he declared, drinking the hot beverage as if to proof his point.

“But you’ve gotta do something” pressured Maria, taking a step forward.

“Right” agreed Adams. “You’re the other obsessive in here who lists things just for fun, we only have you right now”

“If you don’t do it, we’re lost” added Mulligan.

“It’s a risk I’m willing to let you take” retorted Thomas, with his eyes still glued to the magazine.

They frowned in his direction, looked at each other and then back at the secretary, before starting to talk all at the same time, demanding him to do something. In the middle of the noise, Laurens had come back downstairs and run to them.

“Guys” he called, being easily ignored. “Guys!!!!” he screamed, finally catching the staff’s attention.

“What?!?” they spat, grumpily.

“Alex’s leaving”

“What do you mean ‘leaving’?” said Hercules, worried.

“He’s taking his holidays” explained the HR manager.

“Hope he enjoys them, then” stated Jefferson, dryly.

Alexander appeared then, walking straight to the front doors, briefcase in hand. They all panicked at the sight and ran to him.

“Alex, wait!” called Maria, desperate.

“What about the documents?!” asked Hercules.

“Do we do them again?” questioned Burr.

“How, then?” asked Adams.
Hamilton ignored them royally and stepped out the building, not looking back. Laurens had sprinted towards him, wanting to grab him to at least hear anything else he had to say, like when he’d be back. The only thing he got was the front door slamming shut in his noses and falling on his backside. Lafayette knelt by his side, making sure he was fine. The rest watched, powerlessly, how Hamilton’s car drove away quickly, the tyres screeching on the road.

A series of footsteps were heard from behind, but nobody dared to look. Washington appeared on the steps then, looking out the building with the same impotence as his employees.

“Did he leave for real?”

Everybody nodded, silently. Washington let a pause spread among them, before declaring:

“Well, we’re through”

That provoked another collective nod.

Alexander found the cabin easily. Despite popular opinion, he listened to his wife. Especially because when she was excited about something she couldn’t stop commenting and talking about it in full detail.

He recognised Angelica’s car, beside Mr Schuyler’s. With an evil grin, he parked his car perpendicularly behind his father-in-law’s and then stepped out, suitcase in hand. He inhaled the pure air he was surrounded by and then walked to the entrance of the cabin.

It was bigger than he expected it to be; but after he shook his head, he realised it was even moderate taking into account what his wife’s family could afford with the fortune they’d made throughout years of work and inheritance. He still remembered his shock when Catherine had given him her half of the half. He didn’t want to calculate what could be the total amount.

Alexander didn’t even have to knock on the door. This was swung opened, leaving his ready fist hanging in the air. His wife at the other side, looking down at their children, dressed casually but still properly. About to go have lunch, Alexander guessed, a soft smile making his way onto his lips.
“Dad!” the two siblings exclaimed, excited and cutting their mother off abruptly.

Angie began to jump happily, wanting to be held by her father while Philip simply grabbed the fabric of his pants to make sure he was really there. Alexander laughed fondly, taking the girl in his arms and ruffling the boy’s hair with affection. He looked at his wife, who was glaring at him, her lips parted in surprise and pure shock, standing frozen at the doorframe.

Alexander gave her a kiss, unable to restrain himself any longer but also concerned at her lack of reaction.

“Surprise” he tried, laughing nervously.
His voice seemed to take her back to reality. Eliza blinked slowly. “Alexander?”

“Hi, my dear” he nodded, leaning to give her another kiss.

“What’re you doing in here?” she asked, making him stop.
Alexander raised one eyebrow. “I came to spend the summer with my family because I’m on vacation” he explained.

That only blocked Eliza a lot more. “Vacation…?”

“Yes… You know? What your sister and you have been trying for me to do since you knew me” he joked a bit, feeling uncomfortable before her unreadable stare.

And making use of her sixth sense, the oldest Schuyler sister appeared right behind Eliza, checking inside her purse to make sure she had it all in order.

“Alright, Betsey, Phil and John are…” Her words died as soon as she lifted her glare and saw him standing there. “Alexander?” she asked, narrowing her glare, as if she couldn’t recognise him.

“Aunt Angel, look!” said the little girl, hugging her father tighter. “Daddy came to spend the summer with us!”

“What…?”

“Oh, my God…” Eliza had begun to cry.

“Mum, are you alright?” asked Philip, now passing to grab his mother’s dress, in worry.

“Honey, it’s alright, no need to…” tried to console Alexander. Did he really neglect his family that much that the simple fact that he’d decided to finally take a break and relax had moved his wife to the point of tears?
“God, Alexander…” sobbed Eliza, uncontrollably. She took the hand he offered her. “Don’t tell me today was the doctor’s appointment”

“I… What?”

“Alex, are you dying?” asked Angelica, more bluntly than her sister.

“What?!” exclaimed the man.

“Dad, you’re dying!!” asked Angie, terrified.

“Dad’s dying?” inquired Philip, looking sadly at his father.

“Angelica, why in front of the children?!” reprehended Eliza, weakly.

“They’re gonna find out sooner or later” she defended herself.

“I’m not dying!” complained Alexander, feeling his bad mood arising.

“Alexander, don’t deny it, we want to help” offered Angelica, rubbing his arm gently.

“Don’t be strong for us, Dad” supported Angie, hugging him closer.

“For Christ’s sake! I didn’t go to the doctor today! I don’t even know when I have to go there!”

“Maybe because of that you have with his health” commented Philip.

Angelica whacked him on the head. “Kid, respect your father. When he’s gone, you’ll regret it.” Her phone buzzed and she went to pick it up.

“I’m going nowhere! I’m okay! I just wanted to take a break!”

“It’s worse than what we thought” gasped Eliza, placing a hand on his forehead. “Quick, who’s the President?”

“Do you want me to be sick for real?” asked Alexander, disgusted. He slapped her hand away. “I’m okay!”

“He is” supported Angelica, showing her mobile to her sister. “He simply exploded and decided to take revenge”

“See?” said Alexander, starting to get offended by their reaction.

Eliza looked at him. “Why didn’t you tell us?”

“In his defence, he said he was fine like five times” shrugged Philip.

“Thank you, son. You’re the only one in this family who’s normal”

“Buf, what an annoying burden, then…”

Angelica whacked Alexander’s now.
“Ouch! What was that for!!” he complained.

“After three years you had to lose control epically when I’m not there to live it first-hand?” she threw in his face. “You disappointed me, Alexander. So, so much”

“But for the love of…” said the immigrant, starting to get frustrated. “I came here as you wanted and you still complain?!”

“You should’ve come here with us, not wait until making a great fuss…” Eliza supported her sister.

“This is amazing…”

Church came into view then, with his son and baby John in his arms. He froze when he saw his brother-in-law at the door.

“Alexander? What’re you doing in here? Are you dying?” he asked, also with no mince words.

“You too?” spat the financer, under his breath.

Philip Sr made his way to the entrance as well, happier than Alexander had ever seen him. “Alright, family, let’s…” His enthusiasm dropped when he saw him there. “What’re you doing here, gremlin?” He smiled widely once again when he asked: “Are you dying??”

“Dad, please!” reprimanded Eliza.

“Honey, leave the man if he wants to have a detail with his father-in-law”

“I’m healthier than a fucking apple!!!” shouted the financer.

“Don’t swear!” Eliza told him off as well.

Philip Sr’s expression contorted in repulsion. “He can’t even be nice to his father-in-law though he invited him over… For free” He emphasised, cruelly, making Hamilton’s whole face to go red. He tapped his daughter on the arm. “You should’ve married Elijah, the architect”

“I’ve just arrived and he’s already talking about Elijah, the architect!!!” exploded Alexander. He passed his daughter to Eliza. “I don’t know why I even came!” he declared, bitterly, taking his suitcase vehemently and making his way into the house.

“Me neither” said Philip Sr.

“Dad…” warned Eliza.

“Man, you should be thankful, we were just worried for you!” said Angelica.

“Come on, Alex, don’t get angry” tried Church, feeling bad for the man.

“Yeah, Dad, come have lunch with us” proposed his son.

Philip Sr frowned at them all. “This is a complot to kill me slowly…”

“Dad!” repeated Eliza, more firmly than before.
“No!” screamed Alexander, almost at the same time. “I’m going to spend the summer with Peggy, she’s the only one who loves me in here!”

“Buah, there he goes with his drama…” said Eliza, rolling her eyes. “Look, we’re leaving because we’ve got plans for this afternoon. When you act maturely, join us” she decided, taking her son’s hand and indicating the rest to follow her.

“No, it’s gonna be my fault now and all” muttered Alexander, crossing his arms grumpily and ironically childish.

Philip Sr made his way to him, making sure none of his daughters were listening. “Now you’re gonna know what’s suffering for real” he swore, darkly.

“You come late to that, old man” spat the immigrant, also in a whisper to prevent Eliza to hear them.

“Dad, come on!” pressured the middle Schuyler.

“Coming, sweetie!” said his father, with a gentle tone but his stern face not disappearing until he turned his back on his son-in-law.

“Fucking perfect” cursed Alexander, once the front door was closed. “Damn vacation, I should’ve spent them back at home, alone and happy”

A groan was heard from the couch, and Peggy emerged from under the covers. “Ugh, stop making so much noise!” she complained, rubbing one eye.

“Are you gonna spend the days sleeping in here as well, Peggy?” asked Alexander, raising one eyebrow and trying to calm his nerves.

The youngest sister looked at him, eyes narrowed. She pinched her arm and threw a complaint to the air, rubbing the aching spot. Her glare not leaving the man across her. Eventually, she talked, a bit unsure:

“Alex? Are you really here?”

“Yes, dear”

“Why? Are you dying?”

“… … … … To hell” blurted out Alexander, his rage coming at full force once again. He picked up his suitcase and threw a last hateful glare to the girl. “To hell!!” he repeated, heading upstairs, hoofing on the steps. “Go to hell the whole of you!!!!” he cursed before slamming one random door shut.

Peggy raised her upper lip in disgust. “Gee, just for being moribund he thinks to have the right to be even more annoying than usual, tsk…” she complained, deciding to go back to sleep.
To scratch/touch one's balls: Rascarse/tocarse los huevos. A vulgar expression for 'not doing anything at all'. Our way to say, 'bum around'. You can use it for women as well. Stiff(er) than a candle: (Más) Derecho/tieso que una vela. To educate strictly or put someone in place; the simile coming from the posture of the army when you have to respect your superior.
To drop your pants: (Bajarse los pantalones). Our way to say "to bow down to sb, to swallow your pride".
*A bigger deal than God being the Christ [Not literal: Armar la de Dios es Cristo]. Our way to say let all hell loose.
Take a break (P2)

Chapter Summary

Dolley finally makes an appearence.
Marisa Hadfield comes back
Luck smiles to Adams... Sorta.
Lafayette reaches his breaking point.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black almost jet humour, slight smut scene. [Very slight, I don't know if you can even call it that], a very gross scene (South Park level of gross).
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Thanks for coming with me, Madison”

“It’s alright, Burr”

“I was going to come with Alexander, but after what happened yesterday… Who would’ve been brave enough to tell him anything”

“Yes. Thomas is not in any better mood, anyways. I needed to leave the house”

“Things are not getting better?”

“No, it’s not that. It’s about a confusion with the schedule of housework”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“That it doesn’t exist”

Burr scoffed at that, throwing a glare to the line of people waiting for their turn at the secretary’s office. He sighed, reclining on the sofa the room possessed and with a bit of bitterness thought about how Augustine still couldn’t barely stand him and yet he was the one who came here to try and make him register for one year of school.

“He’s calmer after that visit to his family” continued Madison, all of a sudden, casting a discreet glare in his direction. “Thank you for convincing me Hamilton would be good for the job”

“It was nothing”
“To be honest, I thought about him as well at first, but didn’t think it’d work out”

“If it makes you feel better, neither did I. I simply recommended him because I was sick of so much bickering and hoped the 5% of possibility of them getting their shit together came true”

“Only a 5 per cent?” asked the accountant, raising one eyebrow.

“One has to have faith” shrugged Aaron.

“I’m saying it because I was hoping that to happen in a 1 per cent”

They laughed at the same time a buzzing sound resonated through the small room. The door connecting the hallway that led to the classrooms opened, revealing a woman that held a series of folders in her arms, her raven hair tied in a bun that was starting to get loose, surely from all the movement she saw herself into as the school was about to start. She moved gracefully in between the people, clearly used to crowded spaces, and passed the files to the red-faced secretary, who looked at her with a bit of envy when she turned around to go back the way she came.

Before she had the chance, Aaron, who had recognised her after blinking a couple of times, not believing his eyes, got up and walked to her. Madison, who also noticed who the woman was, decided to keep his seat, a crimson shade spreading across his cheeks.

“Dolley?” called Aaron, unsurely.

The woman turned on her white heels almost immediately, raising an eyebrow. Her dark and bright eyes widened as she took in the person in front of her. “Aaron Burr, sir!” she exclaimed, happily, hugging him tightly.

Aaron rolled his eyes. “Still with that joke?”

“Why stop if it keeps being funny?” she defended.

“For you”

“That’s enough”

“Didn’t know you worked in here”

“I started a couple of years ago as a Math and History teacher” she explained.

Dolley’s glare darted to the man behind them, watching their interaction from the sofa sheepishly. She ended the hug rapidly and walked to him, a huger smile on her face.

“Well, James, long time no see!” she greeted, both hands on her hips.

“Hi, Dolley” replied the man, getting to his feet but keeping the distance.
“Huh, I’m sure you were the only child whose grandparents never smothered with how much you’ve grown” she commented, comically.

“Dolley” said Aaron, as soon as he saw the blush on his friend’s face.

The woman waved one hand. “I’m joking, only joking!” she giggled. “I like them short anyways, cuter”

Aaron bit his bottom lip to prevent a laugh to escape when he saw Madison’s face as red as a tomato.

“Sure your children feel you like one more” continued Dolley, her smile a bit forced now.

“I have no children” clarified James, right away.

“Oh? Your wife and you haven’t taken the step yet?” she asked, with a small uncomical laugh in the end.

“I’m not married” the man shook his head once again.

“He’s only accompanying me” explained Aaron.

“Oh” was all Dolley could say, her eyes scrutinizing the shorter man before giving their full attention to the lawyer. “So, you settle down, huh?” she commented, her confident behaviour coming back.

“We can call it that, yeah” laughed Aaron.

“Who would’ve thought, Aaron; domestic life was never quite your style”

“It depends on if you find the right partner”

Dolley sighed at that. “Tell me about it”

James frowned a bit at her reaction. “Things are not going well with Johnathan?”

The name made her scrunch up her nose. She showed them her hand. “I’ll let my ringless finger answer that on my behalf”

“I’m sorry, Dolley…” commented James, though his heart began to pound differently before the new information.

“Or congratulations” chimed in Aaron. “You never know in these situations”

“True” conceded Dolley. “For me, it’s the second option. Now I can be opened to love and meet better men”

“Hm, just like you, Madison” let drop Aaron, throwing a knowing stare in his direction.

“Oh, really?” drawled Dolley.

Madison swallowed and shrugged, casting a hateful glare in Aaron’s direction, who pointed
“It’s a coincidence we met again in that moment of our lives, then” said James, when he felt Dolley was expecting a response from him.

“I don’t believe in coincidences very much” she admitted. “But maybe you can make me change my mind” she added, winking.

“No, I respect your opinion” hurried to say James, taking one step back.

“I’m free tomorrow evening” she said, not giving room for an objection. “At seven sounds fine?”

“I…”

“I’ll give you my number too after the meeting with Aaron”

“What meeting?” asked the man.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you” Her smile grew even wider as she proclaimed: “You’re in front of the Director of Studies”

“Thought you said you were a teacher?” asked James, surprised.

“I am. But the previous one was fired and I didn’t hesitate”

“You’re impressive, Dolley” congratulated Aaron.

“I always get what I want and a little bit more” she winked, more playfully than before. “So, let me take you two to my office and fix the reason why you’re here”

“Shouldn’t we wait?” asked James.

Dolley took the liberty to loop each arm with theirs. “No when you’re friends with the Director of Studies”

“Oh, gee, she’s not gonna stop saying it…” fake-complained Aaron.

“Nope” admitted the woman, heading them to her office.

“Mon ami, what are you doing?” asked Lafayette, sticking his head out the doorframe of the storeroom.

“Cleaning this mess” explained Thomas, as he organised the papers they’d left on the floor yesterday, putting them back in their correspondent boxes. “You only know how to undo things, but not how to tidy them up”

“Sorry” said the Frenchman, frowning slightly. “Do you need help?”
“No, I’m alright, almost finished”

Lafayette arched one eyebrow at the calmness with which Thomas stopped to read each paper before putting it inside the box, and paid close attention to the little pile of documents he had beside him. An inaudible ‘hm’ escape his lips before he proceeded to return to the main reason why he’d gone there.

“Listen, do you mind coming to my house tonight to help me set the recorder? Hercules’s always promising me he’d learn to use it, but it’s been three years and still…”

“Yes, I’ll go, don’t worry” he nodded, taking two sheets apart and piling them as well.

“Alright” said Lafayette, narrowing his eyes in suspicion. “What are those?” he dared to ask.

“Nothing, they just go somewhere else” made up Thomas easily.

“Okay, then” Lafayette let it go. He was going to make him a favour and he’d end up finding out, anyways. “Merci, Thomas”

“It’s nothing, Gil” assured the secretary.

“Lemongrab” said Maria, walking to where the Frenchman was standing. “Are you done yet?”

“No, can’t you see?”

“How long will this take?” she whined.

“Why do you care” he asked, too dryly to be considered a proper question.

“Because I like my alone-time in the counter, I can’t focus on my writing with you across me”

“That’s not my problem. Write at your house”

“You don’t get to tell me where I should write, tsk. Why didn’t you go with Aaron to the high school instead of Jemmy?”

“Because I don’t like that man”

“Thomas” reprimanded Lafayette, with an eye-roll.

“Don’t get confused, Lemongrab: the world doesn’t like you”

“Maria!”

“Listen, Betty Boop, go to keep pretending to be Virginia Woolf until it’s five pm and stop bugging me” spat Thomas, finally turning to look at her.

“From your envy my fame is born” replied the receptionist, childishly.

In that moment, Burr and Madison came in the building, half-closing their eyes tiredly.
“Are you fighting already?” asked Madison.

“It’s your friend” accused Maria.

“Of course, she came in here, saying I was bothering her for existing, but I’m the bad guy. Alright” fake supported Thomas.

“I only said it bothered me to have people across me while I write!”

“You can always close the door” proposed Aaron.

Thomas frowned at him. “I’m not going to close the door because this girl doesn’t know how to co-exist”

“The sociable just talked” James rolled his eyes.

“More like the idiot who lets you live in his house for free just so you’re on everybody’s side but mine” muttered Thomas, bitterly.

James clicked his tongue and headed straight to their office. “I’ll leave, I want to have a peaceful day”

“I don’t understand where all this came from” admitted Aaron, flipping out at the fight he just witnessed.

“Me neither, and I’ve been here since it started” supported Lafayette.

“For fuck’s sake, everybody in here insulting me and I can’t even reply because everyone is very sensitive” complained Thomas, throwing three sheets to the side, more vehemently than before.

“There we go with the misunderstood martyr” commented James, in the distance.

“Weren’t you going to leave? Go, run” hurried Thomas, rubbing his temples.

“Eh, calm down. I’m going at my own pace”

“All the fucking day moving like he’s walking on egg shells”

“Said the man who spent two hours in here” spat Maria.

“HEY” Adams’ voice hollered from the break room, interrupting whatever response Thomas had. The group looked behind their backs, seeing the man there with his phone in one hand and a ticket in the other. “Shut up! I’m trying to listen to the radio!”

“Very professional” condemned Madison, walking in the secretary’s office and closing the door at his backs.

“Silence!” he demanded once again, pressing his ear to the receiver.

Thomas sighed as he got up. “Don’t touch anything” he instructed, pointing at the inside of the storeroom. “Well, come to think of it…” He took out a key and locked the door. “There”

Maria frowned in offense. “I love you too”

“I can’t wait to see it captured in your novel” he replied, sarcastically.
“I will!” she swore.

Thomas took in a deep breath before knocking on the wooden door. Washington’s low-pitched voice allowed him to come in.

“Sir?” he began, a bit unsurely.

The CEO was hunched over his desk, writing a file while he tried to read another one at the same time; his frown and beads of sweat running down his bald head just a little proof of how much stress the man was under. Without the help of Angelica (which, Thomas assumed, Washington had under control as he already knew the holiday schedule of the oldest Schuyler sister) and the unexpected vacation of Hamilton (that truly disrupted Washington’s plan of work for the end of the summer) his boss had found himself doing plenty of unplanned work. Plus taking care of the day care he had in the first floor.

Thomas never envied his position. Though maybe that was also partly because the two men only tolerated each other when it was required. The secretary waited at the door until Washington’s lifted his distressed glare and prayed to whoever that might be up there for the man to not pay his frustrations on him. Slight memories from when he used to work for King coming back at full force and making him regret to have come there today instead of at last hour. That was the way Hamilton had done it and Washington barely blinked an eye before accepting it.

But, of course, he wasn’t Washington’s golden boy.

“Did you need anything, Jefferson?” asked the CEO, taking the little pause the secretary gave him to remember how to breathe calmly.

“I just wanted to make sure my vacation time was in order, sir” he explained, not getting away from the door.

Washington blinked a few times. “Your vacation?” he repeated, proceeding to open a few drawers in search of something, right after.

“Yes, sir” nodded Thomas, tightening the grip he held on the doorknob at his back. “I always have them on September” he reminded.

“So, next week…” muttered Washington, once he found the sheet. He read it under his breath. “You’ll leave after next week?”
“Yes, sir”

Thomas pressed his lips when he saw the CEO frowning down at his sheet.

“Would you mind if it started the second week?” asked Washington, a bit hopeful. “You’ll have the same amount of free days” he promised, rapidly.

“I do mind, sir” replied Thomas, the mental image of his wife and older sister* making his words sharper than he’d intended.

Washington sighed, resigned. “Alright, I understand” he nodded, smiling comprehensively at him. He left the sheet back in place. “Everything will go as normally” he assured.

“Thank you, sir” nodded Thomas, feeling the silent annoyance of his boss. He turned around, prepared to leave and try to forget about it.

“OH, MY GOD, YEEEEEEEES!!!!” a cheerful voice celebrated from far away.

Washington was getting up from his chair by the time Thomas opened the door and walked out the room. Both men went downstairs, finding Adams laughing with superiority from the break room. He sprinted out of it, jumping from excitement. The rest of the staff looked at the strange occurrence with wide eyes. Thomas approached James, who was commenting the scene with Libby.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Adams won the lottery” replied James, as perplexed as the rest of the staff.

Adams kept screaming from happiness. “Yeeeee! I’m leaving for never returning, bitches!” he swore, fist raised solemnly. He turned to Washington, who was looking at him with a simple eyebrow raised. Without thinking, he gave the CEO the middle finger, making his colleagues to gasp and Washington to contort into a grim face. “Fuck you! Fuck all of you! Give my rewards to the creole and record his reaction!” he declared, turning around to give them all the same obscene gesture. “Didn’t want to pay for my winning ticket? Then, take this, you stupid idiots! Hahahaha! Stuck in this shitty place of hell, you losers! I’ll never work in my entire life again!!!”

“You never worked, for starters…” commented Thomas, bitterly.

Adams left the place laughing at them, the ticket held above his head as a way to rub his victory in their faces before storming out, half-running, half-dancing. The rest of the workers stayed there, totally speechless.

“Qué mal repartido está el mundo [This world is so misdelivered]” complained Libby, pouting.

Washington cleared his throat, his sullen face sending chills down the staff’s spines. “Go back to
work, please” he instructed, going back upstairs. They saw he had his hands balled in fists and his knuckles turned white.

“Thank goodness I went to talk to him before any of that happened” whispered Thomas, walking back to the storeroom. He stopped in his tracks when he found Maria rolling on the floor. “What are you doing now?”

The receptionist looked at him as she kept going. “Yesterday, I told Jackie I’d do the croquette if Adams won the lottery”

“The croquette?”

“I named it” replied Laurens, prideful.

Thomas looked at them for a moment before shaking his head and kept walking. “Such a bunch of idiots. Sometimes I feel envy; all the migraines I’d avoid by being like that”

Alexander was a morning person. Especially if he hadn’t slept the night before. But that day he decided to simply roll over and kept sleeping, his pride being bigger than his habits. He didn’t move when he heard two knocks on the door, pretending to be asleep. The person who called opened the door and made their way to his bed, lying next to him. Soon after smelling the perfume he was so familiar with emanating from them, he knew who was now caressing his hair affectionately.

“Alex” called Eliza, in a tender whisper. “Breakfast is about to be ready”

The information fell on deaf ears. Hamilton felt his wife holding him closer with one hand while with the other kept the caresses going.

“Come on” she insisted. “You must understand our reactions were normal. Don’t be upset”

“I’m not…” he finally gave in.

He could almost hear the smile in his wife’s voice. “Then why haven’t you gotten out of bed yet?”

“Because, as shocking as it sounded to you and your entire family, I’m on vacation”

“So are we, and we’re all waiting for breakfast”

“Even Peggy and Angie?”

“… … Almost everybody is waiting for breakfast”
“Hm…”
“C’mon, to make it up for you, I’ll let you have dessert first”
“No, I don’t like to eat those stuff with an empty stomach”

Eliza looked at him for a moment. “For being so clever, you sometimes are so oblivious it hurts” she sighed.

“Wha— Ah, that…” Alexander interrupted himself when he felt Eliza tracing his neck with soft kisses.

“Thanks for coming” whispered Eliza, against his ear. “It means a lot to the children and to me”

“It’s nothing. Thank my workmates” replied the financer, letting her do.

“I’ll buy them a basket for Christmas” said Eliza, with a slight laugh in the end. “Alex…”

“Yes?”

“I love you”

“I love you too, dear”

“How much?”

“A lot”

“Really?”

“Yes, yes”

“To the moon and back?”

“Yes, yes”

“Will you teach Maths to Phil, please?”

“Yes, ye… No, wait, what? OH, FOR CHRIS’T SAKE, ELIZA!” he complained, pushing her off of him. “Are you serious right now?!”

“Please, only a couple of classes, he’s got the test the first week of September” pleaded Eliza, clinging back to him.

“Why didn’t Angelica take him to tutoring classes?!”

“Why? We’ve got you”

“This is incredible, even my family takes advantage of me…”

“Man, it’s a favour, not taking advantage of anyone” She kissed him repeatedly on his lips. “Please? Pretty please?”

“Yeah, yeah, alright” he ceded, waving one hand in resignation. “But I won’t next time”

“Alright, alright” nodded Eliza, not believing his words. “Thanks, hun, I’ll tell Angel” she said, getting up from bed.
Alexander grabbed her wrist. “Where are you going?”

“Downstairs” she replied, simply.

“Weren’t we going to…?”

“Ugh, Alex, my head hurts” complained Eliza, putting one hand against her forehead to emphasize the lie.

“Your head hurts? Woman, not one minute ago you were covering me with kisses!”

“I was being affectionate! You’re obsessed, huh?”

“I’m obsessed?!” exclaimed Alexander. “Eliza, I have the soldier on the warpath already”

“I think he’s gonna go on a lonely mission this morning”

“Eliza”

“Alright, but a quickie, I’ve gotta make breakfast” she gave in, going back to her previous position.

“Can I be on the top this time?”

“No”

The couple began to give caresses, gentle kisses and nice words to one another. The peaceful and lovely exchange was abruptly interrupted when the door (that Eliza had left half-closed) was pushed and opened completely.

“Hey, Alex, can I borrow your laptop?” asked Angelica, barely perturbed by the intimate scene.

“Angelica, knock before coming in!” admonished Alexander.

His sister-in-law knocked in a mocking manner, before repeating. “Can I borrow your…?”

“NO”

She scrunched up her nose in disgust. “You’re gonna steal Jesus his title of King of the Jews*”

“Angelica, no blasphemies in this house!” exclaimed Eliza, horrified.

“Fuck you” she stated, turning on her heels in a bad mood.

“That’s what I’m trying to do, thank you very much!”

Eliza slapped her husband. “Alexander, be prudish!”

“I didn’t know you were into sadomasochism” commented Peggy, at the doorframe.

Eliza turned to sit on the left side of the bed. “Peggy, you too, have shame!” she reprehended, blushing.

“What the fuck is she even doing awake!!?” shouted Alexander.
“Damn, if I’m awake, because I’m awake; if I’m sleep, because I’m sleep…” complained the youngest.

“What do you want, Peggy” interrupted Eliza, tapping her fingers on the mattress, impatiently.

“I don’t remember”

“Then leave us the fuck alone!” ordered Alexander, losing the little patience he had left.

“I live in here as well, huh?” replied Peggy, offended.

“Peggy, please, we don’t bother you when you’re having intimate moments” said Eliza, calmly.

“Like she had anyone to get laid with”

“Alexander!”

“You’re so cruel!” cried Peggy, running away.

“BUT CLOSE THE DOOR!”

Peggy came back, as she sobbed, threw a hateful glare in her brother-in-law’s direction and slammed the door shut.

“There are people sleeping!” reprimanded Eliza.

“You can’t tell this girl anything…”

“You’ll apologise to her”

“Yes, I promise’

“Good”

They went back to where they had stopped, the heat spreading across the room, the passion breaking free…

The door swinging opened once again.

“What? No breakfast this morning or what the hell is… Oh, my God, my pure eyes!”

“Dad!!!!” shouted Eliza, hiding under the sheets, her face totally red. “Knock before coming in!!”

Philip Sr covered his eyes, gagging. “I invited him here for free and he traumatizes me!”

Alexander rolled his eyes and hid his face under a pillow. “For fuck’s saaaaake…” he whispered, darkly.
“Dad, I’ll go make breakfast now, wait for a moment” promised Eliza, shyly.

“Leave it, I’m not hungry anymore” said Philip Sr, unable to look inside.

“Fucking leave, then…” kept whispering Alexander.

“You should’ve married Elijah, the architect!” he screamed, before running away.

The Caribbean exploded then. “There he goes again with Elijah, the architect!” He set the covers aside and jump out of bed. “To hell, I’m gonna take a shower”

“What you should’ve done in the first place” commented Eliza. A pillow hit her in the head. She rubbed it as she looked at the closed bathroom door the room possessed. “No pancakes for you, then”

Today wasn’t Lafayette’s best day. The photocopier had decided to go to hibernate just when he needed it the most; he’d passed all those writings by hand until it hurt; somebody had eaten the last biscuit; every time he went for coffee he had to wait because it had been drunk all (then, they’d complain about Alexander); he’d dropped said coffee over half of the paperwork he’d already done; stayed later than usual (Maria had trusted him with the key, throwing him a worried look) and when he’d gotten out of the building, he saw Hercules and Laurens had gone back home with the car and he had no money to call a cab or an Uber.

With a sigh, he started walking, his hand over the pocket he kept his pepper spray just in case.

He tried to comfort himself by thinking he was going to watch some justice being done once and for all tonight, on that contest. He hoped Thomas remembered to come to help him with the recorder, he surely wanted to see that more than once.

Then, Laf would complain about how unfair he was to Laurens. But when Hercules got into the bedroom of their friend and saw and had to take care of things like that… Really, Hercules was being very nice to that good-for-nothing.

He opened the bathroom door, where Laurens was taking a shower. He sighed exhaustedly when he felt the sauna his friend had turned the place into.
“Leave the door opened!” he reprimanded, as he emptied the content of one of the cans he had found in his bedroom.

“Don’t you always complain about the smell of my shampoo?” retorted Laurens.

“But you’re leaving this suffocating!”

“Man, do you have to annoy me even when I’m taking a shower? You’ve got an unhealthy obsession”

“And you have a worse obsession over peeing inside beers cans” Hercules threw in his face, as he flushed the toilet. “Why don’t you go to the bathroom?”

“Because I don’t want to bother anyone at night”

“Sleep at normal hours and you wouldn’t have to do either”

“I’m an owl”

“A lazy idiot, that’s all you are and will ever be”

Laurens groaned. “Can I have a bit of privacy in the shower?”

“Privacy, he says…” repeated Hercules, as he was about to empty the last can he’d brought with him. The doorbell was heard and he went to open the door. “Privacy, he says…”

He looked at his hand and decided to enter the living room, leaving the still filled can on the coffee table to not open the door to whoever it might be with that on his hand.

Hercules half-closed his eyes when he opened the door and found Alf at the other side. He didn’t even bring anything the nights he came to dine…

“You’re liking this too much, huh?” he commented, but let him enter, nonetheless.

Alf shrugged. “You’re nice enough to hang around”

“Hm… Don’t drink the can that’s on the coffee table” he warned.

“Why not?”

“You don’t wanna know”

Somebody else rang the doorbell not five seconds later Hercules had closed the door. He threw a glare to Alfred.
“Bringing friends now as well?”

“No, I come alone” he answered, raising one eyebrow.

Hercules opened the door and his eyes grew wide when he saw the man at the other side. “Ah, Jefferson. Good night”

“Night. Gilbert wanted me to help you set the recorder?” he explained, hesitating in coming in or not.

Hercules put two and two together and rolled his eyes. “My gosh, didn’t know he could reach this level. Come in” he welcomed him, stepping to the side. “It’s in the living room”

Alf watched the two men trying to understand the unused item while he ate chips from the couch. When the thing was almost set up, the bathroom door opened and the Laurnes stopped right at the doorframe when he saw the Virginian in the living room, talking normally with his friend.

“What is that man doing here?” he asked, disgusted.

“That’s what I ask myself all days when your friend keep visiting us without letting us know first” said Hercules, barely looking in his flatmate’s direction.

Alfred half-closed his eyes at Hercules. “I barely do anything to bother you that much” he muttered.

“Goodnight to you too, Laurens” drawled Jefferson, rolling his eyes.

“Nobody’s answered me” complained Laurens, crossing both arms.

“Lafayette asked him to help us with the recorder” explained Hercules, tiredly.

“We can do that for ourselves…”

“Yes, that’s why the poor thing was there, accumulating dust”

“Clean it more often”

“Shut up already”

“My God, I just came out!”

“And you’re already putting everybody on their nerves!”

“Not me” shrugged Alfred.

“You shouldn’t be here in the first place” whispered Hercules, annoyed.

“He’s my friend, I can invite him all the times I want” retorted Laurens.

“Just like Laf, then” concluded Hercules.

“I’m almost done, I’ll leave in a minute” promised Thomas.

“Hurry”
“John!” Hercules sighed. “Listen, go take Freddy for a walk. You won’t have to stand anyone you don’t like that way”

“I don’t wanna get out now…”

“John, you must start take care of your dog”

“I’ve just showered” he reminded, slowly, as if talking to a little child. “And it’s cold outside”

“It’s the end of August”

“There’s still a little breeze”

“Well, if the little breeze hasn’t killed you yet, with all your late night parties, then it won’t kill you for five minutes of walking the dog!” shouted Hercules, losing his patience.

“Buf, alright, alright, I’ll go…” ceded Laurens, lazily. “But I want him gone by the time I’m back” he added, pointing at Thomas, who simply ignored him.

“He’ll leave when he’s finished” declared Hercules, still not lowering his tone.

“Hm, it’s nice to see these scenes happen in other houses…” commented Thomas, under his breath.

“Godfred, come here…” called Laurens, kneeling on the floor.

The dog, resting on his bed, looked at him before getting up, turned his back on the man, and lay down again. Alfred contained a laugh at Laurens’ frustrated frown.

“Godfred” he called again, more sternly. “Godfred, come here now” he ordered.

“With that name it’s normal he doesn’t wanna go” whispered Thomas once again, to which Hercules gave a small nod.

“Godfred, I’m not gonna repeat myself!” threatened Laurens. “Come here right now!”

The dog raised his head and looked behind, with the corner of his eye, almost in annoyance. He got on his feet, stretched out, yawned and shook his whole body before advancing slowly to where Laurens was knelt, waiting impatiently. Just when it seemed he was going to go to the freckled man, Godfred changed directions and went to caress Thomas’ legs with his snout. He dropped to the floor and showed the guest his belly, which Thomas caressed almost automatically.

Laurens gasped, a hand on his chest. “Treason?” he wondered, looking at the dog with hatred. “We must adopt another dog”

“Yeah, what else?” scoffed Hercules.

“That’s it, you embittered my night” complained Laurens, going to sit on the couch with Alfred, who looked at him with a funny glare. “I’ll simply watch my movie and ignore the whole of you”
“You can’t watch a movie tonight, John. Lafayette wants to watch a contest” replied Hercules, right away.

“I called dibs on the TV first!”

“I doubt it, because he’s been wanting to see that since this morning and you haven’t said anything about any films till now”

“Because I’m secretive”

“A burden, that’s what you are. You don’t have to go anywhere tonight?”

“Not until after twelve”

“After twelve? And at what hour were you going to come back home?”

“I don’t know, when I was finished”

“And work?”

“What about it”

“You’ve gotta go to work tomorrow morning!!”

“Bah, I’ll go on Monday”

“You can’t skip days of work just because! John, you’re a grown-up man!!!”

Thomas looked at the two friends as he kept petting the dog, who suddenly turned around and trotted to Laurens, waggling his tail happily.

“What? I’m nobody’s rebound” declared Laurens, pridefully.

“John, the dog’s already there. Take him out”

“I just sat down”

“Take the dog out right now or I’ll lock the fucking door and you won’t get out”

Laurens got up from the couch dramatically, dragging his feet to the entrance. When he had the dog on the leash, he declared.

“You don’t deserve my kindness”

Hercules looked at the other two men. “Then, Laf will complain about my treatment towards him…”

“Where is he, by the way?” asked Alfred.

“I think he stayed a bit late because something went wrong with his paperwork”
“Did you leave him there, with no way back?” asked Thomas.

“No, no, I gave him my wal…” Hercules patted his back pocket, feeling it not as empty as he expected. “Oh, shit…”

Just in that moment, the front door opened, revealing a red-faced and exhausted Lafayette, who grabbed the knob as if he needed it to not fall. Which, judging by his gasping, could exactly be the case.

“Jesus…” muttered Alfred, eyes wide.

“Gil, are you alright?” asked Thomas, as he ran to his aid with Hercules.

“Yes, yes…” nodded the Frenchman, ignoring their hands, prepared to grab him and help him get to a soft place to lie on. “I’m… I’m fine…” he laughed, his whole body aching for that simple action.

“Laf, did you come back by feet?” asked Hercules, worried sick.

“Oui, yes, oui…” muttered Lafayette, sitting slowly on the couch, giggling from pain. “I… I had to run the last few meters because I bumped into a not very kind beggar who didn’t believe me when I told him I didn’t have any money… And when I finally arrived, the elevator was broken… But I made it… Hehehe”

The three men exchanged a glare as Lafayette buried himself on the couch.

“I did it… Now… The TV is mine… Is… Is the thing…?”

“Yes, we set it” answered Thomas.

“Good, good, merci, good, merood…” And he laughed again, almost sobbing this time.

“Do you want chips?” asked Alfred, feeling bad.

“Once my hand comes back to normal” he said, showing his hand in a writing position though he was holding no pen.

“I could’ve helped if you’d asked” said Thomas.

“Non, non, I’m fine, fine, fine… Pretty fine” he assured, not convincing anyone.

“Do you want me to prepare something for you, honey?” proposed Hercules.

“Alright…”

“We’ll make you a snack” said Alf, following Hercules to the kitchen.

“Thomas, can you give me the remote, s’il te plait?”

“Yes” nodded the man, immediately.
Once Lafayette had the remote in his power and had turned the TV on, he started to feel relaxed. At last. He moved a bit, to not feel numb. Thomas never stopped casting concerned glares in his direction.

“Do you want some paracetamols or…”

“No, no… Well, maybe two…”

“Alright, I’ll be right back”

With Thomas gone, it was only Lafayette in the living room. The contest was about to start. The host introducing Simmons to the public. His eyes darted to the beer can that was opened on the coffee table. A warm feeling spread across his chest when he thought Hercules had brought it to him. It’d been a while since he’d drunk that, but he thought he could give himself a whim after the day he’d had.

Leaning on his seat, he took the can and frowned when didn’t feel it cold. Maybe it’d been just forgotten there, it wasn’t unusual in that house. He shrugged, he still was thirsty and it would only be a couple of gulps. He had the can bare milimeters away from his lips when Alfred talked from the kitchen.

“Laf, do you want some cheese with the chips?”

He thought for a moment. “Um, yeah! That sounds just fine!”

“Okay!”

Laf sighed, thanking the good friends he had.

He returned to drink the beer, the can again bare inches away from the mouth when Hercules interrupted him once again.

“Laf! Coke, water or something else?”

“Coke, please!”

“Alright, honey!”
He truly had the best boyfriend anyone could ever ask for.

Again, he pressed the can to his lips, more eager to finally drown his thirst. That time, it was Thomas who stopped him, re-entering the room with the pills and a glass of water.

“Here you go”

“Thank you, Thomas” nodded Lafayette.

He put the pill on the water, seeing it evaporate and, as he waited, he finally could drink the beer. He frowned at the can.

“This tastes so funny…” he commented. Reading the label, he rolled his eyes. “Of course, store brand… Hercules’s turning into a cheap… Meh, better than nothing” he decided.

He drunk the water with the pills inside and then waited for the snack to arrive. He had decided to take a second gulp of beer when Hercules came back, a tender smile on his face and a tray with food made for him.

“Here you go, my lo…” he interrupted himself when he saw what his boyfriend was doing. “Oh, my lord!!” he exclaimed. “Laf! What’re you doing??!”

“Sssh! Herc, hush, that doofus is already talking” he said, his eyes glued to the TV.

“My God, what the…? What…? Are you drinking that for real?!” asked Hercules, not believing his eyes.

“Relax, uncle Scrooge, I’m sure there are more in the fridge”

Lafayette waved one hand as he took a third gulp. Hercules’ face paled and he put both hands over his mouth, trying hard not to gag. The tray he’d brought falling to the floor and staining the floor with chips, coke and pieces of glass and dish.

“Hercules!” exclaimed the Frenchman, already with his whole attention on him. Or, on the carpet. “Are you out of your mind?! Clean that immediately, I bought the carpet just the other day!” he complained, returning his attention to the TV.

Hercules couldn’t care less. When he saw Lafayette about to keep drinking from the can, he hurried to say: “No, wait, stop, don’t do that!”
Thomas and Alfred had made their way back to the living room when they heard the things falling and crashing, and stayed on the doorframe, seeing the scene between the boyfriends. Lafayette threw an annoyed glare in his direction.

“*Bon sang*, Hercules! What’s gotten into you? It’s just beer!”

“That’s not beer, Laf!” he finally informed.

“What?”

“That’s one of the cans John uses as a pisser!”

Lafayette took his time to repeat, then: “What…?”

“Oh, fuck…” whispered Alfred, totally disgusted with the new information. “Thank goodness I listened to him, I was about to drink it just for the sake of it” he admitted to Thomas, who had covered his mouth to not vomit on the floor.

“B-But…” said the Frenchman, not wanting to believe what he’d just heard. “But it was on the coffee table… He always leaves them in his bedroom”

“What a flatmate, for Christ’s sake…” muttered Thomas.

Lafayette, on his behalf, simply looked at Hercules, who was muttering apologies and explaining how he’d put the can there because someone rang the doorbell and then he forgot about it… Lafayette stopped listening at the twentieth ‘I’m sorry’. His head slowly moving to look directly at the can. He started to feel sick to his stomach the more he looked at it. Eventually, his face began to contort in one of pure disgust, his lips trembling as little gasps escape them, his body also started to shake.

He put the can on the table and jumped from the couch. He sprinted to the kitchen, pushing Alfred and Thomas out of the way as he leapt on the sink, turning on the tap and drinking from there like an animal. He drank a huge amount, gargled and then spit. He repeated the action countless times, being watched by his friends, who threw compassionate glares in his direction.

“Why the heck did you leave that thing on the coffee table?!” he screamed, after one of the spits.

“I wasn’t going to leave it there! I never thought someone would drink it!” Hercules defended himself, vaguely.

“You could’ve left it somewhere else, or back in the bedroom, gee…” commented Alfred, rolling his eyes.

“It was an accident, I swear, I didn’t intend for any of this to happen!” promised Hercules, feeling terribly bad.
“The last thing I needed to hear was that you planned it!” shouted Lafayette, hysteric.

The front door opened in that moment, Laurens and Godfred coming back from their walk.

“Hello, familyyy” he greeted, oblivious to the whole issue.

“JOHN, YOU FILS DE PUTIN [SON OF A BITCH], I’M GONNA TE TUER [KILL YOU]!”

“Oh, no, when he talks in Frenchenglish is never good” said Hercules, and Thomas nodded in support.

“What happens??” asked Laurens, going to the kitchen, shocked.

“Laf drank your pee” explained Alfred, normally.

“My pee?” repeated Laurens, puzzled.

“Laf drank your pee” explained Alfred, normally.

“Oh, stop saying it!” pleaded Lafayette, at the verge of a panic attack. Thomas went to him to calm him down.

“But I don’t know what happened!” complained Laurens.

“I was cleaning your damned bedroom, and I took a couple of the cans you use to pee in, and I left one on the coffee table because Alfred rang the doorbell…” explained Hercules.

“Hey, hey, hey” Alfred interrupted. “Don’t pin the blame on me! I didn’t even know that man did such a thing!”

“I’m just telling the story as it was, not blaming all on you!”

“But what’s wrong?” asked Laurens, raising one eyebrow. “If you drink pee, you die?”

“No, of course, not” answered Thomas, rolling his eyes, as Lafayette hyperventilated against his chest.

“Then, it’s not such a big deal!” decided Laurens.

“Not a big deal?” repeated Lafayette, his words choking. Pure rage crossed his irises at that. “Damn it all, John! I’m sick of you and your habits proper of a pig!”

“Even a pig would be disgusted by sharing its space with this guy” commented Thomas, rubbing soothing circles on his friend’s back.

“Hey, don’t scream at me” said Laurens, offended. “I didn’t make you drink that. You did it on your own” He put both arms in akimbo, as an exasperated parent. “So, why do you drink those things, Lafayette?”

He gritted his teeth. “Because I thought in this house we all were civilized and rational beings, who, when feel the call of nature, go to the toilet instead of relieving themselves in beer cans!”

“There, you made a mistake” said Laurens, calmly and with a comprehensive smile. “It’s okay, it’s human. Now you know how things work around here”
“What? What the… What?!” exclaimed the Frenchman, not knowing where to turn or what to think.

“Aren’t you going to apologise?” asked Alfred, in bewilderment.

“Why? He knew the way I was before inviting me over for a few days” shrugged Laurens.

“3283 days…” whispered Hercules, darkly.

“Just say you’re sorry, for God’s sake” confronted Thomas.

Laurens threw daggers in his direction. “How? How you did to Alex?”

“What does that have to do with any of this!” complained the secretary, enraged.

“Nothing, but I’d rather talk about your bullshit” admitted Laurens, nodding in reaffirmation.

“Besides, I shouldn’t be the one apologising. The idiot who left that thing on a very wrong place was Hercules”

The man in question threw an uncomical laugh to the air. “Ha! Sorry for being your free maid!”

Laurens pointed at his friends while he looked with condescendence at Thomas. “There you have your apology. Now, let me watch my movie. I’ve earned it for taking the dog for a walk”

“Excuse me?” said Hercules.

“But what the hell is wrong with this guy?” asked Thomas, upset.

“John, man, you can’t…” began to lecture Alfred, his voice lost at the other two began to reprimand the southerner as well.

John soon began to scream back at them, and the hallway was filled with obscenities, complaints and insults said in a volume they all knew was illegal at that hours. Lafayette, on his behalf, stayed there, supporting his weight against the counter and pressing his other hand to his forehead, as if trying to comprehend what had just happened.

He turned numbly to the sink, grabbed his favourite mug and filled it with water, still not feeling satisfied with the amount of liquid he’d tried to wash his mouth with. Just when he was about to drink, the handle broke and the mug fell against the pile of dirty dishes waiting to be cleaned, cracking on one side.

Lafayette snapped just there.

“ÇA SUFFIT! [ENOUGH!]”

His scream was able to silence the four arguing men. They frowned and swallowed when they saw the fire in the Frenchman’s eyes, as well as his hands balled into fists and how he was
gritting his teeth furiously.

“I’ve just had the shittiest day ever!” he began, his voice breaking at some point from impotence and rage. “The photocopier didn’t work and I had to write until I couldn’t feel my hand anymore! Some connard [asshole] finished all the coffee when I went to drink some! And they also ate the last biscuit! My boyfriend left me there with no way to come back because he was too busy joking with Maria and the rest of inept that work in there to remember to give me a few bucks to call a taxi! I had to run for my life because a homeless man with anger issues threatened me with a dirty knife! I had to walk forty steps to get to my house!” he explained, counting with his fingers all the events of bad luck he’d to face since he woke up. He let out a shaky sigh. “I just wanted to come back home and laugh at a person I don’t like… Because it was my moment to laugh last, goddamn it!”

Tears ran down his face when he couldn’t control his impotence any longer. Between sobs, he added: “It’s not about universal justice anymore, I just wanted a moment to myself… Am I a bad person for it? Am I a monster?”

Lafayette began to cry. The four men exchanged a glare. Hercules and Thomas made the gesture to go to him to comfort him when a bell dinging from the TV stopped them in their tracks and made Lafayette to raise his tear-streaked face from his hands.

They saw the host with a shocked expression on his face, as a man with cocky smile stood beside him, pretending to not be affected by anything that was happening concerning him.

“My god! I haven’t seen something like this in the twenty years we’ve been running!” assured the host, turning to the seemingly impassible contestant.

“Oh, and it’s the first time I do something like this, hahaha” talked Simmons, with a nasal voice and tone proper of one of those snobbish characters you’d expect to see on a high-school movie.

“Is it the first time you play this kind of game?”

“Yeah, and the first time I come to the TV. It was the first time I tried and they called me”

“Wow!”

“I didn’t even wanna come, it was just for a bet I made while being drunk, hahaha”

“Well, thank the friend who made you do it, because you’re going home with three million dollars, plus the gift from the Surprise Bag: a brand new car!”

“Oh, nice”

“Did you need a car?”

“Well, yes. The one I bought last month had a little scratch and I didn’t like it anymore, hahaha”

“Well, I hope you enjoy it“
“I will, I will”

“And what will you do with the money? Studies, start a company on your own…?”

“Nah, I’ll throw a party tonight to celebrate and I’ll see when I want to spend it first once the hangover is over. Hahahaha”

“Hahahahaha! You only live once, huh?”

“Yeah, haha”

The group watched the whole scene unfolding on the TV. Lafayette standing a few feet behind, totally numb and with a blank expression on his face, while the others couldn’t believe the conversation they’d just heard.

“Huh, you were right, Laf, such a lucky bastard” agreed Hercules, nodding.

“Laf?” called Alfred, a bit scared at how still the other man was standing.

“Gilbert, are you alright?” asked Thomas, frowning.

“… … … … … … … … That’s it. I’m leaving” he declared.

“What” said the four men. Laurens and Hercules going rigid at his words.

The two friends followed the Frenchman around as he packed clothes and food, ignoring their complaints and pleads. He just turned around when he went to the door, everything prepared to abandon the house.

“Silence!” he ordered, managing to quiet the two men. “Plenty of things have to change for me to be back to this hideous place!” he swore. “A lot of things!”

“But what things?” whined Laurens.

“Laf, please, think about it…” tried Hercules.

“Ferme ta gueule! [Shut the fuck up]” he interrupted, sharply, making his boyfriend to wince. “Bon débarras [Goodbye forever]”

And then, he stepped out the house, slamming the door shut.

“At least he didn’t record it” said Alfred, wanting to be positive.

“It was recording” assured Thomas.
They ran to the balcony when they heard a car driving away at full speed. Hercules and Laurens frowned when they recognised it.

“Well, now I truly won’t go to work tomorrow” decided Laurens.

Hercules whacked him in the back of the head without hesitation.

Eliza was trying to finish the book Angelica had lent her last year when her father came back with the children. Thankfully, the little ones were exhausted and didn’t make any noise. Instead, they went to the kitchen where her brother-in-law was making dinner for them tonight. Eliza felt her father looking at her for a long moment before deciding to drop himself next to her, on the couch. He threw a pitiful sigh to the air, and then looked at her with the corner of his eye.

Eliza ignored him, trying to focus her whole attention on the book. It was a miracle Angelica hadn’t interrogated her about it by now.

Philip Sr repeated the action, this time louder. Eliza frowned her lips and kept reading.

A third sigh, this time so loud even Alexander and Phil looked up from the kid’s notebook, clearly upset by the interruption. The Caribbean got up from the table and closed the balcony doors, to keep studying without the noise from inside the living interrupting them. Like the fourth and longer sigh Philip Sr threw. Eliza closed the book and inspired slowly.

“Something’s wrong, Dad?” she asked, as kindly as she could.

“You always read people so well, Betsey” he complimented.

Eliza rolled her eyes. “Yeah, okay…”

“It’s just that today Pip said one thing to me that…” He took in a deep breath. “It was really a punch in the guts”

“What did he say to you?” she asked, already straightening herself up in case she had to be firm with
“He told me about what you did in New Year’s Eve”

Eliza blinked, trying to understand what her father was referring to. “What did we do?” she finally asked.

“He and Angie told me how much fun they had with Nana and Papa” he explained, drawling the last two words as if they were poison.

“Oh, yes!” exclaimed Eliza, smiling at the memory. “Gosh, it was fantastic! Henry told Lu he could bake the dessert and he almost set the house on fire! Alex couldn’t stop himself from making a reference about when I got angry. And right after that…”

“You too?”

Eliza stopped and her smile dropped at the harsh tone of her father. “Me too what?”

“You don’t understand what’s going on, right?” he asked, chin raised with hurt pride. “The kids called them Nana and Papa” he repeated, again with repugnance in his voice.

Eliza frowned, not understanding anything. “Yes… They call them that”

“Ah, you knew…”

“Yes? I’m usually with them when we go for a visit?”

“You don’t understand what’s going on in here, right?”

“No…?”

Philip Sr shook his head. “I’m the other”

“The other what?”

“The other grandparent”

It was Eliza’s turn to sigh dramatically. “Oh, Dad, really?”

“You don’t see it because you’re too nice. But that man…” He pointed at Hamilton, who was encouraging a Phil that was feeling very down, surely for an exercise he couldn’t get right. “That man is the devil in disguise”

Eliza rolled her eyes. “Yeah, sure, I’m seeing it” she commented, sarcastically.

“He took you away from me and now he’s trying to do the same with the love of my grandchildren”

“Dad, the children love you” assured Eliza. “Besides, hm… Well, nothing”

“What?”

“No, nothing, I… Nothing”

“What is it?”

She sighed. “Look, I don’t want to take sides in this, I love you both dearly, but… But, Dad, you’re always pestering Alex”
“Excuse me??”

“You’re always talking about Elijah”

“He’s nobody to complain about a man saying his opinions out loud!”

“Okay, but you just saw him yesterday and smiled because you thought he was dying. And you promised him you would teach him what true suffering is”

“He told you that? That tell-tale of Hell!”

“I heard you say it, Dad. He didn’t tell me anything”

“Ah… Well, you heard wrong. I said another thing”

“You just admitted you said it!”

“Well, but all that are little squabbles between in-laws”

“You also called the INS on him”

“Damn, if you say those things without context, of course it sounds bad!”

“You called the INS on him in the middle of our honeymoon, saying I was in that hotel against my will. Context in here makes it worse, Dad”

“… You never understood my humour. Just like your mother with that little joke I played on her”

“You faked your own death in your anniversary, Dad!”

“But did they discount her the 50% of what that cruise to old couples cost or did they discount her the 50%? Here, you only talk about what interest you the most!”

“Dad…” She sighed once more. “Listen, Alexander’s a stubborn man. God know I’m telling the truth” she added, almost bitterly, as she rolled her eyes. “But that’s a trait you both have in common. So, stop focusing on the negative and even the score, alright?”

Her father looked at her for a moment before kissing her on the cheek. “Thank you, honey, you always know what to say” he told her, before getting up the couch and going upstairs.

Eliza nodded in satisfaction and fetched the book again. She turned serious when she saw she didn’t remember how far she’d gone.

“… … I’ll try it any other day” she decided, leaving the book aside and going to see if Church needed help.
“Lemongrab”

“Betty Boop”

“This again?”

Thomas sighed as he closed one box vehemently. He turned to the standing form of the receptionist, with arms crossed, looking down at him with a serious expression.

“Yes, darling, this again” he nodded, locking eyes with her as if challenging her to say anything about it.

“I told you I don’t like to have people across me when I write” she reminded him.

“So I’ve heard, yes” he nodded, mockingly.

She scrunched up her nose. “You’re doing this on purpose, right? This is nothing but sabotage”

“Oh, yeah, I’m so afraid of what you could tell on your joke of a book…”

“Hey, my book might be silly, with a lot of surrealist craziness and most of things make no sense if you analyse them, but I take it very seriously!” defended Maria, passionately.

“Whatever…”

“Close the door, how much does it cost you?”

“Almost as much as treating you well”

Maria pouted and kicked the air, powerlessly, before turning around. She stopped, surprised to see the new face entering the building. A slight blush spread on her cheeks for having let a stranger (maybe a client) to see the receptionist like that.

“Um, good morning, ma’am. Did you need anything?” she asked, changing into polite demeanour and giving the woman the brightest smile she could manage.

“I have a meeting with Mr Washington” the woman answered, returning the gesture, to which Maria was beyond grateful.

Thomas’ head spun around at the familiar voice. He stuck it out the doorframe, still surprising himself when he saw the woman with his own eyes. “Marisa?”

Marisa Hadfield smiled at him before embracing him with all her might. “Tommy! Didn’t expect to see you so soon!”

“What’re you doing in here?” he asked, reciprocating the hug.

Marisa looked him in the eyes. “You might be talking with your new public relations officer”
“Pardon?”

“I still have to meet with Washington” shrugged Marisa, a bit nervous. “But I’ve gotta be positive, right?”

“Absolutely” nodded Maria. “Don’t be scared, Washington’s a very good man”

“Knowing you, you’ll only need a couple of minutes before you’re hired” supported Thomas.

“Thank you” she said, blushing.

“Jefferson” called Mulligan, approaching the group. “Washington wants you to get rid of Adams’ stuff”

Thomas patted Marisa on the arm. “Told you” he kept encouraging, with a smile.

Maria’s eyes widened at the sight of Hercules: his short hair dishevelled, his clothes wrinkled and bags under his eyes.

“Jesus, Herc, what happened to you?” she asked, taking a few steps closer, clearly worried.

Hercules looked at her before letting a sob escape his lips. “Laf’s gone”

“What?”

“He got angry and left. And the house is falling to pieces”

“He left yesterday” Thomas reminded him.

“Well, the house was already a mess…” admitted Hercules. “But that doesn’t mean it’s not hard…” He sobbed harder. “And he even took the car and the wallet with him”

“Well, you left him here with no way to go back home or money. You’re even” concluded the secretary before going upstairs, to Adams’ office.

“Lemongrab, if you’ve nothing nice to say, be quiet” admonished Maria, hugging a crying Hercules.

Marisa’s laughter resounded throughout the whole building. “Oh, my God, ‘Lemongrab’, this is gold!”

Maria smiled at her with complicity. “I can give you a sheet with out nicks, so you start to feel like home” she proposed.

“Don’t pollute her sanity, Betty Boop!” said Thomas, before disappearing from their view. Maria still gave him the middle finger.

Marisa laughed harder. “This is too much!”
Thomas sighed, exhausted by only imagining how much it would cost to tidy that whole place up. He comforted himself by thinking at least Adams wouldn’t have a lot of paperwork to take care of and got down to work.

He went blindly to the window (stumbling into something that was on the floor and that almost made him hit the glass across him) to open the blinds (struggling greatly at the task. Who had invented those) and once the light of the day illuminated the barely used room, a groan of complaint was heard from behind him.

Thomas turned around, a bit startled, and stayed in shock as he saw what he’d stumbled into was a lump covered by a sheet. It moved slowly and the secretary thought about going out and send somebody else to do this or simply tell Washington what he’d seen, but he doubted the CEO was in the mood for one of those things. Whatever this was…

Eventually, he took a deep breath and gathered his courage to uncover the form, who ended up curling on itself as it covered its eyes, throwing a curse with a husky voice Thomas recognised immediately.

“Who the hell turned on the sun??!”

“Adams” Thomas was about to lecture the man out of habit when he realised the situation he’d found him in. “What in the world are you doing in here?”

“Sleeping” the lawyer simply responded “Or was trying to, until you, very rudely, disturbed me”

“Disturbed you?” echoed the Virginian. “For your information, I caught you sleeping on the floor of your office. Or what used to be your office, Mr ‘I’ll never be back’”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, Thomas… This is exactly why we fell apart”

“We fell apart because you’re a selfish asshole who refused to help me out but sent your daughter to work for my sister!” Thomas threw in his face, enraged.

“Resentful, annoying and a hypocrite. This is why all your friends abandon you” spat Adams, taking the blanket away from Thomas.

“And the reason why you can’t even have fake friends is because there’s not a soul who can stand your lack of personality and hideous lack of loyalty”

“What’s going on in here?”

Both men stiffened in their spots when the voice of Washington interrupted their quarrel.
Thomas decided to be silent, leaving his boss to see the man lying on the floor. Washington barely raised an eyebrow as he asked.

“Mr Adams, what’re you doing in here?”

All the bravado disappeared from the lawyer’s demeanour as he laughed sheepishly. “Hehe, you see, something very funny happened, sir…”

“Make me laugh” challenged Washington.

“You remember that I won the lottery yesterday, right?”

“And that beautiful gesture you dedicated *me* and your former workmates. Yes”

Thomas flinched at the sharp tone his boss used for the accusative. Adams moved uncomfortably.

“And my wife as well, hehe…” admitted Adams, blushing, the last piece of puzzle to understand the situation. “Well, hehe… Em… It turned out that, uh… I… Hm… I had the ticket upside down and, um… Got confused with the sixes and nines, hehe”

Thomas bit his bottom lip, beaming. For once, he would enjoy Adams’ clumsiness and lack of interest on checking things and be entirely sure. The last one the reason his former friend used to mock him plenty of times when they were younger. *What goes around, comes around*, he thought, vindictively.

Washington didn’t seem to share his good mood, though. The CEO barely blinked an eye as he scrutinized the distressed man. After a while that felt eternal, he decided.

“Mr Adams, you can’t stay here. This is not an inn. I want you gone by today, before we all leave for the weekend”

Now, Thomas was grinning without bothering in concealing his happiness.

“But, sir…”

“Wish you luck, Mr Adams”

“Can’t I stay over the weekend?”
Washington’s narrowed eyes made him tremble. “I want you gone before we all leave for the weekend” he repeated, stoically. “Have a good day, Mr Adams”

And with that, he left. In those moments, Thomas understood why Hamilton and Washington could get along so well despite their differences at the hour of approaching an issue or defending a posture. He looked down at Adams, who was glaring at the floor with a bitter expression, totally impotent.

“Well, I didn’t know you weren’t aware that people who do nothing at all are usually fired” drawled Thomas, with a sided smile, throwing in the lawyer’s face the threat he’d received from him when Washington and Angelica left him in charge. “The mop and the bucket are in the door by the storeroom. Have fun” he teased.

And his grin didn’t evaporate even when he felt Adams’ infuriated glare in the back of his neck as he walked out.

Laurens heard Hercules’ voice from the living room, trying to contact Lafayette. Well, more than ‘heard’, he ‘felt’ it. Once Hercules could overcome his shock, thanks to cutting his finger as he picked the pieces of glass he broke last night, he had grabbed his phone and proceeded to send his boyfriend a series of confusing voice messages that made Laurens doubt about the mental health of his friend.

“Lafayette, come back home immediately!” he ordered, in one of the first messages, his voice plagued with pure hatred and anger. “If you don’t come back, we’re through! Did you hear me? Through! Do you think what you did was responsible and mature?! I’m gonna end up killing that son of a bitch, and his death will be your fault!”

Then, his business voice made an appearance. “Look, I’ve got a deal. I’ll take care of everything. Screw the schedule. You’re doing enough back at the law firm, you’re so hardworking that deserve a bit of peace. You can have the weekends all for yourself, you can even leave the house and no return until Sunday night. I’ll pay whatever place you want to stay”

Then, all was replaced by heartbroken crying. “I’m sorry, you know I get nervous with anything… At least pick up the phone… Please, we can sort this out, I wasn’t being serious, we’re fine”

Laurens walked out his bedroom when he heard nothing else that ugly crying. He found Hercules on the carpet, shaking as tears rolled down his cheeks; Freddy seeing it all from his bed. The dog looked at Laurens fixatedly, making the freckled man to sigh in exhaustion before the
pressure the animal was exerting on him.

“Alright, I’ll fix this” he promised, being completely ignored by his flatmate. He frowned his lips as he said: “I can’t believe I’m about to do this; you don’t deserve my friendship”

“Buy bread, please” sobbed Hercules.

He rolled his eyes. “There’ll be no supermarkets on my waaaay” he complained, closing the front door.

“What’re you doing, grandpa?” asked a curious Angie, as she jumped to try and see what was on the counter.

Philip Sr kept his eyes glued to the cookbook. “I’m going to make your dinner tonight”

The girl froze. “Why?”

“Because your mother made me realise I’ve not been the best to him”

“Aunt Peggy says you need professional help” revealed the little girl.

The man muttered a few curses against his youngest daughter. “Takes one to know one”

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing…”

“Grandpa”

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“Are you going to poison my Dad?”

Philip Sr tightened the grip he had on the ladle. “Girl, go pester your brothers. Your parents had them for a reason”

“Gee, then you’d complain about Pip and I not talking to you” muttered the girl, leaving the kitchen, sulking.

“And forget about that habit of spying private conversations!” Philip Sr told her off. “You learnt that from the useless of your aunt…”

“What have I done now?”

Philip Sr startled at the voice of his daughter. “God, Peggy, stop scaring people”

“I can’t live…” complained the girl, pouting.
“Besides, I was talking about your sister”

“Ah, good”

“You’re only the fake crafty who badmouths me to my grandchildren”

Peggy frowned darkly. “Damn kids, last time I drink in front of them…” She groaned from pain. “Ow, Dad, can you do me an infusion or something? My tummy hurts”

“Do it yourself, girl. Can’t you see I’m busy trying to boast your resentful brother-in-law?”

“Wonder why he hates you” replied Peggy, giving an eye-roll. She patted her grown belly. “Oh, I think I got cold… I’m gonna annoy Betsey until she takes care of me”

“Yeah, go bond with the only normal daughter I have”

Peggy threw daggers in his direction. An evil grin came to her lips. “You think you’re insulting Angel and I, but the ‘only normal daughter you have’ is the only one adopted”

Philip Sr turned around, seeing the satisfied smile on Peggy’s face, before the girl left. He stood there, looking at the door with a frown.

“Smarty-ass…”

“Tommy”

“What the hell do you want now?”

James stopped in his tracks at his reaction. The things he put on the tray trembling slightly. He clicked his tongue.

“The weekend is just starting and you’re already bitter?”

“If you’re gonna ask me for favours, then, yes”

“I brought you a snack”

“You never bring me anything unless you want something. Like with that suspicious mandarin I don’t remember”

“The mandarin existed, alright?”
“Good for it, but I never ate it”

“Really, you’re getting angry because I brought you a couple of cookies and coffee. You’re not normal”

“I’m sick, that’s what I am. Of the whole of you only getting close to me to ask me for favours”

“Come on, that’s not true”

A knock on the door. “Thomas, I’m going to the movies with Maria. Give me 20 bucks, please” said Libby.

“See?” Thomas told James, bitterly.

“Libby, I was going to ask him for money as well” complained the accountant.

“Huh, who got angry because someone brought him food?” asked Thomas, throwing a sigh of tiredness to the air. “You both have salaries, pay your things yourselves”

“I’m just asking you for half of what I’m gonna spend tonight” explained James, frowning slightly.

“Where are you going tonight?” asked Libby, curiously.

“I’m gonna have dinner with a friend” he answered, ambiguously.


“What is this? The Inquisition? I’m only going out with a friend” exclaimed James, starting to be flushed.

Polly appeared at the door, phone in hand. “Uncle Jemmy, a woman named Dolley called asking if you could go pick her up at half past seven tomorrow”

James threw the little girl a glare, before responding, in a tiny and angry voice. “Yes, tell her it’s alright”

Polly nodded and left.

“And next time, just tell me who called, don’t answer yourself!” he reprimanded.

“Dolley who?” asked Thomas, raising one eyebrow at his friend. “Dolley Payne?”

“Uh” Libby whistled. “Jemmy-James has a date”

“It’s not a date, it’s having dinner to catch up” defined James.

“Yes, with the woman you’ve been pinning on since college” commented Thomas. “And even after she married”

“That’s true love” sighed Libby, with a hand on her chest.

James frowned at his friend. “Yes, well, that’ll make two of us”
“It’s still beautiful” supported the Latin American woman. “You two met again. It must be because it’s your moment”

“Hm, you’re gonna last less in that law firm than Bambi in a meeting of the National Rifle Association with that attitude” commented Thomas, with a thoughtful expression. He took out his wallet and, as he passed it to his friend, said: “Here, take what you need. And you can even take my car if you want”

“Really?” asked James, in bewilderment.

“Yes, have fun” he nodded, waving one hand.

“Thank you, Thomas, I’ll pay you back”

“Not necessary”

Libby talked as soon as James left. “You’re so nice, Thomas”

“Yes. That and that if that thing goes fine, he’ll go live with her and then I’ll only have three persons left to get rid of in this house”

Patsy appeared right behind Libby (who looked shocked at the man’s explanation), dressed up and ready to leave. She stopped once she heard her father’s words.

“Gee, Dad, you’re such a good friend…” she praised, sarcastically.

Thomas narrowed his eyes at her. “It’d have been two if one girl I know had taken her studies seriously and weren’t at the verge of repeating her last year”

Patsy frowned her lips at the reminder. “Relax, it’s summer…”

“And where do you think you’re going, young lady?” he asked, tapping the pen on his desk, nervously.

“Out” she simply answered.

“Out where?” he insisted.

“Out of the house”

Thomas inhaled slowly through his nostrils. “Have you studied for the make-up tests?”

“Then you’d complain about me not talking to you. You only embitter me…”

“Gal, have you or not?”

“… Yeah”

“You’ve only got one week and a half to prepare”

“I know”

“If you know it that much why are you going out instead of studying?”
“Because I’ve spent the whole afternoon studying!”

“Martha, it’s your last shot to pass”

“I know…”

“Focus, then”

“I’ll focus better after a break”

“You’ve lived a constant break for nine months, that’s why you’re in this situation” began to lecture Thomas.

“Agh, Dad, I’m not gonna listen to you, I’m late”

“There goes the White Rabbit again…” muttered the Virginian, clicking his tongue. “Who are you going out with?”

“With a friend”

“A friend?”

“Yeah, Dad”

“What friend?”

“One of mine”

“You’re not gonna meet up with that Randy guy again, right?”

Patsy imitated a winning bell sound. “Ding, ding, ding, congratulations”

Libby contained her laughter, shaking in spot, while Thomas also trembled, from impotence.

“Gal, I told you I didn’t want you to meet up with that stoner ever again” he spat, trying to contain his ire.

“Huh, like you didn’t have your own experience”

“Excuse me?”

“Dad, stop being such a hypocrite. Lucy told me you’ve spent years doing nothing on the studying field and else” she threw in his face, with a quite threatening tone.

Thomas exploded at the mention of his sister. “Oh, yeah? Did your best friend and aunt Lucy told you how I spent all that fucking time reading and studying on my own while she and the other two lived the life of Riley*?!” he blurted out, feeling his cheeks growing red. “On my own, without bothering anyone, less my mother”

“Bf…” complained Patsy, tapping her foot impatiently on the carpet.

“Books bigger than Petete’s*, for you information’
“Aw, I loved that show…” commented Libby, nostalgically.

“Yeah, Dad, you’re awesome and impressive and so cool, alright” said Patsy, lazily, as she walked away.

“Don’t come late!” he shouted. “I want you back here by nine!”

“By eleven” Patsy shouted back.

“Nine!”

“Eleven”

“Gal, don’t push your luck. Nine o’clock and that’s final!”

“11.30” said Patsy, from the staircase.

“Brat, I said nine and it’s nine!!!!!”

“Don’t wait for me awake” declared the teenager.

“I’ll go for you if you’re not here by nine!” swore Thomas.

He only received the door slamming shut as a response. Thomas sighed and massaged his temples.

“I was always told girls matured faster than boys. I feel conned…” he complained.

“She’s just sixteen” said Libby, comprehensively.

“She’s gonna turn seventeen next month”

“She’s still a young girl”

Thomas sighed, frustratedly, and decided to focus on his paperwork again. Libby moved uncomfortably at the doorframe.

“Thomas?”

“Yes?”

“My twenty bucks?”

“… … I gave James my wallet”

“Damn… … … And don’t you have secret savings or…?”

“Get out of here!!!!!”
Polly appeared on the doorframe, again. “Dad, a man wants to talk to you”

“Girl, stop answering the phone and opening the door to strangers!” reprimanded her father.

“You’re always complaining about how we do nothing around here” shrugged the kid.

“I’m talking about the useless adults I’ve got in here!” He sighed, massaging the bridge of his nose in frustration.

“Don’t be ungrateful to the kid. She must be the only polite Jefferson I’ve ever met” confronted a voice that only put him in a worse mood.

“Pikachu, what’re you doing in my house?” he demanded, contorting his face in one of disgust.

“Good afternoon to you too” drawled Laurens, sharing his bitter mood. “Look, let’s go straight to the point: I don’t like you and you don’t like me either”

“That much is in understatement” nodded Thomas.

“But for some reason Laf does like you, and right now he refuses to answer Hercules’ texts or answer his phone. And, as Alex’s not here, you’re the only option, as shitty as it is, I’ve got left to fix this mess”

“That’s not the way you should ask for a favour” Polly reprimanded him, frowning.

“A ten-year-old is more mature than you” teased Thomas, scoffing. “Think about that while you go back to your house”

“I’m not going anywhere until you help me” declared Laurens, crossing his arms and planting himself on the ground, stubbornly.

“That’s extortion” complained the little girl, one more time.

Laurens looked at her with a cocked eyebrow. “Girl, you don’t look smarter by inventing words”

“Laurens, you’re making a fool out of yourself. Leave, please” said Thomas, waving his hand to emphasize his petition.

“No”

“Laurens, this is not the law firm. I can call the cops on you” threatened the Virginian.

“You call the cops on me and I’ll tell Alex, who just made amends with you” the southerner threatened back.

Thomas frowned. “Alright, listen to me, you annoying toddler…”

“Hello, peopleee” interrupted Maria, coming into view. “How’re you doing?”

“Betty Boop, what on Earth are you doing here as well??” asked Thomas, starting to lose his patience.

“The door was opened” replied the girl, nonchalantly.

“Polly!”
“It wasn’t me! Mr Laurens should’ve left it opened!”

“Tattletale”

“Irresponsible”

“Gosh, John, this is your life now?” asked Maria, with a mocking smile. “Fighting with kids?”

“I just turned ten this month” proclaimed Polly, proud of herself.

“What do you want now? A present?” asked Laurens.

“It’s the normal thing to do, yes”

“Gee, even kids I just know want to bleed me dry”

“That’s you” confronted Thomas, slamming his hand on the desk. “Living off in your friends’ house and not even apologising when one of them drank that”

“That’s none of your business” snapped Laurens.

“Excuse me, but when you come in here to demand me in bad manners to help you fix it, it automatically becomes my business, young man”

“I’m being as polite as I can after what you did to Alex”

Thomas clicked his tongue at the reminder. “That’s between the gremlin and me. And this is between you and me, and I’m telling you to leave because my pulse won’t falter to pick up the phone and dial 911. You’ve been warned”

“Do it, do it. I won’t leave until you decide to help us”

“Laurens…”

“This a pressing matter” insisted the southerner. “I wouldn’t be sharing my oxygen with you if it weren’t!”

“I don’t even know where Gilbert is!” gave in Thomas, frustrated. “Can you understand he didn’t tell anyone because he wanted to be alone for a minute, away from your personality?”

Before Laurens could complain, Maria informed: “He’s in Loli’s Hostel, about thirty blocks away from his house. If you drive there around evening, you arrive there in twenty-something minutes”

“…”

“Maria, how do you even know that?” asked Libby, shocked.

“I’m the receptionist, I know everything about my colleagues” she replied, simply. “And he called me to inform Washington in case he could get into trouble. He’s a very responsible man, even when angry”

“How long have you known that then?!” asked Laurens.

“Since this morning. I told you he’s very responsible”

“Why didn’t you tell us! You saw the state Hercules was in, even asked him if something was
“Laf asked me for discretion and I gave it to him. Because Maria Lewis is a woman of her word!” she declared, solemnly.

“Maria Lewis is an asshole who just fucked my whole afternoon up” spat Thomas, organising his things ill-temperedly. “Now, that I know, I’ll have to drive there because this tattletale won’t leave!”

“You lent your car to Jemmy” Libby reminded him.

“For Christ’s sake…”

“I’m gonna tell Hercules, see you there” said Laurens, bidding farewell.

“Wait, drive me there, at least!” pleaded Thomas.

“He’s running away, Daddy” informed Polly.

“To Loli’s Hostel and beyond!” they heard Laurens screaming.

“Don’t go beyond there; it’s where the traffickers meet” warned the receptionist.

“Hell of a life…”

“I can drive you there” proposed Maria. “If you pay me back the gas, of course”

“… What a fucking hell of a life…”

Chapter End Notes

*Pip is Philip Hamilton. Phil is Philip Church.

*In this AU, Thomas lost important people to him on the month of September. Jen, his older sister, died on the 4th and his wife on the 6th. That's why he remembered them at Washington's petition.

*FUNNY FACTS: Jews have the negative cliché of being miserly. This is thought to come from the event in the New Testament, where Jesus threw the moneylenders out of the Temple (The narrative occurs near the end of the Synoptic Gospels (at Matthew 21:12–17, Mark 11:15–19, and Luke 19:45–48) and near the start in the Gospel of John (at John 2:13–16).) That teaching persisted in Christianity, giving the Jews an undeserved fame, attaching the idea of them being miserly and greedy. During the Middle Ages, the Jews turned into moneylenders, because they weren't allowed to possess lands or be part of a guild; also the Church didn't let Christians to practice usury. Jews had nothing to do with laws that were for Christians, so Kings and nobles needed money, and so, the Church and the State appointed Jews as moneylenders and taxmen. It can also be an exaggeration of Jews sometimes being austere, which is very different. Jews don't believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but he has the initials of the Latin form of "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews [IESVS NAZARENVS REX IVDAEORVM — INRI]", on the top of the Cross by Pilates. (John 19:19-22). The dark joke really was educational xD.
*To live the life of Riley: I don't know how well this expression is known in English, but it means to live a very good life. If you're interested, in Spanish is: "Vivir la vida padre", which literally can be translated into "Living the father life".*

*Reference to the show "El libro gordo de Petete (The Big Book of Petete)". Petete was a little penguin who came from Antarctica, and was the protagonist of a short animated educational film for kids from about 1 to 2 minutes. These shorts were broadcast on television in Argentina in the 70s, also issued in Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Spain. The program showed audiovisual information that illustrated the famous Encyclopedia that gave name to the program: The Big Book of Petete. It was a great encyclopedia of 8 volumes of 400 pages each, which was published weekly during the 70s; was first published in Argentina and later in other Latin American countries and Spain.*
Chapter Summary

James and Dolley go on a special date.
Philip Sr wants to make amends with Alexander.
Thomas and Lafayette's friendship finally makes an appearance.
Something unexpected happens. Or, well, it was expected but not this soon.
Alexander and Thomas being civil.
Adams will never learn.
But Lafayette does and Laurens will never forget.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Madison tried to not show himself as nervous as he was feeling. Especially when it took him half an hour to find a proper spot to park the car, far from the restaurant and had to go by feet. Dolley didn’t complain once. On the contrary, she looped their arms and walked serenely by his side, with an honest smile on her face that managed to calm him down considerably.

After all these years, the woman still had that effect on him, which always do Madison good, as well as her constant support and firm yet gentle demeanour when he thought he wasn’t going to be able to do something. Even if he never got a chance to ask her out personally (neither back in college or now), Madison promised himself he’d try to not lose her friendship again, whatever the end of this date might be. Dolley was one of the best persons he’d met and though he could go on without being his significant other, he didn’t want to try to lose her presence from his life. That was too much to demand from him.

“It’s a lovely night” commented Dolley, her eyes admiring the dark mantle plagued of stars.

He nodded in agreement. “I’m sorry I made you walk this long” he managed to say, at least.

She shook her head rapidly. “Don’t be. This is already one of the best dates I’ve ever been to” she promised.

“It just started” he said, laughing slightly.

“I stand for what I said” she replied, proudly. “In fact,” she added, after a moment of thought, “you could simply have taken me to McDonald’s and made me eat in the car, and it’d still be the best date.
Blame it on the company” she winked at him, making him blush.

He’d tried to tell her he was feeling just the same, when some man came running in the opposite direction and the next thing the pair felt was a pull from him trying to steal Dolley’s purse. By instinct, Madison grabbed the woman’s arm, in fear she could get hurt, while Dolley was fast enough to grab the handle of her purse and pulled back, with enough force and skill to make the thief to fall on his back, groaning in pain as his head hit the pavement.

Madison saw in shock how, without doubting for one second, Dolley decided to start hitting the man with her purse with all her might. The thief curled on himself, covering his head, terrified, asking for mercy and apologising. Meanwhile, Dolley added verbal assaults to his physical punishment.

“What? What did you think, huh? That you could rob me and go scot-free, piece of garbage? Do you like to bully helpless ladies, you scumbag? Well, take this! Take it, you son of a bitch!”

Madison swallowed, terrorized. He took a small step forward and stretched out his hand towards Dolley, not touching her. “Hm, Dolley, I think he’s learnt his lesson” he said, grimacing as he heard the thief crying on the pavement.

Dolley turned her head so fast he shrunk, appearing to be smaller than he actually was. “Do you wanna go next?” she asked him, cuttingly. He shook his head so quickly he almost felt dizzy. “Shut up, then” she ordered.

“Yes, ma’am” he nodded, standing to the side as he let her do.

Madison’s face blushed once again from embarrassment as he saw the people around them stopping and recording it with their phones, some even commenting on Dolley’s favour.

It didn’t go any better when the show was over and some of those people had decided to eat in that restaurant as well.

Maybe because of that James decided to break his habit of not drinking a drop of alcohol if he was going to drive.

He’d tried to control himself. He really did, but without knowing how or when, the two of them had drunk four and a half bottles of wine. Dolley had done most part of the job, but Madison
couldn’t say he wasn’t falling under the spell of alcohol as well. The maître gave them a look but kept his silence when they paid and saw them walking out instead of going directly to one of the cars parked near the building. Or maybe it had a lot to do with what he’d seen Dolley doing to that thief.

Whatever it was, the pair staggered, between laughs and clinging to one another as if any of them were a proper pillar in that moment. They looked around, not remembering how the car looked like and, after three fail attempts, they finally saw one unlocking as James clicked the key fob. He tried to open the driver’s door, but Dolley grabbed his wrist.

“No, no, no” she said, slurring her words. “Y-You can’t drive, Jemmy, you-you’re drunk”

“I’m less drunk than you” he shook his head, trying to climb in.

Dolley grabbed him by the waist and separated him from the door, obstructing it so he couldn’t enter. “No, I can-can’t let you do it”

“Dolley, don’t use my height in your advantage” he admonished, frowning in offense.

“C’mon” she hiccuped, the simple action making her fall on the seat. “S-Sit down… No, inside the… the here!” she explained, when Madison almost sat on the street.

“Here where?”

“The thing, this thing” she said, gesturing towards the vehicle.

“The car?”

“That, that, that…” nodded Dolley, exaggeratedly.

James rounded the car and dropped himself on the passenger’s seat, closing the door a few times until he managed to do it properly. He nodded to himself and then buckled up, a task that also cost him dearly as the damned thing didn’t click as it was supposed to.

“Where’s the wheel now?” asked Dolley at some point.

Madison looked up, seeing her, giving the back to the windshield. “The other way around”

Dolley did as she was told. “You’re so smart… Fuck, I don’t understand why I chose Johnathan before you…” Her grip on the wheel tightened, her knuckles turning white. “Superficial jackass. Two-legged shit. Hope his hair transplant gets infected; the fucking idiot looked like a Nancy…”

“There” declared Madison, satisfied when he had succeeded in his task concerning security. “Seatbelt” he told the woman.

Dolley obliged again. She blinked a few times, looked around her a few times.
“Why aren’t we moving??”

“Ah, I didn’t give you the keys…”

Madison looked inside his pockets until he finally found it. Dolley was looking through the window with a lost glare. He had to call her to catch her attention. The teacher nodded, thankful, and then proceeded to fail each attempt to put the key in the hole.

“Are you sure you can drive?” asked James, resting his head against the glass.

“Yes, yes, yes” she nodded, frowning and narrowing her eyes. “It… It’s this hole… It hates me. Hahahahaha” She succeeded. “Finally!”

The car started and Dolley drove backwards, getting the back of the car on the pavement and making them both to shake in their seats. She then drove forward, hitting the car they had in front of them.

“Careful!”

“Shut up, you’re distracting me!” she complained, as she now hit the car they had behind. “Fucking Jeeps… What are their owners trying to compensate?”

She kept hitting the cars as she tried to leave the place, growing more frustrated at each attempt. Their heads bumping back and forth.

“Let me… Let me drive” Madison pleaded again, now massaging his aching neck.

“Nooo” she growled, her cheeks now also red from anger. “Why the fuck did you park in here?”

“The only spot I found!” Madison defended himself. Another shake of the car made him hit his head against the headrest. “Ow! Dolley!”

“Got it!” she proclaimed, happily, when she finally could turn the car a little bit and get out of there, not before hitting the car one last time. “Ha, ha! That spot thought it could-could win, b-but I’m better!”

“Slow down, slow down, there’s a stop in there!”

Dolley stepped on the breaks forcefully, a car passing in front of them at full speed and honking at them. Dolley took her arm out her window and showed the driver the middle finger.
“Fuck you too!”

“He was in the right there!”

“Shut up! You’re making me lose concentration” Dolley looked at both sides. “Is anybody coming?”

“No, no, go” instructed James. He frowned when he saw the woman driving to the other lane. “No, the lane where that car almost hit us! This goes in the opposite direction!”

“Don’t scream at me!”

“Let me drive” he insisted again, wanting to get a hold on the wheel.

Dolley slapped his hands away. “Shoo! Shoo!”

“Look at the road!”

“Get your hands off the wheel!”

“You’re gonna kill us! Stop and let me drive!”

“What, are you saying it because of, what, because I’m-I’m partly Asian or something?”

“No, of course not!”

“Well, fuck you, you racist, I don’t drive like this for being Asian!”

“I already know that, I didn’t…!”

“I drive like this because I’ve got no license!”

“What?!” exclaimed Madison. “Dolley, pull over!”

“No, no, I’m getting the hang of it!”

“Dolley…”

A bright light coming their way blinded them both, as a noisy honk made them cringe. Madison turned the wheel to the correct lane, barely grazing the trunk that almost hit them and that kept going on its way. The pair’s delayed scream intensified when none of them let go of the wheel and collided directly against a streetlight.

“If this date ends with me able to skip the first week of class, it’ll totally be insuperable” decided Dolley, after a moment of silence.
“Does it hurt too much, Peggy?”

The youngest Schuyler sister groaned in pain from the couch, hugging her belly. Eliza caressed her hair to calm her down.

“Okay, honey, I’ll prepare you a hot tea as soon as Dad leaves the kitchen free” she raised her voice to be heard through the closed door. “What is he doing there, anyways?”

“I think he’s trying to poison Daddy” explained Angie, watching her aunt with a frown of concern.

“Angelica, don’t talk that way” admonished Eliza.

Her sister appeared just there. “I haven’t even opened my mouth”

“Not you, my daughter”

“Ah… Why did she say?”

“She says that Dad’s trying to poison Alexander”

“Ah… Sounds legitimate”

“See?” said the little girl, cockily.

“Angelica, stop being a bad influence on my children”

“That’s Alexander. I’m the cool aunt because I say what I think”

The balcony’s doors swung opened then. Phil came in running, a bright smile on his face and held his notebook above his head, to show it to his mother.

“Mummy, mummy, look! I was able to resolve two exercises on my own” he said, jumping from excitement.

“Really?” said Angelica, beaming with happiness. She took a look at the notebook. “Good job, Phil!” she congratulated, ruffling his hair.

The kid squeaked from happiness and went to hug his uncle when Alexander had walked to them. “Thanks, uncle Alex!”

“It’s nothing, kid” laughed the Caribbean, patting his head.

“Good to know we won’t spend money on tutorial classes” commented Eliza, smiling at the scene.

“Hey, I’m not a teacher” hurried to remind Alexander.

“The two meetings you’ve taken care of say the opposite” teased Angelica.
Church went down in that moment and his son also ran to him to show him his success. Church shared his wife’s happiness in a blink of an eye.

“Thank you, Alexander, really” he said, hugging his son.

“It’s nothing” assured the financer.

The kitchen door swung opened, interrupting the family moment. Philip Sr appeared with a few dishes he rushed to put on the table, as he proclaimed:

“Dinner’s ready!”

Angie made a dramatic sound effect, making everybody but Eliza to contain a laugh. Her mother hushed her and the girl looked down, biting her bottom lip to not laugh out loud and made Eliza angrier.

“Let the poor girl have her fun” defended Alexander, throwing a smile of rapport to his daughter.

Eliza rolled her eyes but let them be.

They sat on the table, chatting amicably. Peggy was the last one to take a seat, still feeling bad.

“What have you cooked, Dad?” asked Angelica.

“I made an apology-dinner” informed Philip Sr.

“Oh, gosh, who are you going to ask for money?”

“Alexander!” gasped Eliza.

“Or worse, maybe he wants to come live with one of us” theorized Church.

Angelica threw an accusatory look in her father’s direction. “Dad, did you lose the house for one of your stupid bets?”

“No, I…”

“Well, he isn’t moving to our house” hurried to say Alexander, gaining a dirty glare from Eliza.

“Neither to ours!” complained Church.
"Hey, I’ve got four children, you only have one"

"You’ve got three"

"Are you forgetting about Peggy? She’s right here, John. Shame on you"

"But…!"

"I’m not going to move to anybody’s house, alright?” interrupted Philip Sr. “And thank you for showing me how much you love me”

"Same” retorted Alexander, bitterly.

Eliza nudged him on the arm. “Stop it”

“As I was saying” continued the oldest. “Betsey made me see I was being very unfair to you” he explained, looking directly at Alexander, who raised a suspicious eyebrow in his direction. “And I decided to make you dinner as a way of showing you I want to start over”

“Aw, Dad, that’s so thoughtful!” complimented Eliza, a hand on her chest.

“He’s never done something like this for me” pointed out Church, his nose scrunched up in disgust as he saw the dishes that were on the table. “Now, I won’t eat” he decided, childishly.

“Ay, John…” sighed Angelica, rolling her eyes.

“Better, more for us” declared Philip Sr barely paying him any attention. He continued to explain. “And this is not any food. I looked for dishes from Honduras, so you feel like home”

They exchanged a glare Philip Sr didn’t notice.

“Um, Dad…” tried to correct Eliza.

“Honey, honey, I’m not finished” said her father, gently. “I made you” he kept going, showing him the dishes. “Grilled beef after marinating with lemon, vinegar, sugar, black pepper, and cumin seed; this flour tortilla; an *enchilada*…”

“Enchilada” corrected Phil.

“Hush, kid, adults are talking” silenced his grandfather. “Soup of black bean; steamed corncake with a filling of onion, potatoes, rice, and tomatoes, and a salad of…”

“Dad” Eliza interrupted again, more urgently. “Alexander’s from Nevis”

“… …” The man looked at his son-in-law. “Are you sure?”

“I’ve spent fourteen years there, yeah” nodded the financer, tapping his foot on the carpet.

“… … Well, Nevis, Honduras, Peru… All those islands are on the same area…”

“Peru and Honduras are not islands” corrected Philip.

“You haven’t started school yet and you already think to be smart?” spat the grandfather.
“Dad, it’s alright” assured Eliza, waving a hand. “The intention is what counts”

“If he had any good intention, he’d have gotten it right” complained her husband.

“Well, I’m not to blame if you were born in the butt of the world!”

“Dad!” said Angelica and Eliza at the same time.

“Well, it’s true! I’ve spent hours in the kitchen and this ungrateful brat complains! Then, you’d whine about me hating you!”

“I didn’t, it was my wife” responded Alexander, shrugging.

Eliza threw him an irritated glare. “Yes, because your wife is sick of seeing her father and husband fighting like two proudful kids!” she stated. She took one of the dishes randomly and put it in front of Alexander. “I won’t tolerate it any longer. He got the place wrong, but he tried! And you’re going to eat it!”

“Betsey…”

“No! Eat it!”

Alexander sighed in resignation, grabbed the fork with bad manners and began to eat the salad his wife had given him.

“Thank you, honey” nodded Philip Sr.

“What’s that?” asked Pip, disgusted.

“Philip, don’t put faces on the dish” reprehended Eliza, for the millionth time.

“It’s a seafood salad I learnt to…” began to explain his grandfather, proud of his job.

He never got to end the sentence as Alexander choked on what he had eaten, panic spreading across his features, as well as on everyone else’s. He spit what he’d eaten and coughed, trying to catch his breath.

“If you don’t like that much, just say it” spat his father-in-law.

Eliza helped her husband to sit on the floor, back against the wall. “Dad, he’s allergic to seafood!” she informed, in a scream.

“Oh, come on, he’s doing it on purpose!” complained the man, hitting the table with one punch, as they all (but Peggy) went to Alexander’s aid.

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” asked Eliza, her voice shaking from fear.

“He wanted to poison him!” exclaimed Angie, jumping from her seat and running to her father’s
side. “I told you all!”

“Nice going, Dad” reprimanded Angelica, fanning Alexander, who had turned red.

Her father frowned at them, infuriated. “Always making me look bad. Die, bastard, die!” he ended up saying, before starting to eat on his own.

“Grandpa!” said Phil, horrified.

“Someone call an ambulance!” ordered Eliza, crying from powerlessness.

Peggy let out a scream, startling them all and making Church to almost drop his phone.

“Gee! Aunt Peggy peed herself!” commented Angie, as he and the rest saw the little pound beneath her seat.

“Her water broke” explained Phil.

“John, told them we need a couple of ambulances!” said Angelica, going to help her sister.

“I’m on it, I’m on it!” assured Church, nodding with nervousness.

Philip shook his head and told his cousin and sister: “If this family don’t make at least two messes at the same time, this is not a proper family vacation”

Church noticed baby John in his highchair, laughing as he saw the whole situation. Turning to his wife, he said: “Huh, he takes after you”

The joke earned him a whack on the head.

Maria parked the car in front of an old looking hostel that had seen better years. Thomas frowned at it, the falling night not helping to his suspicious and fears to died down. Instinctively, he grabbed his daughter’s hand, calling the attention of the little girl, who was watching her surroundings with curious eyes. He sighed in frustration. He didn’t like to bring Polly here, but he didn’t want to leave her alone back at home.

“Stay here in the car with Libby and Maria, alright?” he whispered to her, right after planting a kiss on her forehead.

“Alright”

“Don’t get out of the car, and stay with them” he insisted.
“Alright, Daddy” said the girl, leaning back on her seat and playing with her bracelet.

“We’ll be with her all the time” promised Libby, giving him a reassuring smile.

Thomas nodded, still unsure. “Try not catch anybody’s attention. Here, you get AIDS just by getting looked at” he said, giving Polly another kiss and a last squeeze on her hand, before stepping out of the car.

Thomas walked the noisy metal steps, frowning and trying not to think negative thoughts. He looked at all the doors lined up, some of them with a vacant space where the number of the room should’ve been. He frowned his lips counting how many there were, praying for some compassion that’d help him get the one Gilbert was staying in among the first ones.

A strident sound broke the silence of the night. Thomas whipped around, frowning down at the car as he saw Maria with her hand glued to the honk, looking out her window with a poker face. Libby and Polly exchanged a glare and a few words Thomas couldn’t comprehend from his distance. He gesticulated to make the receptionist stop but she kept going, ignoring his pleas. In fact, they only made the situation worse, as Maria stuck her head out the window and screamed the nickname of ‘Laf’ at the top of her lungs.

Thomas stiffened when he started to listen a series of doors being opened, along with curtains and whispering or even shouts demanding silence. Finally, the Frenchman appeared at the other side of the hallway, a baffled expression on his face. He saw the tall figure of Jefferson a few meters away, making his surprise to grow. The honk stopped sounding, and Thomas’ face felt hotter than he’d ever felt when he realised they were curious eyes looking through some windows, commenting under their breaths.

“Thomas” called Lafayette. “What’re you doing in here?”

“He wanted to talk to you!” replied Maria.

Thomas threw her a glare. “There! Hush already!”

The girl shrugged. “Only wanted to help…”

“Hold on a minute, Gilbert”

Lafayette rolled his eyes with tedium when he saw the normal speed Thomas was advancing towards him. He walked in his room again, leaving the door open.
“Gilbert, this is getting out of hand. Just go back home and talk it out” began Thomas taking a seat on the bed, which showed a bit unsteady at their weight. And that was still the thing with best condition in that place.

Lafayette shook his head, affected. “No, there’s nothing more to talk”

“They need you back at home”

“No, they need what I do for them without asking for something in return”

“Mulligan’s been totally downcast since you left”

“Good. Maybe this way he appreciates what he had”

“He does”

“Sure…”

“According to Laurens, he was crying in distress before he left to ask me for help”

“And what about him?”

“… He’s… upset”

“Upset how?”

“I don’t know him, I can’t explain”

“The hell you don’t. He doesn’t give a damn about what happened, right?”

“Well, he… He’s upset” insisted Thomas.

“He barely blinked an eye when I left, right?” pressured Lafayette, his jaw tensed.

“I wasn’t looking” wandered the secretary.

“He doesn’t care at all” concluded Lafayette. “He only cares about him, him, him and if he has a little time left, it’ll be dedicated to him as well”

“Look, if you don’t want to fix things with Laurens, I won’t get in there” said Thomas, seeing they were going nowhere. “But admit you overreacted”

“Overreacted?” echoed Lafayette, gasping dramatically.

“After all you’ve told me you put up with on a daily basis with those two? Yes, you did” nodded Thomas. “I remember one day my brother took my car without asking me for it first and the next day I sat on a vomit. And did I break it off with everybody and disappear from sight? No. I got the car cleaned, burnt those pants and went to buy some new ones…” With a nostalgic tone, he added. “God, that was life”

“You don’t understand it, Thomas” argued Lafayette, frowning. “I’m the first one to get up and the last one to go to sleep; I bear with their bickering 24/7; I defend John more times than he deserves; I bought him a dog he doesn’t even take care of and that my boyfriend starts to prefer over me; I prepare their clothes and breakfast all mornings before we go to work; I refuse to all my inheritance and started anew in a whole different country for love and all that for what?” His eyes had begun to water as he recalled his sacrifices and deeds. “All of that so I drink a can filled with pee as a reward”
he answered his own question. He started to sob uncontrollably. “All for a can full of pee”

He burst into tears and hugged Thomas, who returned the gesture a bit hesitant, rethinking his life until he’d found himself in this position, living this.

“And they haven’t even come here” continued Lafayette, once his crying had calmed down a bit. “They sent you here, because they don’t have the balls to come confront me or ask for forgiveness in my face. No. Just stupid phone calls. If they loved me that much, they’d come here and talk it out with me in the face!”

“Yes, that’s true…” conceded Thomas.

“But nooo, they send you here. Selfish cowards” He sniffed.

“Sorta, yes” nodded the secretary.

A knock on the door startled the secretary, who looked behind, seeing Maria at the doorframe. She raised one eyebrow at the state the Frenchman was in.

“You’re a true cheerer, Lemongrab”

“That’s why I refuse to do this in the first place”

That only made Lafayette to sob harder.

“Nice” commented Maria sarcastically. “Yo, Laf, your boyfriend’s here”

He looked up at her in disbelief. “Really?”

“Yeah, a cab dropped them off”

Lafayette ended the hug, then, and went to the window, seeing Hercules and Laurens talking with Libby. A warm sensation spread across his chest and a small smile crept onto his face.

“Oh, they truly came” he commented, moved.

“See?” said Thomas, looking out as well with Maria.

“That’s the most romantic thing anyone has ever done for me”

“What kind of partners did you have?” asked the receptionist.
“Not now, Betty Boop” warned Thomas.

Lafayette started daydreaming in the meanwhile. “He’d come here, we’d sort it out, we’d cry and hug and he’d take me back home, like a true Prince Char…”

A series of honks interrupted his fantasy. Lafayette’s expression changed drastically, and he whipped around to face the window, seeing Hercules with the hand on the wheel, looking directly at the room they were in.

“Did he just honk at me???” asked Lafayette, totally indignant and furious.

“Oh, God” muttered Thomas and Maria, frowning in concern.

“That motherfu…”

Lafayette sprinted to the door, swung it open and stepped out, arms in akimbo and face red. He saw his two friends waving at him, and that simply made him snap.

“Are you two serious right now?!” he screamed.

Both exchanged a glare and then shrugged. Looking back at him they vocalised they confusion. “Eh?”

“Honking at me? Really? You could be a bit more romantic and considerate after all I’ve been through!”

“…What?” asked Hercules, more lost at each thing he said.

“You could’ve come here and take me back home in your arms! You’re lamer than a water yogurt!”

“… … But what’s wrong now, man?” asked Hercules, matching his annoyance.

That only made Lafayette’s mood to go worse. “You could at least come here, damnit!”

“… … I had to get out to come here even after I was already on my pyjamas”

“You’re nothing but an egocentric!”

“We were not the ones who abandoned the household, leaving two useless to their own devices!” admonished Laurens.

“Hey” complained Hercules.

“That’s all you deserve!” argued Lafayette, red in the face. “It’s time for you to value me or I won’t be back!”

“What do you want now from us? Roses, chocolates? You knew I didn’t like those fripperies before we started dating!”
“I’m not asking for material things! I want more!”

“I’d lay down my life for you!” admitted Hercules, without hesitation.

“Those are just words, no matter how pretty! In the end, I sacrificed a lot of things for this relationship and the only thing I’ve got in exchange is drinking urine while seeing how Simmons won the stupid contest! Without being in need, to make matters worse!”

Hercules rolled his eyes. “Jesus Christ, are you still stung for that man? Ignore him!”

“I can’t, it’s not fair!”

“Yes, you can. He can’t compare himself to you! Okay, he’s more handsome and luckier and way wealthier than you, but he lacks your golden heart. Everybody does. So stop bitching about what other people have achieved because you’re gonna get even further just by your beautiful personality, the one I fell in love with”

“… Really?”

“Yes. Now, drop this shit and get in the car”

“… … That’s the most beautiful thing anyone has ever said to me” sobbed Lafayette, a hand on his chest.

“Again, what kind of partners did you have?” asked Maria.

“Let it be…” advised Thomas, massaging his temples.

Lafayette ran downstairs and to Hercules, hugging him. Both men shared a kiss as the people watching it all from their rooms applauded. Laurens got in between once the couple had finished.

“Can we go back home? I’m hungry”

“Yes, yes” nodded Lafayette, looping his arm with his boyfriend’s.

Maria scrunched up her nose in disagreement. “Well, maybe I’m weird, but if I’d been in his position, I’d have killed them both in their sleep”

“Me too” nodded Thomas, walking to the car with her. “But leave them, it’s finally over and that’s all that matters”

“In the end, I missed my movie” she commented, saddened.

“Don’t you have enough with this one?” he commented, opening the door car for her, to which she looked slightly surprised but then nodded in gratitude.
Peggy’s screams could be heard all over the third floor where they were taking care of her. Actually, maybe the whole building might be hearing her. Her relatives had to leave the room she was in when they felt their ears hurting too much. Angelica and Church made turns to console the girl with their presence. Eliza came back, seeing her brother-in-law waiting with the children outside. Philip was the first one to see her and his worries evaporated rapidly when he saw his father trotting right behind her, already putting up a fight.

“Alexander, you must be resting!” said Eliza, fed up.

“I’m alright” insisted the man.

“You just had an allergic attack!”

“I’m tolerant to pain”

“Alexander, go back to your room or I’ll call the doctors so they sedate you!”

“You won’t dare!”

“Are you feeling better, Dad?” asked Angie.

“Can’t you see him making a scene?” retorted Philip.

Alexander frowned at them. “Look, kid, you’re surpassing the line”

“Don’t reprimand the kid for being sincere” said Eliza, throwing a sigh to the air. “Where’s Dad?”

“Your father went for something to eat” answered Church, passing John to the arms of his mother, as the baby was inclining to the woman, eagerly.

Hamilton scoffed as his wife took the baby. “Huh, who will he try to kill now?”

“Alexander” warned Eliza.

A bloodcurdling scream made them all startle. Angelica walked out, rubbing her temples.

“John, your turn” she said, ill-temperedly.

“Is it really necessary?”

“John”

“How’s she doing?” asked Alexander.

Another scream that made them all cringe.

“How do you think she’s doing?” asked Angelica, between gritted teeth.
“Haven’t they gotten her an epidural?”

“They can’t. The doctor said her platelets are low” explained Eliza.

The Caribbean’s eyes widened at that. “My God, the poor soul’s gonna flip out…”

Peggy screamed louder than before. Angelica covered her ears.

“Someone go to her and make her stop!”

“I’ll go” proposed Alexander.

“As long as he doesn’t go back to his room” started to say Eliza.

“I’m going to help my favourite sister” he blurted out.

“So disagreeable…”

Philip and Angie had already fallen asleep, not disturbed by the screams of their aunt. Phil and Church looked at them with envy. The kid was already asleep on his feet, supporting his weight by the wall. Church nodded at the doctor when he came back and both men shared a grimace when Peggy screamed once again from pure pain.

The family looked at the door with pleading eyes. Peggy was holding the sides of the bed with all her might, pale, with pearls of sweat adorning her features contorted in pain, gasping and sobbing. Eliza was holding one of her wrists, she and Angelica frowning in empathy for their little sister. Alexander and Philip Sr were at the other side of the bed, with the younger man caressing her hair and telling her reassuring words to give her some kind of comfort while the father of the girl patted her on the leg a few times, telling her she was doing good.

“Doc, please, drug me!” begged the girl, between tears, as soon as she saw the man standing there. “Morphine or… Or whatever, but drug me”

“Keep going, Miss Schuyler, you’re doing good” assured the man.

“Doctor, how long will this take?” asked Philip Sr, in distress.

“Just a little bit” he answered, after checking.

“A little bit?” repeated Angelica, knitting her brows. “How much is that?”

“Sir, we’ve been here for nine hours” complained Alexander.
“She’s a first-time mom, right?”

“Yeah” they all replied.

“Huh, you’d have time to sleep three naps of four hours” he said, the final of his sentence being met by another scream.

“How?” complained Philip Sr.

“Well, I’ll come back later” he promised, walking out of the room.

“Noooo! Don’t leave meeee!” cried the youngest. “Take this thing out of meee!”

“C’mon, Pegs, just a little effort” supported Alexander. He received a slap.

“Peggy!” exclaimed Eliza.

“Fuck you, you don’t understand this pain!” hollered Peggy.

“It’s stinging” complained Alexander, as Philip Sr smirked in his direction.

“God… And there are women who do this more than once?” kept talking Peggy. She looked up at her sisters, with watery eyes. “Why? Why?”

“And all for two people you don’t even know” chimed in Philip Sr. “All because you wanted to be the Good Samaritan”

“Sir, the girl’s already under a lot” complained Hamilton.

“Dad, it’s not the time” reprimanded Angelica.

“I should’ve asked those people for money…” she groaned.

“Peggy!” gasped Angelica

“True, you’re very stupid sometimes” nodded Philip Sr.

“Dad!” exclaimed Eliza.

“How long?” asked Church, appearing at the door.

“A bit” they all responded.

“You said that an hour ago!” whined Phil.

Angelica frowned down at him. “Kid, go wait with your cousins”

“They all fell asleep… Lucky ones…”

“It’s normal, having this man as a father…” said Philip Sr, pointing at the Caribbean.

“At least I won’t try to kill my son-in-law with a salad” retorted Alexander.

“Wait until your daughter grows up and comes home with a guy like this. Just you wait”

“Like how?” asked Alexander, straightening in front of the older man.
“Alexander, don’t” warned Eliza.

Peggy screamed once again, making the tension to disappear and returning the group’s attention to her.

“I’m going to fetch some water” said Alexander, wanting to breathe some air.

“Good” nodded Eliza, almost with pride.

“It’s gonna be a long night tonight” he muttered once he was out, making Church to frown his lips.

Everybody’s energy was almost drained by the time the labour started. Peggy was the only one with enough strengths to keep screaming at the top of her lungs and hold Eliza’s hand until the middle Schuyler sister couldn’t feel the circulation.

“Aaaaaah, cut my belly and take the alien out of there already!” she cried.

“Don’t say those things…” said Angelica, weakly.

“Push, Peggy, push” advised Church, receiving a hard slap. “Ow!”

“Welcome to the club” said Alexander.

Philip Sr looked in both directions, at the doorframe. “Where the hell is that doctor?” He tapped Phil on the head, who was holding the baby. “Kid, go look for him”

“Dad, don’t send my son away!” reprimand Angelica.

“I’m sending the oldest!”

“Dad!”

“Do I go or not?” asked Phil, already passing the baby to his namesake.

“No!” hollered his mother.

Philip Sr rolled his eyes in frustration at his oldest daughter. “Who is the worst person the child could bump into in a hospital at night? A fat man with indigestion?”

“Dad, I said no!”

“We don’t need more screaming!” complained Eliza, trying to get her hand away from the tight grip of her sister.
“Someone get the stupid doctor!” ordered Peggy.

“Dad, why don’t you go?” proposed Angelica.

“No, I won’t miss the labour of my youngest daughter” he replied, indignantly.

“You didn’t even agree with it in the first place!”

“So? She’s still my daughter”

“All labours and babies are the same, anyways” shrugged Alexander.

“Thank you, Daddy…” commented Angie.

Eliza and Peggy screamed at the same time.

“Peggy, please, let my hand go!” cried Eliza, in despair.

“This is ridiculous, we can’t wait until the doctor decides to appear” said Alexander, going to the sink the room had to wash his hands.

“What do you think you’re doing?” asked Angelica, narrowing her eyes.

“I’ll take care of it”

“You?”

“Whoever, just get it out!” pleaded Peggy.

“Let me help” said Church, washing his hands right after.

Philip Sr and the kids walked to the side of the bed across Angelica and Eliza.

“We can see the head” informed Church.

“Push, Peggy, push” instructed Alexander.

“Why the hell do you think I’m doing? Macramé?” groaned the youngest Schuyler.

“Just a little bit more” encouraged Angelica.

“It’s almost over, honey” said Philip Sr.

Peggy grumbled as she strained, her face totally wrinkled from the force used. “Why isn’t it out yet?” she whined.

“They’ve been hearing us for nine months” pointed out Philip. “It’s normal the poor baby doesn’t wanna get out”
Alexander threw him a glare. “Kid, if you’re going to be an impertinent, wait outside”
“I took this from you and you’re gonna put up with it” challenged the boy.

Philip Sr whistled, in surprise. “Damn, you’re gonna have it rough when he’s a teenager”

“People, focus!” said Angelica, clapping her hands for emphasis.

“There, there!” said Church, nudging Alexander.

Peggy let out a last yell before letting her head drop on the pillow, gasping for air. She let go of Eliza’s hand, who rubbed it in pain. She looked at her older sister.

“I thought they’d have to amputate it” she commented, shaking the numb hand and whining under her breath.

In the meantime, Alexander had the new-born in his arms, Church helping him by grabbing the head, both smiling despite themselves.

“It’s a boy” said Church.

“Aaaw” they all, but Peggy, said, fondly.

“But he’s so scared, he has the penis inside” he commented, narrowing his eyes.

Alexander took the baby all by himself, with an eye-roll. “It’s a girl, you idiot”

“Aaaaw” they all repeated.

“Can we see her?” begged Angie, jumping in spot and failing to have a clear look. Her younger brother babbled in agreement.

“Why isn’t she crying?” asked Peggy, before her brother-in-law could answer. “Why isn’t the baby crying?” she asked again, in fear.

Just in that moment, the new-born sneezed and started to cry loudly.

“Why is she crying?!” asked Peggy now, equally afraid. “Why is the baby crying?!”

“It’s alright, sweetheart, you’re not part of this family, don’t be scared” Alexander assured the baby, rocking her by instinct.

The doctor appeared then, with a biscuit and a coffee in his hands. He froze once he saw the
little one in Alexander’s arm and the mother whining from the bed.

“Already??” he asked, perplexed.

“What do you think” spat Angelica.

“You’re not getting paid” assured Philip Sr.

“Dad, we can’t do that” pointed out Eliza.

“Besides, Peggy and the baby must stay here for a few days” added Church.

“Well, I’ll fall ill after this is over and I’ll leave without paying” swore Philip Sr.

Adams stood in front of the door for what felt like ages. He took a deep breath, gathering his courage to finally raised his free hand and knock on the door. His grip on the handle of his suitcase tightening as he heard the footsteps approaching. Well aware of his wife’s habit of looking through the peephole before opening the front door, he smiled sheepishly, gaining a tedium sigh from the other side.

The door swung open, Abigail at the other side with the poker-face she used in each case she got.

“What” she spat, dryly.

“Goodnight, love” replied Adams, trying to keep things cool.

“Now I’m ‘love’? I thought I was the witch who destroyed your dreams of becoming a farmer” she threw in his face, crossing both arms, sternly.

“C’mon, hun, it was the heat of the moment” Adams excused himself, scratching the back of his head.

“You also asked me for my sister’s phone number before abandoning me like the disgusting pig you are” recalled Abigail, eyes narrowed with resentment.

“Another joke. You never got my humour”

“And I’m not interested anymore” she declared.

“Abby, please, I was fired this morning”

“About time” she nodded, in agreement.
“And I can’t stay at the office”

“It’s normal if you got fired”

“Abby…”

“Goodbye, John”

He stopped the door about to be closed. “But where will I go?”

“Don’t know. With my sister, who is hotter than me?” she proposed, with rancour, before closing the door in his noses.

Adams frowned enraged at the close door. “Alright, nice. I hope you celebrate your new life so hard you end up broke and can’t pay the house and you end up in the streets. There’ll be no room for you under my bridge!” he grumbled, enraged.

“I’m still here, listening” revealed Abigail, boringly.

“… Can’t a man vent now or what?” he complained.

He turned around, unwillingly, and then moved his suitcase above his head in circles, for pure frustration, his face growing redder by the second. When he felt a bit better, he put the suitcase on the pavement and kept going.

_________________________________________________________________

“Believe me, Adams, you wouldn’t like to live in here”

Adams knew it was pathetic to beg for colleagues (or ex colleagues, at much) for a roof over his head, but he’d left his former house that morning without caring for his wallet. A bad move, if you asked him now. He knew he could count with a few… Okay, a couple. And he didn’t want to move with Burr simply because he had two children and he liked his beauty sleep. So, Lafayette it was. But his hopes had been crashed as he heard the Frenchman’s response.

“Come on, you know I only sleep. There are days in which I sleep so much I don’t eat” he tried to convince.

Laurens appeared right at some door inside of the house, frowning at him. “Weren’t you the same one who once told Alexander he was a fucking beggar in comparison with you? Then, go, man, hurry, go to a fucking motel with all your fortune. Gooo!” He’d started to howl like a wolf. “Goooooo. gooooooo, oooooout, oooout!”

“Johnny, resent is not nice!” admonished Lafayette, in the meantime.
“Shut up, you leech!”

“Hercules!” reprehended Lafayette, kicking the floor slightly.

Laurens looked irritated at his friend. “I’ll eat all of your chips!” he swore, sprinting to the kitchen.

“No, John!” Hercules ran out of the living room. He stopped for a moment to throw a hateful glare to Adams. “But he was right: go to a fucking motel or under a bench of the park! My limit of squatters is zero and I’m already surpassing it!”

Lafayette sighed at the fight he could hear from the kitchen as soon as Hercules walked in. He turned to the unemployed man with an apologetic look. “See? And you didn’t even put a foot in!”

And with that, he closed the door in his face as well, not waiting for a rebuttal and not caring for his puppy eyes. Adams kicked his suitcase with fury.

“Assholes, the three of you. I hope one day the creole’s friendship won’t be enough for Washington to not fire that useless asshole and the tension grows worse once he doesn’t even have his own salary and you break up in the most heart-breaking way possible!”

“I’m still here, listening!” admitted Lafayette, minding his curse as much as his wife had done.

“Go to hell, fuckers” he muttered, turning around, chin raised in pride.

Thomas couldn’t fall asleep as he saw the time passing by and no trace of James. As far as he knew, his friend and Dolley had gone out just to have dinner, and if something else had happened, James would’ve sent him a text. Which hadn’t been the case.

He finally could let out a breath he didn’t even realise he’d been holding when he heard the doorbell. He trotted to the front door, taking a look through the peephole before opening, just in case, and opened, not finding anyone at the other side. Confused, he was about to close the door again when Adams jumped from the side, startling the southerner.

“For the love of God, Adams” gasped Thomas, a hand on his chest. “What were you doing there, hidden like a Muppet?”

“Nothing, I was walking around the neighbourhood and decided to drop by to say hello” made up Adams, faking a friendly tone.

“Don’t say” drawled Thomas, not buying it.
“Yeah, and now that I’m here, with suitcase and all, I thought ‘Well, let’s drop by for the night… and a few days’”

“Excuse me?” exclaimed Thomas, as Adams pushed him out of the way and made himself in.

“Just a few days” promised Adams, nonchalantly.

Thomas grabbed the suitcase and pulled on the opposite direction. “No, no, in this house is not allowed to get in with a suitcase” he declared.

“Abby left me” he sobbed.

“ Took the poor woman long enough…”

Adams frowned as he whined. “C’m on, Thomas, I’m going through a rough path!”

“So was I and you didn’t hesitate in making it worse”

“Don’t be so resentful!”

“Adams, get out of here, I’ll only warn you once”

“I’ll curl up in the corner of the living room, right beside the TV” he promised, pointing at the place with his chin as he kept pulling the suitcase towards him.

“I said no”

“I won’t be a bother!”

“Adams, you’re always a bother!” exclaimed Thomas, both men stopping the struggling at the same time after that declaration. “You’re nothing but a human mess that fails at everything he does. As a husband, as a father, as a lawyer, as a friend… With that stupid lottery, just because you didn’t check the numbers right before flipping us all off”

“Hey, life’s not been nice to me, that’s true. But I consider myself a successful man” retorted Adams, hurt.

“You’re a walking calamity, Adams. A zero to the left side*, a disgrace to everybody that meets you”

“Well, that’s enough, don’t you think?” complained Adams, with teary eyes. “I only had bad luck”

“I’m the one who had bad luck by having you in my life” concluded Thomas. “Fend for yourself, but don’t come back near me”

Adams looked at him for a moment, then nodded. “Alright, I understand”

“Good”

“You’re hurt. But we’ll sort it out while I’m here”

“What. No, no, no… Adams!”

Thomas retraced his paces to close the front door as he saw Adams walking in the room by
the end of the hall. Somebody pushed the front door open from the other side, and Thomas saw James wobbling in.

“Where were you?” asked the secretary, as he raised an eyebrow at him.

“Having dinner, I told you”

“Until this late?”

“Yeah… Um… I… I hit your car on the way back…”

“What?” exclaimed Thomas, turning to see the vehicle parked outside, with the whole front destroyed. “What the hell did you do??”

“Nothing, eh… I little bug startled us and I lose control for a moment, but it’s barely noticed”

“Barely noticed? What kind of bug was it? Where did you take her to dinner, to Jurassic Park?” asked Thomas in a hurry, furiously.

“Can we talk about it tomorrow?” pleaded James, with a hand against his pounding head.

“If you’re old enough to drive back home drunk and destroy my car, you’re old enough to give me explanations!”

“Yes, but tomorrow” decided James, as his friend muttered curses under his breath. He frowned as his bedroom door wouldn’t open. “Why is my door locked?”

“Adams learned from you” spat the secretary. “And why does your door have a lock in the first place?

“I like my intimacy”

“Intimacy? That’s the last thing I needed to hear in here…”

“Gee, man, what’s wrong with you tonight? Do you have the man-o-pause?”

“I’ve got two ungrateful bastards living off of me, that’s all I have”

“Look, goodnight. I’ll talk to you tomorrow when you’ve calmed down”

“Wait, now I’m the one who deserves a reprimand…”

“Where do I sleep tonight?”

“On the couch or on the floor, I don’t fucking mind”

“Now, for obnoxious, I’ll sleep on your bed”

“Yeah? Good luck going upstairs…”

Thomas slammed the door shut, hearing a demanding ‘sssh’ from Adams. He clicked his tongue in annoyance as he made his way to the living room.
“Sleeping on the couch in my own house. Perfect. This couldn’t get any better” he complained with dry sarcasm.

He turned around when he heard the front door unlocking and opening slowly. Patsy’s head stuck out, moving to both sides to see if the cost was clear. She froze when she saw her father standing there. She walked back as silently as she’d intended to enter the house.

“Patsy, come in, I already saw you, you idiot!” snapped Thomas. “What kind of hours to come back these are?”

“And what kind of hours to be awake these are?” retorted the teenager, shutting the door. “You’re not that young”

“Look, brat, go to your room, we’ll talk tomorrow. It’s been a hell of a day”

“Pay it with who are to blame”

“You’re part of that group”

“Sure…”

“Oh, Alexander, I wasn’t expecting you to be back!” commented Laurens, as soon as he saw the immigrant walking in the break room. “Thought you still had a couple of weeks more of holidays?”

“Look, shut up. I don’t want to know more about holidays” was the greet he received from the financer.

“What happened?” asked Burr, sat at the table with the HR manager.

“Nothing, no-warm greetings, tutoring classes with no salary and a deadly salad” summed up Alexander, serving himself a mug of coffee. “Oh, and Peggy giving birth to a child that cries more than she breathes and that triggers my son to imitate her in un-harmony. I needed to run away”

“The father and husband of the year” commented Burr, sarcastically.

“Ah, true, the baby” nodded Laurens. “Lafayette hasn’t told you anything about the parents yet?”

“You live with him” pointed out Aaron. “Wouldn’t you know first as he commented it with Hercules?”

“Burr, unlike you, some have lives and no time to snoop around”

“But if you’re the nosier of the office!”
“Only Peggy could be almost nine months along, feel a pain in her belly and think they’re cramps for getting cold” commented Alexander, shaking his head with resignation.

“In her defence, she went into early labour” said Aaron.

Laurens scoffed. “The poor little one couldn’t stand their bickering anymore, hahaha!”

Alexander threw daggers at Laurens with the glare as the man cackled loudly. Marisa chose that moment to appear, and she smiled brightly at the Caribbean.

“Well, finally I see you” she greeted, walking straight to him to give him a hug.

“Ah, hello, Marisa” said Alexander, tapping her on the back. “Finally decided to give this place a shot?”

“She did right after you left” explained Aaron. “She’s already hired”

“Congratulations!” Alexander told her with sincerity.

“Yeah, well, I wouldn’t have tried it out if you haven’t proposed it” she giggled, blushing slightly.

“Anything else that happened during my absence?” he asked, jokingly.

“Adams was fired” Laurens surprised him.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“No, no, it was epic” assured the southerner.

“He thought he’d won the lottery, but he just had the ticket upside down and mixed the sixes and the nines” explained Aaron. “He went crazy. He flipped Washington off and all!”

“No wonder why he was fired” chimed in Marisa.

“And the wife kicked him out” added Laurens. “And he came to our house begging for a place to stay”

“He’s living with Thomas” Marisa told them. “I know because he spent his last week complaining”

“Fuck, and I lost it. Angelica’ll pay for this. Missing that glorious moment is worse than me losing control” he said, a bitter taste in his joke.

“Come in” Alexander said after someone knocked twice on his door. He looked up in surprise when he saw the secretary across him. “Ah, Thomas, I thought you were already on vacation?”

“I am” he nodded. “But Marisa told me you came today and I wanted to give you this in person” he
explained, as he passed the financer the stack of papers he’d brought with him.

Alexander leafed through it a bit, rapidly knowing what he’d been given. “Are these the reports that got lost?” he asked, wanting to be sure.

“Indeed”

“Where did you find them??”

“You’ve known my siblings already. I always tried to make two copies of each report just in case. Besides, I was seeing the scene you make the day prior you left coming before Mulligan even had started to pass all to that to the computer” he admitted. “I think a few are missing, though”

“Well, you’re already saving us with these” dismissed Hamilton, sighing with relief. “Thank you, Thomas. I’ll make sure to let Washington know”

“You’re welcome” shrugged the secretary, prepared to leave.

“Wait” said Alexander, suddenly. “If you already knew you did that, why didn’t you tell me in its day, before everything that happened?” he asked, frowning.

“It’s rude to interrupt” replied Thomas, with a smirk, just to close the door right after, not waiting for a response.

“… … Son of a bitch” muttered Alexander, still with a wee smile making its way on his lips.

“I shouldn’t have drunk that fifth soda…”

Laurens complained, as he tossed and turned until he finally gave in and sat up, prepared to grab one of the empty cans he had scattered across the room floor. Just as he was about to grab one, he felt something pressing against his forehead and heard the indistinguishable sound of a gun getting loaded. He went rigid at it and once his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw Lafayette in front of him, pointing at him with a gun.

“What the…?”

“Get out and go to the bathroom” ordered Lafayette, deadly serious.

“Laf, are you cra…”

“Get out” he repeated, more dryly, as he pressed the gun further against his forehead. “And go to the bathroom”

“Alright, alright, man, chill…” nodded Laurens, terrified, as he obliged. Lafayette passed to press the gun against his back as they both made their way out of the room. “Where did you even get that?”
“I’ve never loved this country as much as now” was all Lafayette said.

Chapter End Notes

*A zero to the left side (Un cero a la izquierda): A nobody, nothing.

I'll try to upload a Halloween special on October 31st, but if I can't make it on time... just pretend I did. After so many episodes you know how this goes XD

Sursum corda!
Chapter Summary

A little bonus as I thought it would be nice to know for sure the baby will be in good hands.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are you sure you want to be here with us?”

“Why are you asking me that with that look?”

“Because you never agreed with this”

“What’s done, it’s done”

“The ‘it’ is a baby, Dad”

“And she’s in front of you” Lafayette interrupted the conversation between daughter and father with a reprimanding tone. “So, watch what you talk about”

“She’s barely a month old” Philip Sr rolled his eyes as he casted a glare to the baby his daughter was holding.

“Be honest, Dad” chimed in Peggy, ignoring Lafayette’s tries of peace. “You’re only here because now Eliza has a job and can’t keep you company”

“You’re starting to be as poisonous as the guy she married” commented her father, nose scrunched up in disgust.

“Wonder why he hates you that much…”

Lafayette jumped from his seat on the couch when he heard the doorbell. He threw a warning glare to the two before opening the door and greeting the couple with a smile and welcomed them in their native language.

“You should’ve learnt French as your sisters” whispered Philip Sr.

“I don’t like it…”

“You didn’t like any language. At least, choose one that can be useful daily”

“How is French useful to me in the middle of America?”

“Only God knows what your brother-in-law mutters about you when you can’t understand him”
“The same insults he tells me in English. The only good thing about Alex’s straightforwardness”

“Peggy” called Lafayette, his accent thicker than ever. “Come, they want to talk to you” he clarified when the girl was going to simply pass the baby to him.

“Om, alright… But I…”

“They can talk English, don’t worry”

“See?” kept pestering her father.

“Dad, enough”

Peggy walked to the front door, where two men were waiting for her. Their eyes immediately fell on the baby and refused to look at anywhere else but her arms, where the little girl was reciprocating the glare with curiosity.

Peggy smiled, moved. “Look, sweetheart, these are your parents” she introduced, walking closer to the men. “Louis and Gabriel”

“She’s beautiful” said the taller out of the two, stretching his two arms, unable to control his emotion any longer. “Can I?”

“Of course!” nodded the girl, passing the baby to Louis. “She’s your daughter”

Gabriel elongated his neck to take a better look of the baby, who moved her hands to touch his face. After she had scrutinized the two new faces, she yawned and went to sleep in her father’s arms.

“I think she likes you” giggled Peggy. “She’s never fallen asleep so fast”

Gabriel took one of her hands. “Merci beaucoup, Peggy”

“It’s nothing” she assured, blushing for the attention she was receiving.

“Hm, you didn’t say the same during the labour” commented Philip Sr. Lafayette shushed him, glad that the two men hadn’t heard him.

“This means the world to us” contradicted Gabriel.

“We’re sorry we couldn’t be here sooner” added Louis, frowning in genuine regret and lowering his voice to not disturb the baby. “We’ve been working to have all covered for when the baby came and we had the trip planned for a few weeks before the birth…”

Peggy raised one hand. “No need to excuse yourselves”

“You always try to keep the contact personally or by Adrienne” added Lafayette, supportive.
“And I also went into early labour”

“And you did the right thing by choosing to have it all prepared before her arrival” added Philip Sr, surprising both Lafayette and Peggy. “Kids are a lot of work and better to be free now than before”

“True” conceded Gabriel. “Thank you for your words, Mr Schuyler. I know not all people would be so cool with this decision”

Philip Sr showed a cocky smile as he proclaimed: “Yeah, well, not everybody can brag about an open mind”, which gained a look from his daughter and her friend.

“Well, are you going to stay long?” asked Lafayette, wanting to change the subject.

“Oh, of course!” nodded Louis, vigorously. “We have it all planned”

“Gee, you’d get along with Alexander just well” laughed the lawyer.

“We’d love to meet your friends!” said Gabriel, with excitement. “I think it’s just fair they know us as well”

“Well, we could meet on the weekend” proposed Lafayette.

“They’re a very special gang” commented Peggy, humorously.

“Why don’t you talk us about them while having a coffee?” asked Louis. “And you can have your round of questions for us too”

“Sounds fair to me” shrugged Peggy.

“Let me grab a cardigan” said Lafayette, turning on his heels and trotting directly to his bedroom.

“Okay, grandma!” teased the girl.

“Excuse me” said Philip Sr, walking to Louis with a serious expression. “Do you mind if I hold her for a moment?”

“Of course not, Mr Schuyler!” hurried to answer Louis, as he obliged.

“Be our gest” added Gabriel.

“Peggy” called the man, after he’d rocked the baby a couple of times. “Listen, I know I’ve not been the most supportive out of the family” he started, surprising the girl for how sincere he sounded. “But I want you to know and to believe me when I say I’m proud of you. You always do what you think is right and just for helping people, wanting nothing more than the other’s happiness as a reward”

Peggy smiled slightly at her father’s words, getting emotional. “Oh, Daddy”

“Your daughter is one of a kind, Mr Schuyler” nodded Gabriel.

“Thank you…” She sniffed and changed the subject before she could be a crying mess. “Have you decided her name yet?”

“We were thinking that Margarita is a nice name” said Louis, arching one funny eyebrow.

“Oh, c’mom, I don’t want to ruin my mascara” sobbed Peggy.
“We promise to come to visit” said Gabriel, putting a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“We’re liking the country so far” added Louis.

With a laugh, Lafayette made his appearance once again. “Huh, be careful or you might stay forever” he joked.

“Don’t say those things, or you’ll turn her into a waterfall” said Louis, patting Peggy on the arm. “Are you ready?”

“Oui, I’m… Mr Schuyler, what’re you doing?!”

They all turned their heads to the living room, seeing Philip Sr, with the baby still in his arms, about to escape from the balcony. He froze in spot when he saw he’d been caught red-handed.

“Dad!” exclaimed Peggy, eyes wide.

“Oh, God, sorry, I don’t even know what came over me” he laughed, shaking his head.

He returned the baby to Louis’ arms, who took the girl rapidly and held her close to his chest. Gabriel put himself in front of his husband, protectively. Lafayette threw them an apologetic glare.

“Bf, we almost had it big, huh? Hahaha” kept laughing Philip Sr. He clapped both hands. “Well, are we going for that coffee or not?”

“Don’t let him sit closely to you” whispered Gabriel, walking out of the house, throwing glares to the oldest man.

“Gee, Dad…” said Peggy, blushing and shaking her head in resignation.

Chapter End Notes

Sursum corda!
Chapter Summary

Part of the staff wants Halloween too arrive a little too soon for the rest of their workmates' likings.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, black humour
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

BTW, I just realised I made a mistake of making Polly turn ten two times XD She's eleven right now, I'll try to fix it as well as I can in previous episodes.
*Isa: I changed the nickname of Marisa during the narration to not getting it confused by Maria.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Washington sighed in exhaustion when he walked in his law firm and saw all the creepy decorations, as well as more than half of his staff right in the entrance, chatting as if it wasn’t 7.30 am and they had to be in their respective offices working. Washington scoffed at the thought. They’d need to know what the word means first, he thought, bitterly.

“Good morning, Mr Washington!” greeted Maria, smiley, as she stuck some spiderwebs to the wall behind her counter.

“Good morning” he nodded, taking a look at her work. “Maria, don’t you think it’s a bit too early for this?”

“It’s never too early for Halloween!” she replied, with an enthusiasm proper of a child.

“It’s October 29th”

“Already too late!” insisted the receptionist.

“C’mon, George” chimed in Angelica, petting a stuffed spider. “Let the girl have some fun!”

“Besides, you’re always saying we need to do things with time” added Laurens, sat on the floor as he tried to untangle some lights.

“I was talking about your jobs…” replied Washington, boringly.

“Dang it!” exclaimed Laurens, fed up with his task. “Herculeees”

“Noooo” answered the man right away.
“You don’t even know what I’m going to ask you!”
“I already untangle enough lights in Christmas!”
“… … Smarty-ass”
“C’mon, don’t fight” said Lafayette, automatically.

Washington sighed, in defeat. “Well, at least you’d be quieter than usual…” he decided, walking to the elevator. He pressed the button and looked over his shoulder. “But do that in the break room! Normal people and possible clients don’t need to see that as a presentation!”

“Alriiiight” they all drawled, lazily.

George turned to put a foot in the elevator when he heard the doors dinging opened. He jumped back, startled to found the body of Isa lying on the floor with a pond of blood coming from her head. The CEO paled at the sight of the limp form of one of his employees, and immediately knelt in front of her.

“Oh, my God, Marisa!” he exclaimed, calling the attention of the rest of the staff, who looked at the scene with wide eyes. “Someone call the ambulance!” he ordered.

The limp form soon turned into a laughing mess. “Hahahaha! Gotcha!” she declared, changing into a sitting position.

“What… What’s the meaning of this?!” her boss demanded to know.

“Do you like it?” she asked, pointing at her blond hair stained in red. “I just bought it on my way here and couldn’t resist. Is it realistic?”

“Realistic?” echoed Washington, blinking dumbfounded. “You almost gave me a heart attack!”

“I take that as a yes?”

“Clean all this mess immediately!”

“Okaaaay…”

“Damn kindergarten, I can’t have a peaceful day” muttered George, deciding to go upstairs instead, now with a sour face.

“I thought you had more sense of humour than Mr King” was all Isa said as an excuse as she pouted.

Washington gave her a glare. “Seven years left to the early retirement, George. Have faith” he cheered himself up in a whisper.

Libby walked in, grocery bags in both hands. She looked around, whistling with admiration.
“Is someone’s birthday today?”

“Way to decorate something for a birthday, then” scoffed Laurens.

“Do I need to ask Alexander for the tickets of all the things you asked for your birthdays?” asked Angelica, a hand on her hip.

“True, it looked like he was dating a witch” nodded Hercules, gaining an offended look from the man

“This is for Halloween, Libby” explained Lafayette.

The girl’s eyes grew wide at the response. “¿Qué? [What?]”

She dropped the bags to the floor, searching for her phone in a hurry. Angelica ran to pick the groceries up, a frown on her face.

“Careful! I heard glass breaking!” she reprimanded.

“Isn’t today October 29th?” asked Libby, ignoring the COO’s words.

“Yes, yes, but we wanted to have this ready soon” explained Hercules.

“We’re still late” repeated Maria, as she put a little Jack-o’-lantern on her desk.

Libby sighed, the colour returning to her face. “Gracias a Dios [Thank God], I thought I only had one day left to get all my things for El Día de los Muertos”

“El what?” asked Laurens, with a frown.

“The Day of the Dead” translated the girl. “It’s what my people celebrate between November 1st and 2nd.”

“We should do that this year in your honour!” proposed Maria.

“The only thing you want is to procrastinate the cleaning of all this” said Hercules, pointing at the box she’d brought that morning.

“How dare you? I’m being a nice workmate to my friend Libby”

“Sure…”

“What’re you doing?” someone asked from the front doors. “Decorating this place according to the demons that work in here?”

“Talking about the Devil” muttered Isa, mopping the floor and frowning at the familiar voice. “Why did I name him…”

“Mr King” drawled Angelica, crossing both arms upon her chest, defiantly. “What’re you doing here?”

The man in question changed his weight from one foot to another. “I came to honour a deceased one
“I knew” he replied, shaking the bouquet of flowers he was holding.

“Who? Your soul?” asked Isa, loud enough to make the man throw her a hateful glare.

Maria laughed. “Good one, Isa”

Libby gasped, feeling bad for the man, in contrast. “Oh, I’m so sorry, sir. Were they a loved one?”

“She was one of my best employees” shrugged King. “Never complained about her schedule or salary”

“Could she speak English, exploitative?” asked Angelica, rolling her eyes.

“You don’t sound smarter by making up words, Mrs Church”

“Schuyler” spat the vice president, narrowing her eyes in annoyance.

“Your husband must be happy”

“Happier than the poor soul you’re dating, that’s for sure” spoke Isa, louder than before.

“Well, I just came here to have a detail” spat King, throwing the bouquet to the pavement.

“Beautiful detail” commented Laurens, raising one eyebrow.

“Why don’t you take that to the poor one’s grave?” asked Libby, walking out to put the flowers nicely.

“She’s so pure… She’s gonna last a sigh in here…” pointed out Maria, saddened.

“She has none” replied King, normally. “She died in here during a fire and nobody found the remains of her body”

“Oh, poor girl” said Libby, a hand on her chest. “Hope she found peace wherever she is”

“I do not” declared King, straightforward. “The crazy bitch provoked the fire because she went crazy one day and backfired”

“That expression was never better used” said Hercules.

“She went crazy or you drove her crazy?” asked Angelica, rolling her eyes.

“Besides” proceeded King, throwing a glare to the vice president, “with you working in here I doubt the poor woman has any rest at all”

“Pardon?” asked the Mexican girl, with tiny voice.

“Nothing, a few said to hear voices and saw a few things moving of place. Nothing major” explained the man, enjoying the terrified expression of Libby.

“Of course, she must be the one that eats the last cookies” laughed Lafayette.

“Don’t joke with that” reprehended Laurens.

“The only one in here who hears voices is you” said Angelica, walking to him and gesturing him to leave. “You’ve always been insane. I don’t want to know how much the poor woman had to endure while working for you”
King raised his chin in pride. “Excuse me, but she came insane from home, huh?”

“Suuuure” nodded Angelica, sarcastically.

“C’mon, sir, we work with a few of your previous victims” supported Maria. “According to Jemmy, Lemongrab didn’t used to be that bitter” she told her workmates, who nodded, interested.

“Well, I only came to warn you as well” said King, being pushed by Angelica.

“Next time warn before appearing” said Isa.

“If you hear laments or weeping, you know!” kept insisting King.

“Yeah, yeah. Now, go, shoo, shoo. Wouldn’t want her to hear you and follow you” said the COO, giving him one final push that put him out of their working space.

“Well, I wouldn’t complain if she did” shrugged Hercules, having a bad feeling in his body.

“Don’t joke with those things!” reprimanded Laurens, strangely serious.

“There he goes” complained Lafayette, rolling his eyes.

“John’s right” supported Libby, jumping to her feet. “We shall not laugh at the dead”

“What’s that? Another commandment?” asked Maria, jocosely.

“It’s not funny!” complained the Mexican, frowning at every laughing person. “Especially on these dates, when the deceased come to visit us”

“Well, if you see someone, give them my rewards” kept joking Angelica, with a dry laugh.

“I’m serious!”

“Is this place still a mess?” asked Washington, his deep voice making them jump.

“Fucking startle” complained Laurens, passing a hand through his face.

Washington walked to the centre of the room. “I told you to clean this place; it’s the first thing our clients see”

“Yes, sir…” they all said.

“And those flowers?” he asked, raising one eyebrow.

“King paid us a visit” replied Angelica, nonchalantly.

“Why?” asked the CEO, the disgust clear in his voice.

“Nothing. Something about a woman that died here a few years ago during a fire…” explained Angelica, not getting into detail for her lack of interest.

George’s entire demeanour changed at her words. “Who? The poor woman that one day lost her mind and set fire to the last floor? Did that happen in this building?”

They all stiffened at that and exchanged a glare.
“Is it true?” asked Maria, starting to be worried.

“That son of a bitch, I knew he’d never give in easily, blackmailed or not” said George, between gritted teeth.

“George, is it true or not?” pressured Angelica, walking closer to him.

“Yes, but I wasn’t aware that the event happened in here” he answered, striding to the front doors.

“Have we been working with an unrested soul?” asked Hercules, paling.

“Huh, now nobody’s laughing, right?” said Laurens, rolling his eyes.

George half-closed his eyes in the meantime. “Of course not, don’t be superstitious”

“And where are you going, then?” questioned Angelica, arms in akimbo.

“To have a few words with King, I’ll be right back” he informed, before striding to the same direction King had taken.

“This turned creepy quickly” said Maria, swallowing in fear.

“If there’s nothing, why would he tell him anything?” provoked Laurens.

“John, shut up” ordered Lafayette.

“She couldn’t set fire and die somewhere else but where my office is” complained Angelica, in a bad mood.

“Same” nodded Hercules, sharing her grim face.

“Oh, c’mon, you were all laughing at King a few minutes ago” said Lafayette, with an exasperated sigh.

“Because we thought it was one of King’s one-god-nuts moments” Angelica defended herself.

“Just because someone died in here means his tale was true” said Lafayette, boringly.

“There’s only one way to know” said Laurens, jumping from spot and trotting to the front doors.

Lafayette narrowed his eyes in suspicion. “John, don’t you dare!”

“I’ll be right back!” he declared, ignoring his friend’s words.

“What’s he gonna do?” asked Libby, confused.

---------------

Libby was the first one to shake her head in denial when she saw what Laurens brought once he was back.
“No, no, no, no” she repeated, the accent thicker than they’d ever heard. “No and no. I refuse!”

“Libby, you can stand to the side if you don’t want to play” said Laurens, shrugging one shoulder. He put the board on the table of the break room.

“I won’t play or let any of you play!” declared the girl, a nervous wreck. “I don’t think ‘play’ is a proper word for a Ouija board!”

“Libby, you can’t be that impressionable” said Isa, rolling down the blinds to sink the room into darkness.

“I’m respectful” corrected the girl.

“Are the candles necessary?” asked Angelica, watching Hercules igniting one. “You plus fire is not a good mix. I don’t want a sequel to the legend”

“Please” begged Libby.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to participate either” said Hercules, as if by that she felt any better.

“Coward” said Maria.

“Nothing’s gonna happen as long as you do as I say” promised Laurens, cockily.

“That’s not helping our nerves to calm down, John” said Hercules, gaining a dirty glare form the freckled man.

“Can I close the door already?” asked Isa. “Are all the candles lit?”

“Yes” answered Hercules, walking to Libby’s side.

Isa nodded and closed the door quietly, taking a seat right in the middle of Angelica and Laurens.

“Laf, are you sure you wanna do it?” asked Hercules, concerned.

“It’s alright, I don’t believe in these things” shrugged the Frenchman.

“I’m just saying that if something happens and a ghost gets attached to you, you’re not getting in the house” warned his boyfriend.

“Stop calling for bad weather, you imbecile” spat Laurens, fed up.

“Don’t start with bad vibes or it’ll definitely go wrong!” advised Libby.

“Weren’t you saying you didn’t want us to do this?” asked Angelica.

“But if you’re gonna do it anyways, do it fine!”

“She’s right, vibes are very important” nodded Isa.
“Thank you, I like you already” declared Laurens, solemnly. “One thing, though, when’s your birthday?”

“John, man, are you gonna ask every new member of the staff for their birth dates?” asked Lafayette, with tedium.

“Yes, Lafayette, yes, I will, because I wanna know the people I share my air with”

“I’m a Gemini” answered Isa.

Laurens made a face. “Ugh, I don’t like them. Two-faced”

“That’s why nobody likes you, not because of their signs” said Hercules, fearing the angry face Isa was throwing in his friend’s direction.

“I like Geminis” said Maria, as an encouragement.

“Well, can we do this already?” interrupted Angelica. “I’m getting bored”

“True, true” nodded Laurens. “Let’s start”

“Should we hold hands?” asked Isa, lost.

“But then how we touch the planchette?” asked Maria.

“What planchette?” asked Lafayette.

Laurens hit his forehead, in frustration. “Shit, I forgot it back at home”

“Not even in these things he likes so much he can focus” commented Hercules.

“I was in a hurry!”

“I’ve seen people using glasses in the movies” proposed Maria.

“Good idea. See? This is cooperation” said Laurens, looking at Hercules.

He got up and opened one cupboard. Lafayette decided to light the interior when he saw it was taking Laurens long enough. They both sat down again when he had the glass in his power.

“There, now” proclaimed Laurens, with pride, as he placed the glass on the centre of the board.

“What’s that crap?” asked Angelica, once her eyes adjusted to the new barely-lighted form and could tell what drawings it had on. “Is that Peggy’s Donald Duck glass?”

“John, man” laughed Hercules.

“It doesn’t matter” promised Laurens.

“But take one of your own, don’t be so selfish!” admonished Isa.

“We’re losing time” Laurens shook his head. “Come on, let’s start”
“Finally!” exclaimed Angelica.

“But shall we hold hands or not?” inquired Isa once again.

“Marisa, honey, if we have to have the finger on the glass, we can’t hold hands” explained Angelica, as if she were stupid.

“Okay, okay, it’s my first time!”

“Be careful” insisted Libby, frowning in worry.

“Hush!” ordered Laurens, closing his eyes. He inspired deeply, concentrating. “Hello?” he said, aloud. “Is there anybody here with us?”

“Why is he only so serious with this stuff?” lamented Hercules.

“Ssh” instructed Libby, scared. She looped their arms to comfort herself.

“Is somebody here with us?” asked Laurens, again.

“We don’t mean any harm!” clarified Maria.

“Should’ve asked for her name” whispered Isa, to which Angelica nodded.

“Should’ve done this where the fire happened, actually” said Lafayette, opening one eye.

“Yeah, that as well”

“Please, order and silence” begged Laurens.

“Oh, I feel a vibration!” said Maria, jumping in her seat.

“Really?” asked Angelica, surprised.

“Ah, no, wait…” Maria let a few seconds pass and then shook her head. “Sorry, it was my phone” Laurens sighed. Then, a little light bulb turned on in his brain. “Please, if someone’s here with us, give us a sign to prove it”

They waited for a moment, expectantly. Libby clung closer to Hercules, who was now reciprocating the action, feeling the tension the room had sunken into. Lafayette broke the silence, with a kind of condescending tone.

“See? It’s all about sugges…”

Before he could end the sentence, the door was swung opened, making them all to jump in their chairs. Isa even lost her balance and fell to the side, screaming as the rest of the group.

“But what’s going in here?” asked Thomas opening the door completely and letting the natural light
They gasped, their hearts beating fast against their chests, as they tried to comprehend that it’d been the secretary the one who’d opened the door. Eventually, their eyes could distinguish his figure along with the one of Alexander by his side.

“I knew everything was too quiet” said Alexander, shaking his head.

“Gosh, Tommy, you almost gave me a heart attack!” complained Isa, taking a deep breath from the floor.

Thomas frowned at the scene before his eyes. “But what are you doing in here, with the blinds closed and by candlelight? You look like a sect the day of the collective suicide”

“Very graphic” nodded Lafayette, blushing in shame.

“We were trying to talk to the ghost of the woman that died in here” explained Isa, getting back to her feet.

“And you ruined the session, Lemongrab” condemned Maria.

“What woman?” asked Alexander.

“One that worked for King and set fire to the last floor of this building” said Angelica, trying to control her emotions.

“Well, if she worked for him, I can’t blame her” said the secretary, derisively.

“Thomas, this is serious” said Libby. “Even Mr Washington’s face changed once we told him”

“Because he knew you and that ghost story was like throwing gasoline to a fire” said Alexander.

“Great simile” congratulated Hercules.

“Pick all this up immediately and go back to work” ordered the CFO, grumpily. “And open the blinds!”

“And the windows, this is smelling like humanity*” added Thomas.

“Huh, something tells me we invoked something evil: these two are agreeing on something” joked Maria.

She received a hateful glare from the two men before they left them to clean the room. Laurens took his board with a grumpy face. Libby frowned at his actions.

“No, wait, you haven’t closed the session!”

“Who cares, we contacted nobody” said Angelica, as she walked out.
“Told you” supported Lafayette, following her close behind.

Isa felt bad for the pouting man. “Aw, don’t worry, John, it might be because there’s nothing here” she comforted.

“Better for us” said Hercules, patting Libby on the arm as a reassuring gesture and walking to the door. “I don’t trust this man with anything from this world, imagine from something of a world we know nothing about” he added, as he left.

“Excuse me, but I’m very cultured in these subjects!” said Laurens, offended.

“Hey, this starts to be like a horror movie” commented Maria, suddenly.

“Very much to my likings” admitted Libby, embracing herself.

“No, think about it: the session that goes wrong and nobody takes seriously; the mock to the person who believes in it. Everything’s perfect!”

“Call Spielberg, then” joked Isa.

“No, no, we don’t need him here. With us it’ll be enough” said Maria, smiling. “With our cameras. We set it all up”

“Well, this law firm was already a perfect place for that” said Laurens, after a better thought.

“See?”

“The place is one thing” said Isa. “But another thing is our workmates. They’ll never offer themselves for such a thing. Not that they’re good actors, anyways” she added, smiling smugly.

“Cocky…” said Laurens.

“I went to drama classes during high school!” Isa defended her acting skills.

“And who said they were going to know?” asked Maria, smiling evilly. “The best actors are the ones who don’t know they’re acting”

“That’s so true” nodded Isa.

“Maria, if you’re thinking what I’m thinking you’re thinking, the answer is: don’t” warned Libby.

“I got lost with all the thinking” admitted Laurens.

“And that’s so odd” teased Isa.

“What’s the difference between what I’m proposing with what we all do during meetings, recording fights?” asked Maria, arms crossed, defiantly.

“She’s got a point in there” nodded Laurens.

“No, she doesn’t. One thing is to do that to our workmates, but we can’t disrespect the deceased” insisted the Mexican.

“Libby, you and I are under no danger because you already respect them. The rest, on the other hand…”
“Hey, I’m agnostic” said Isa.

“That’s not enough”

“Because you say so!”

“But are you hearing yourselves?” reprimanded Libby, voice high-pitched. “If you want to prank the whole office, do it with something else!”

“No, if you don’t wanna help, don’t do it, we won’t make you” said Maria, sternly. “But this is a one-time chance to do a great movie”

“I want to be the star!” said Isa, raising her hand.

“No, that’s me!” complained Laurens. “I’m the expert in these things!”

Libby rolled her eyes, in surrender. “Look… I’m not going to tattle, because it’s not my style. But be careful with whatever you do or say!”

“Good workmate, good workmate” nodded Maria. “I’ll bring my camera tomorrow, and we’ll start”

“Nice. It’s the first time I’m excited for a Tuesday!” said Laurens, rubbing his hands as a villain.

“Me too” nodded Isa.

“Ay, Señor [Oh, Lord]” sighed Libby.

“A Ouija board at work, really?” asked Dolley, as Madison helped her fix her costume. She laughed when Thomas nodded. “Maybe I should become a lawyer and work there!”

“Well, at least you wouldn’t have to be dressed up for Halloween” commented James, fixing one sleeve.

“I like to wear costumes” said Dolley, raising one playful eyebrow.

“Hm, another thing we don’t have in common”

“What a catch, Jemmy” commented Patsy, scrolling down her phone.

Thomas scoffed. “Like you’re someone to talk about partners”

“Patsy and Randy are about to break up” commented Polly, not stopping to draw.

“Shut up” ordered the teenager, blushing.

“Oh, problems in the Hotel California?” asked Thomas, with a smirk. Dolley laughed at the reference.

“No, we’re very fine!” she clearly lied, avoiding her father’s glare.
“She was shouting at him on the phone before you came back” kept telling the eleven-year-old, smugly.

“The only bad thing of her passing her last year is we can’t control her from making noise” commented James, wrinkling his face in annoyance.

“Why don’t you marry the neighbours if you care about them that much?” spat Patsy.

“Hey, have respect, young lady” admonished Thomas, gravely.

“You were the ones commenting about my private life!”

“You just turned seventeen, don’t act so high of yourself”

“I’ve taken it from you” muttered the girl, crossing both arms.

“And that nasty personality? Did you take it from me as well?” asked her father, annoyed.

“What do you think” asked Patsy, dryly.

“What’s your custom about, aunt Dolley?” asked Polly, interrupting the quarrel between her sister and father. On purpose, most probably.

Thomas frowned slightly at his youngest child. “Polly, don’t call…”

Dolley waved one hand. “Leave her, Thomas. I adore it” she assured. “And I’m the Corpse Bride”

“I love that movie!” exclaimed the girl.

“Hm, suits you like a glove if you keep waiting for James to take a step” blurted out Patsy, casually, making the couple to blush.

“Girl, why don’t you go to be misunderstood in your room, as a good sulking teenager?” said Thomas.

“That’s why you wanted me to pass? To have me locked up in my room all day?” asked the girl, raising on eyebrow.

“Like you’ve ever been locked up in here” said Thomas, rolling his eyes. “And I was hoping for you to go to college”

“Dad, I just passed high school after spending the whole summer studying, let me breathe!” whined Patsy.

“You spent the whole summer studying because you did nothing in nine months, young lady. Don’t try to play the victim in here” lectured Thomas.

“I already told you I wanted a sabbatical year after high school”

“And I already told you I didn’t want you to”

“Look who won”

“Let’s see if you think the same when I cut back your allowance” threatened Thomas, with an innocent tone.
“Excuse me?”

“You either look for a job this year or you’ll have less money to spend on your idiocies”

“But this year was to find myself!”

“Find yourself while you refill supermarket shelves”

Patsy groaned as Dolley and Polly contained their laughter.

“I hate this place!” complained the teenager, jumping from her seat and hoofing over the steps as she went upstairs.

“This is like going back to when I live with my father all over again” whispered the teacher in her boyfriend’s ear.

“Don’t say it out loud, or she’ll have ammunition” advised Madison.

Patsy slammed the door shut. Adams made a noisy and annoyed ‘ssssh’ from his corner of the room, right beside the TV. Dolley jumped when she saw the lump covered by a sheet on the floor moving slightly.

“Adams, don’t demand silence in my house or you go live under a bridge” threatened Thomas, nonchalantly.

“A bridge is way more silent than this house” complained the unemployed man.

“What in the world is that?” asked Dolley, blinking in bewilderment.

“It’s Mr Adams, Daddy’s ex friend” explained Polly, going back to her drawings.

“One of my many mistakes in life” added Thomas, loud enough to be heard by Adams, who grumbled in offense.

“I thought that was just a pile of dirty clothes” admitted Dolley, shrugging.

Thomas shook his head, resigned. “If only, Dolley, if only”

The next morning, Maria, Libby, Isa and Laurens met a bit after the workday started. The receptionist showed them her camera, as she gave them the script she’d written the night prior, explaining how she imagined it all to unfold.
I also have the title: The Law Firm of Horrors

That’s not a title, that’s the definition of our workplace” laughed Isa.

And you haven’t even been to the worse meetings we had” assured Laurens, reading the script.

“You haven’t gone too far, right?” asked Libby, concerned.

Stop worrying” Maria waved one hand. “The plan is very simple. The rest of us is hidden while the person in question plays their part and scare the others”

“Simple indeed” nodded Isa.

Alright, but I want a minor role”

Look at Libby, taking courage” said Isa, with pride, as she nudged the Mexican supportively.

“Jackie” called Maria. “Do you know your part?”

Laurens made a face at the script he was holding. “I don’t understand this” he admitted. “In the silence of my solitude, from the deserted upstairs, I heard sinister and worrying cries of agony that sounded like a suffering woman” he read.

“What don’t you understand from there?”

“With his vocabulary? The great majority of the words” teased Isa.

Laurens threw her a glare. “What if I mess up in the beginning just because you think you’re Shakespeare?” he asked Maria.

“English is not my first language and I understood” supported Libby.

“I knew you had to be the star…” lamented the receptionist.

“Oh, yes? What if I kick up a fuss and you are left with nobody for this shitty film?” threatened Laurens.

“The film is awesome, your attitude is shit” retorted Maria.

“Hey, hey!” interrupted Isa. “There comes Peggy”

“Aw, not her” said Libby, feeling bad. “She’s nice!”

“And my ex’s sister-in-law. This could be dangerous” agreed Laurens.

“But she’s perfect to start, she gets scared with nothing!” assured Isa. “Don’t you remember the time my phone rang in the middle of a meeting?”

“Your ringtone was The Exorcist theme!” Libby defended the therapist.

“She’s coming, she’s coming! To your places!” ordered Maria, preparing the camera and going to hide in the storeroom, across her counter.
Laurens read his line one more time and then kept the paper in his back pocket, trying to act casual. Peggy walked in the building, devouring a chocolate bun. Laurens jumped right in front of her, groaning exaggeratedly and making her choke on her bite. He waited until the girl was done with coughing to talk.

“John, what the…?”

“Agh, Peggy, from the loneliness of my silence I heard from the mystery of upstairs a woman terrified of her pain” he proclaimed, putting a hand on his forehead for emphasis of his malaise.

“… What?” asked the girl, scrunching up her upper lip in confusion.

Laurens clicked his tongue in frustration and decided to talk normally. “I was here, minding my own business when I heard female crying from upstairs”

“… … Maybe someone fought?”

“Nooo, it had an echo, like ghostly echo. That sound was not human” promised Laurens.

“… John, did you hit your head?”

“Peggy, no, I’m trying to tell you that I heard the ghost of the woman that died here in a fire a long time ago from upstairs”

“What woman?” asked the girl, sceptically.

“The one we all talked about yesterday”

“I didn’t come yesterday. I spent the whole weekend out and decided to spend Monday sleeping”

“Very professional”

“Hey, it’s been nine months without a proper party. I have my necessities!”

“Well, I’ve warned you”

“About what?”

“About the woman ghost that lives with us!”

“John, are you high?”

“No, god damnit, I’m serious. I was here and suddenly I heard moans of pain”

“And are you sure it wasn’t Washington?”

“No, I told you they were from a female”

“I’m just saying because it wouldn’t be the first time”

“Besides, it sounded very ugly. It was clear that it was a dead woman trying to manifest herself”

“And did she say something?” asked Peggy, starting to feel uneasy.

“Well… The typical things dead ones say: you all are gonna die, this is my home… Don’t you see
movies?"

“No, they scare me too much!” admitted the girl, moving uncomfortably in spot.

Laurens leaned closer to her to whisper. “There’s something here with us, Pegs. They’re watching”

“Who?” sobbed the girl.

“The fucking dead, girl, follow the conversation!” exploded Laurens.

“Shit, stop it already!” demanded the therapist, pushing Laurens away from her. “You’re gonna make me puke the bun!”

“Well, don’t come complaining to me when the ghost kills you” said Laurens.

Peggy looked back at him as she advanced to the staircase, a terrified look on her face. She looked at the stairs with dread and then turned on her heels, sprinting to the break room, gasping from fear.

The three women who’d been watching the whole thing from the storeroom got out.

“Poor Peggy” commented Libby.

“How did I do it?” asked Laurens.

“Wrong” replied Maria, honestly. “You overreacted a lot”

Laurens got offended at the review. “Well, then, you do it the next time”

“No, even if it’s shit, it’s natural shit”

“She still believed it, though” supported Isa.

Peggy came running in the breakroom, startling the three men that were there.

“Peggy, are you alright?” asked Alexander.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost” commented Aaron, frowning with concern.

Peggy threw daggers in his direction. “Don’t you even dare to say that word”

“What happened?” asked the CEO, as Alexander walked to be by his sister-in-law’s side.

“Jackie, he told me he heard moans of pain from upstairs” she explained, hugging Alex in search of comfort.
“Did Angelica overeat again?” guessed Aaron.

“No, no, he told me it sounded like ghostly. From the woman that died here in a fire a long time ago” she explained.

Alexander ended the hug just as he heard that. “Oh, my God, you too?”

Washington’s expression changed to one of pure concern. “Is he telling the others?”

“First thing he told me when I came in”

“Let me talk to him” said the CEO, marching to the door immediately. “I don’t need anyone else knowing”

“But is it true?” asked Alexander, raising one eyebrow.

“Don’t listen to those things, son. They’re hearsays” assured Washington.

“But did she die here or not?” questioned Aaron, strangely bluntly.

“I don’t know. I wasn’t working in this building when the incident happened and the body was never found” explained the CEO, lacking his usual calm behaviour.

“Well, she must be happy, because she told Jackie she’s coming for us” said Peggy, nervously.

“Peggy, for God’s sake…” admonished Alexander, rolling his eyes.

“I’ll talk to him now” promised their boss, walking out of the room. “The last thing we need in here is panic to spread…” they heard him say in the distance.

“I’ll bring my grandfather’s crucifix to hang it in my office” planned Aaron, out loud.

“Do you have a spare I can borrow?” begged Peggy.

“Aaron, don’t tell me you believe in those idiocies” confronted Alexander, hands on his hips.

“Alexander, I don’t play with a world I don’t know” the lawyer defended his reaction. “I don’t even want to play by this world’s rules and I’ve lived here all my life”

“Now, how am I gonna take my nap?” complained Peggy, crossing both arms.

“Woman, you just woke up a few hours ago!” reprimanded Alexander.

“So? I’m still sleepy”

“This is surreal…”

“See? A ghost in here is even normal” said Aaron, cockily.

“Well, if I found her, I’d give her a prize for stand us all. For first-hand experience I know it’s a valiant task” promised Alexander, with mockery.
Lafayette looked with pride at his work. He already had his paperwork done and prepared for the meeting tomorrow. Stretching out, he got up from his chair and decided to rest a bit in the break room.

Oddly enough, he found the place totally deserted once he got there. Shrugging it off, he simply ate a few biscuits, enjoying the quietness and the rare occurrence of being able to hear his own thoughts.

Once he was finished and he felt his batteries full again, Lafayette exited the room and walked directly to the staircase. There, he found a mistreated and old-looking ragdoll, lying on the first step. Arching one eyebrow, Lafayette took it, scrunching up his nose at how battered it looked.

“Where did this came from now?” he wondered, looking at both sides, and again not finding a soul around him. Shrugging one shoulder he exited the building and put the doll on the top of the nearest garbage bin he found. “I know it’s not the poor doll’s fault, but she’s so gross…” he commented under his breath, as he made his way back in.

Just as he began to go upstairs, Maria stuck her head out her counter and ran out to where the doll was. She sprinted to the side of the building where Lafayette’s office window was. Laurens was looking down at her there, waiting for her.

“Throw it, throw it!” instructed the freckled man, in a hurry.

Maria did as she was told, closing her eyes. The doll flew a few meters, almost landing on her backs and barely grazing Laurens’ fingertips. Maria went to fetch the doll to try once again, as Laurens frowned down at her, desperate.

“Throw it right, you good-for-nothing!” he cursed.

Maria matched his fury and threw the doll with a whole lot more of force, hitting John in the face. The southerner lost his balance and fell on his butt, the doll on his lap, witnessing him rubbing his nose. Laurens heard footsteps approaching the room and he hurried to put the doll on Lafayette’s chair, turning it so it was facing the door. He looked around and then frowned.

“Should’ve thought about a hiding spot while I waited” he realised.
The doorknob turned and Laurens, intuitively, crawled under the desk.

Lafayette went back to his office, a bit absent-minded. Reality hit him hard in the face when he saw the doll he had previously thrown away sitting on his chair, facing him with that sewn smile that now seemed way creepier than the first time he saw it. Lafayette stood at the doorframe for a moment, his brain suffering from a short-circuit. He looked around, as if the response to all the questions he had inside his head was somewhere in the room.

He tried to think rationally, but the shock was so big he found himself unable to. There had to be a reason why the doll was there, right? A rational, not spooky reason, preferably. After what felt like an eternity, Lafayette found it within himself to walk a few steps closer to the chair, stretching out his hand. Maybe it was a different doll? He’d have to take a closer look to…

The chair was pushed forward.

Lafayette lost it right then.

Laurens was trying to get on a comfortable position when he pushed the chair by accident. The next thing he heard was Lafayette running out of the office, screaming in horror.

“Herculeeeeeees!” he called, his voice shaking and breaking at how high-pitched it turned.

Laurens crawled out of the desk, grabbed the doll and ran to his own office, pretending to know nothing about the issue.

“For once, my clumsiness was useful” he said, proud of his work.

Hercules had been trying to be sure everything was in order (that scare of summer really scarred him, he didn’t want to see Alexander crying like a big baby, surrounded by old paperwork, ever again) when Lafayette came in, swinging the door opened and with his eyes wide.

“What…?” he tried to ask.
“Come! Come!” ordered his boyfriend, taking his hand and dragging him to his own office.

In their way there, Hercules saw the rest of doors opening and their friends’ heads sticking out, curious at the sudden noise. Washington also opened his door at the end of the hall, walking closer to the scene with an air of resignation surrounding him. The rest of the staff joined them, as confused. Lafayette really lost it when he saw there was no doll now, both hands at the sides of his head.

“Th-The doll! The doll!” repeated Lafayette, pointing at the now empty chair.

“Laf…” said Hercules, grabbing his boyfriend by the shoulders and shaking him slightly. “Laf, c’mon, calm down”

“The doll, Hercules! It was here!” he insisted, shaking like a leaf.

“What doll?” asked Angelica, worried for her friend’s behaviour.

“There was a doll in the staircase and I threw it away and then… then it was here” he explained, his teeth chattering.

“Here where?” asked Hercules, rubbing his boyfriend’s arm as a kind of comfort.

“On my chair”

“But where did it come from?” asked Aaron, raising one eyebrow in disbelief.

“I don’t know, I just found it on the staircase” sobbed Lafayette, losing control of his emotions.

Everybody threw a glare at Alexander, who was frowning at his friend. He realised their reaction and rolled his eyes, annoyed.

“Oh, right, one brings his children to the office eight times and now every mystery toy that appears is his fault…”

Laurens walked out of his office, whistling casually. He stopped abruptly at the group gathered in front of Lafayette’s office.

“Oh, what’s going on here, dear workmates?” he asked, faking a surprised tone.

Maria passed a hand through her face, in annoyance at the forced acting of her friend.
“Lafayette says he found a doll in his office” explained James, taking a look inside the room.

“No! I found it on the staircase!” clarified Lafayette, angry at his friends’ scepticism.

“Wherever…”

“And then I threw it away and it appeared on my chair!” he told Laurens, hoping he’d believe him. “Really, I’m not making it up!”

“Gilbert, if you threw the doll away, it can’t be in your office” explained Thomas, almost boringly. “It’s common sense”

“Do you think I don’t know that?” spat Lafayette, whipping around in offense. “Why do you think I’m panicking!?”

“Alright, calm down…” tried to say Washington, taking a few steps closer.

“The doll just came here all by herself!” continued Lafayette, starting to raise his voice.

“Nothing, keep ignoring me…” complained the CEO.

“How? She doesn’t reach the elevator button” joked Alexander.

“That sounds like a demonic entity” said Laurens, normally.

“What’s he talking about?” asked James, raising one eyebrow.

Libby gasped loudly, making Angelica, the one closer to her, to jump in a startle.

“Fuck, you scared me!” she complained, a hand on her chest. “Be surprised in a lower tone!”

“Maybe you did call something when you played with the Ouija board” theorized Libby, eyeing the ones who were part of that in an almost accusatory way.


“They have excuses for the next ten years with that stupid thing” lamented Thomas, sighing in exasperation.

“You’re making us live Anabelle!” exclaimed Peggy, horrified.

“For God’s sake, the only thing that happened to you for playing it is that you influenced yourselves” said Thomas, throwing a glare to Libby.

“Yes, I made the doll to teleport with the power of my mind” mocked Lafayette, angered.

“The board gives you powers as well?” asked Peggy, confusedly.

“Can you stop saying nonsense?” spat Alexander, throwing a hard glare to his sister-in-law.

“Don’t take these things as a joke” warned Libby. In a darker tone, she whispered: “That’s why I told you to not play with the spirits”
“What spirits?” asked Washington, fed up with the conversation.

“Maybe they want to tell us something” proposed Isa.

“You too?” asked Angelica, exhaustedly.

“If they want to tell us something, they can always leave a post-it in the break room” decided Thomas, jocosely.

“What they’re trying to say,” chimed in Washington, faking an understanding tone. “is that you have to start working, so you stop imagining these movies” His expression turned serious all of a sudden, and they went rigid under his severe glare. “Please, sub-animals, grow up and go to your offices” he ordered, before turning around to go back to his own paperwork.

“Come on, Laf” said Hercules, once the CEO had closed his door. “Take a seat while I go to make you…”

“No!” Lafayette stopped his boyfriend once he saw he was walking him to the chair. “I don’t want to sit in there anymore!”

“Laf…”

“Let me be with you for the rest of the afternoon, please…” he begged.

“Huh, look at Mr Rational” commented Angelica, though she was looking also a bit uneasy.

“We’re all gonna die in here” declared Maria, darkly.

“Listen to that girl as well…” complained Thomas, shaking his head and walking back down.

“Alex, drive me home” sobbed Peggy.

“I’m not going to waste gas for this” declared Alexander, stoically.

Peggy looped her arm with his and let herself being dragged as the CFO walked back to his office. “For your favourite sister??”

“For your crazy bullshit”

“I think I’m gonna ask Theodosia to bring my crucifix right now…” commented Aaron when Madison and he were left alone in the hallway. The accountant nodded, in agreement.

It was almost dark outside by the time Madison finished his part of paperwork. If his workmates usually got out before the workday ended, today, after the events with the mysterious doll, everybody decided to call it a day sooner. Washington also left before he was supposed to, but Madison attribute it to how sick the poor man was of everything. There was that day when he came in his office without knocking, as the door was opened, and he saw his boss looking at a calendar, muttering how many days he still had left until he could retire, with dreamy eyes.
Let’s say Madison avoided his boss’ office more often after that incident.

He picked up all his things and kept them inside their respective drawers. He also tidied up the place, as Thomas was with Hamilton discussing a few things and he doubted his friend would be back there as he’d forgotten his clicker there. Madison stepped out and locked the door of his shared office and went straight to the staircase to let his friend know he was ready to leave whenever he was finished.

He hadn’t advanced a few steps when he heard footsteps echoing right behind him. Madison, at first, thought it was because of the rare silence of the building and the fact that it was vacant in the first floor. But when the sound and his actual footsteps didn’t match, he stopped.

A shiver went down his spine, his body turning rigid. Madison turned around, seeing there was nobody there but him. With a frown, he tried to think rationally. Isa had carpooled with Maria early in the afternoon, as the two girls had decided, at last hour, to go shopping and spend some time together. So, he knew for sure his flatmate and their receptionist were not there. He’d seen Aaron also leaving at lunchbreak and never returning, alleging he was going to fetch the famous crucifix. Peggy and Angelica said they were going to eat outside that day, but all their belongings in their hands gave their true destination away. Hercules had taken Lafayette home around twelve, when the latter didn’t calm down and showed himself afraid by only looking at his office, trying to understand what had just happened and growing obsessed when he didn’t find the doll anywhere. Washington also left. And Thomas and Alexander were in the last floor, working together.

Maybe it was that. Maybe they were walking up there and that was why the footsteps had sounded so strange and echoing.

He turned around once more, deciding that was the most logical explanation, and resumed his walking.

The sound came back again, this time undoubtedly coming from behind. Madison turned around, this time a bit faster than the first one. He scrutinized the whole entrance of the building, finding it as vacant as before. That didn’t make his growing fear to disappear.

“Hello?” he called, out loud. “Peggy?” It wouldn’t be the first time that girl had fallen asleep somewhere unimaginable and they had to wake her up. “Washington?” Maybe he had come back and he didn’t even realise it, as he was absorb in his own paperwork?
Just when he was about to call another name, there was a bang on the counter by the door, followed by a hiss. Madison sprinted upstairs, paling.

Maria and Isa got up from under the counter, the latter rubbing her aching head. The receptionist laughed at the memory of her fried hitting her head as she tried to get out earlier than she should have. She closed the video where she got the sound effect from and went to help her to get out before Madison came back and saw them there.

“Are you alright?” she asked, concerned.

“Yes, it was more noisy than hurtful” giggled Isa, though she hissed from pain when she rubbed one spot. “Well, a bump for the memory”

“Hey, do you still have some of that fake blood?”

“Why?”

Madison pounded on the door insistently until it was finally opened. Once he saw Thomas standing at the other side, startled by his demeanour, he stretched out his hand.

“The car keys” he demanded, without getting into detail.

“We haven’t…” tried to explain Thomas.

“The car keys” he repeated, more insistently, looking for them himself inside his friend’s pockets.

“What’s wrong with you?” asked Alexander, watching it all from his desk.

“I just heard footsteps downstairs” he said, sighing in relief when he finally had the keys in his power.

“It might’ve been yours echoing…”

“No” the accountant interrupted the immigrant brusquely. “I don’t know what that was, and I’m not going to stay here to find out” he swore.

“And what about me?” asked Thomas, watching him marching downstairs.

“I’ll drive you” promised Alexander, sighing right after with tedium. “We’re gonna have to stand them like this for the whole freaking month…” he complained, and Thomas nodded as he closed the door again.
*This smells like humanity (Esto huele a humanidad): Our version of "Smells like death".
Next morning, things didn’t get any better. The fact that clouds gathered in the sky, making the morning darker than it should be, along with the rain that hit harder as the minutes went by, didn’t help the nervousness that floated in the environment.

“Even the weather is warning us” said Peggy, face pressed against the window.

“I’d say even the weather fears our meeting days” said Alexander, sipping from his coffee mug and trying not to look through the window.

He almost dropped the whole liquid all over his buttoned-up when Peggy let out a shrieking.

“What now?!” he asked, turning around.

Peggy pointed at the item, with fear. “There’s a spirit making a mug going in circles in the microwave!”

“That was me, I was heating you some milk” explained Alexander, rolling his eyes.

“Oooh…” exclaimed Peggy, giggling nervously as she scratched the back of her head, blushing in shame. “And what did you press to make it go in circles like that?” she asked, now eyeing the mug with curiosity.

Alexander passed a hand through his face. “God… Look, why don’t you go to prepare the things in the meeting room?” he proposed, wanting to have a bit of mental peace.

“I don’t want to be alone anywhere in here” admitted Peggy, displaying her best puppy eyes.

“Peggy” insisted Alexander, harshening his tone.
“Please” she whined.

“And what’re you gonna do when the meeting is over?”

“Follow you around”

“Excuse me? Following me around as annoying as you’re today? No way, miss”

“Alexander, please, I’m afraid”

“Why didn’t you stay home, then? You’ve missed work before for less…”

“Because my gossip nature is bigger than my fears!”

The microwave dinged and the girl jumped, afraid. Alexander got up to take the mug out of it and passed it to Peggy.

“Drink this, relax, stole a few anxiolytics from Madison and try to think rationally once and…”

Alexander’s advice was muted when a blood-curdling scream resonated throughout the whole building. Peggy dropped the mug, slipping the milk all over the floor and went to hug her brother-in-law, joining the screaming. Alexander hugged her by instinct, also startled by the unexpected and loud noise.

“It’s the ghost of the woman!” assured Peggy, trembling. “She’s coming to get us!”

“Peggy, calm down and let me go!” ordered Alexander, wincing from pain as she was shouting right in his ear.

“It’s coming from upstairs!” they heard Maria saying.

“From where she died!”

“Peggy, stop it already!” complained Alexander, finally getting away from her grip. He still held her hand, though.

They went upstairs with the rest of the staff to see what had happened. On the last floor, at the doorframe of the meeting room, they found Libby with both hands clasped over her mouth, looking terrified at the inside of the room.

“What’s wrong now?” asked Thomas, putting a comforting hand on the girl’s shoulder.

Libby babbled a few words none caught as she pointed at the wall across them. They went
rigid when they read the red letters written on the wall, that warned:

_Yall’re gonna to die._

They exchanged a few glares, Lafayette and Angelica paling slightly, while Libby decided to hug Thomas, in seek of comfort, as she trembled like a leaf. Aaron rummaged in his pockets, took out a crucifix and then threw it inside, gaining a few looks from his workmates. Washington, on his behalf, squinted his eyes, re-reading the sentence a few more times, feeling something was odd. Alexander helped his suspicions when he threw a huff to the air.

“The only scary thing of that is the two misspellings”

“Hey, what’s wrong?” chimed in Laurens, quite offended. “Maybe the poor woman couldn’t go to school… Preppies”

The CEO heaved a tired sigh. “Alright, who did this?”

“We played with what we shouldn’t and now we’re gonna pay for it” said Libby, her voice shaking from fear.

“Nonsense, this could’ve easily been Adams” dismissed Angelica.

Lafayette nodded, relieved to find some common sense within the staff. “True, true. He’s always been very resentful”

“If he weren’t so lazy, I’d think the same” commented Thomas, rubbing Libby’s back to soothe her.

Madison hissed. “Agh, I forgot to change his water before leaving”

Isa scrunched up her nose at that. “How is the poor man living?”

“He’s already lucky I allow him in the house” commented Alexander, bitterly.

“No, no, no, I’ve got a sixth sense” insisted Libby. “And I feel something around us”

Washington sighed. “Come on, let’s keep calm…”

“I heard footsteps yesterday” shared Madison, uneasy. Thomas rolled his eyes in exhaustion.

“It might’ve been the echo” proposed Angelica.

“No, no, they sounded arrhythmic”

“Madison, you were kicked out of the band back in college for a reason” commented Aaron, with a cocked eyebrow.

“Besides” chimed in Hercules, also nervous but clinging to any kind of rational comfort he could get. “Alex and Jefferson stayed till late yesterday. Maybe one of them were pacing to not kill each other”

“As supportive as always” said Alexander, frowning his lips.
“I heard the footsteps right behind me” clarified Madison, still flustered by Aaron’s backstab from before.

“But are you hearing yourselves?” interceded Washington, sternly. “First playing with a Ouija during your worktime and now playing jokes on the rest like this” He pointed at the wall with the letters on it, clearly angry.

“Sir, with all due respect, I think we should say a prayer before the meeting starts” proposed Libby, very seriously.

“No, please, I’ll have flashbacks of my childhood” pleaded Aaron, frowning in discomfort.

“Me too” nodded Laurens, sharing his mood.

Maria shook her head vehemently, as she declared. “We all are going to die”

“Maria!” admonished Lafayette, moving uncomfortably in spot.

“A therapist would get rich in here”

“Peggy, you’re a therapist” Angelica reminded her.

“We need to do something!” exclaimed Libby, finally letting go of Thomas to confront the whole staff. “There’s something evil in here”

“Yes, your lack of maturity” snapped the CEO. With a sided and quite mocking and challenging smile, he added. “So, according to you, there’s a ghost woman lurking in this building?”

“That’s what we supposed from what Mr King told us” said Libby, a bit weakly under the severe stare of her boss.

“Well, in that case they’d have to contribute in here” joked Washington.

“Yes, cleaning or doing paperwork. Something tells me they’re more hardworking than the living” joined Alexander, with a laugh in the end.

“Yes, and they’ll have to come to the meetings as well” added Lafayette, less humorously.

“How will I be able to count all the votes, then?” asked Maria, sounding overwhelmed with the mental image.

“Well, enough!” ordered Washington, his smile totally gone. “Don’t drive yourselves crazier than you already are, please”

“Never thought that’d be possible” muttered Angelica.

Alexander looked at her with complicity. “They evolve”

“We’ll have the meeting in the afternoon” declared Washington. “So, you’ll have time to calm down and return to the real world”

“But, sir…” tried Libby. She sealed her lips as soon as Washington threw her a warning glare.

“Burr, please, paint that wall. You’re already an expert on that” ordered the CEO, turning on his heels to go back to work.
“Yes, sir”

Thomas eyed him. “But no trees this time”

“Don’t limit me” complained the lawyer.

“How am I going to be able to work after this startle?” said Peggy, writhing her hands nervously.

“Don’t get smart, young lady” Alexander was rapid to reprehend.

“Well, in her defence, I’ll say that I’m also a bit uneasy” supported Angelica, with a tinier voice they were used to hear her talk with.

“Me too” nodded Lafayette, grabbing his boyfriend’s arm to feel grounded. “I didn’t sleep at all, remembering that doll”

“What a night” complained Hercules, shaking his head. He received a whack from his partner at the comment.

“We all are going to die!” repeated Maria, louder than before.

“Stop it already!” hissed CIO, finally reciprocating the physical touch to his partner, his hand on Lafayette’s.

“Please, this is suggestion, nothing else” insisted Thomas, for the zillionth time.

“Work and be serious for the rest of the day, and you’ll see how you forget about this whole issue” assured Alexander.

“Well, I don’t know” commented Peggy, squinting her eyes. “I’m seeing a lot of strange things going on here. Like you two agreeing and acting civil with each other” she condemned, looking repeatedly at her brother-in-law and then at Thomas.

“Do as I say” commanded Alexander, tapping his youngest sister-in-law for reassurance. “You’ll see how you see things in another perspective once your mind has calmed down”

“Yes, if one of us live to tell” commented Maria, eyeing the whole staff, which went rigid at her words.

“Maria, enough” ordered Alexander, harshening his tone.

“I’m still very afraid” said Libby, looking for support with her panicked eyes.

“Does any of you want an anxiolytic?” asked Madison, taking out a bottle from his pocket.

“Oh. I was going to rob you later, but alright” nodded Peggy, gaining a dirty look from the man.

The majority of the group walked to him, as if he was giving candy.

“Is it normal for you to do this?” asked Isa, taking one pill for herself.

“It could become a tradition, seeing the staff that works in here” answered Thomas, shrugging.
A loud buzzing sound resonated throughout the building, along with a few thumps that made them all to jump and scream in fear. Aaron bent over himself, coughing.

“Fuck, just when I was swallowing it” he complained, with a raspy voice.

“What the hell was that?!” asked Peggy, terrified and looking around.

“It’s just the front door” responded Alexander, boringly. “I told Maria to close it because water could get in” he elaborated.

“And she did it?” asked Angelica, surprised. She looked at her sister. “You’re right, this is starting to be too weird”

“Hey, I’ve got my moments!” complained Maria, crossing both arms.

“Alexander, are you going down all by yourself?” asked Lafayette, worried for his friend.

“For the love of God, I’m just going to open the door for a probable client!” complained the financer.

“What a scene they’re gonna be greeted with” complained Thomas, under his breath.

“I mean, it could be someone dangerous as well” theorized Hercules, not wanting to give away how afraid he was starting to feel, his eyes not wanting to meet the writing on the wall.

“Like who?” challenged Alexander.

“A robber”

“Huh, like they’re gonna take a lot from us’ laughed Thomas.

“A few cookies and I think we finish those already” agreed Isa, cackling with him.

“Besides, is the robber so kind that they knock on the door?” asked Laurens, also with a funny smile plastered on his face.

“It could be to trick you” commented Madison, after a thought.

“Stop watching so much TV…” reprehended Angelica, rolling her eyes.

“Be careful though, mon ami” said Lafayette, not feeling any calmer. Hercules nodded in agreement. Alexander glared at his friends for a moment, eyes half-closed. “Really, people, the fact that you still believe in ghosts at our age…”

He left, shaking his head in disappointment and leaving the sentence hanging in the air.

Libby watched him go, feeling concerned but not brave enough to go with him. Maria tapped her on the shoulder as she indicated Isa to also come to her. Laurens was already by her side. The receptionist threw a glare at the rest of the staff as they all commented under their breaths, walking
“Great acting, Libby” congratulated Maria, making the Mexican girl to raise a confused eyebrow.

“Yeah, you really made me believe you were legitimately afraid” nodded Isa. Throwing a hard glare to Laurens, she added. “You really saved our buddy’s slip up”

“I was in a hurry” Laurens defended himself.

“Read more” admonished Isa.

“Wait, wait” said Libby, holding both hands up. “Was it you?”

“Of course… Who else?”

Libby sighed exasperated. “Why didn’t you tell me? I almost had a heart attack when I saw that writing!”

“You didn’t inform her?” asked Isa, again with a rebuking tone.

“You complain a lot but do nothing” grumbled Laurens.

“John, we complain because you can’t act or write” agreed Maria.

Laurens was prepared to fight her when Alexander’s scream silenced all the conversations that were taking place in the last floor. Washington’s door swung opened not a second later, their boss’ face completely paled and terrified for what could’ve happened to the financer. He was also the first one to move, running to the staircase.

The group of four that had decided to play the prank exchanged perplexed glares that soon turned into worry as they followed their workmates.

Alexander left the last floor shaking his head in disapproval and went downstairs trotting, thinking they had already made whoever was at the door wait long enough. He shivered when he heard the sound of rain hitting the glass clearer as he approached the entrance. Maybe he shouldn’t have been the one receiving them, but he knew the rest of his workmates weren’t up for that. Especially today, with all that was going on.

He only dared to raise his glare when he was on the last step. Alexander froze when he saw who or what was standing at the other side of the glass doors. A slender figure covered in a white dress that had seen better days; its face covered by raven and dishevelled hair that turned even
messier with the seldom whips of air that accompanied the now heavy raining. A flash of lighting illuminated the tall figure, showing her pale skin adorned by a few marks on her bare arms. Just at the same time, the woman threw herself against the glass doors, colliding against them and making them shake more violently. She also let out a loud grumble that mixed up with the thump and that helped Alexander to wake up from his daze.

“Fucking hell!” he screamed, as loud as he could, storming upstairs with wobbly legs.

Dolley had told James she would make him lunch for that day and she always fulfilled her promises. Even if it was a bit later than her boyfriend started his workday. Blame it on how addicting Netflix could be on the nights she needed her sleep the most.

Still, she made it just one hour late than she knew James started working. The only problem was that she found no parking spots nearby and had to leave her car a few blocks away. She didn’t mind walking to the building, it wasn’t that far away, and the rain was so slight she barely felt it.

Until it started to pour.

Dolley cursed everything she knew as she ran to the building, tripping a few times and falling on her knees in a couple of occasions as she’d decided to wear heels today. Obviously. The wind also decided to show up just to make her battle more difficult, but Dolley was so stubborn she kept going with her chin raised up in pride, though nobody was watching her brave action. And if somebody did, they’d have thought she was crazy for being there, under such a weather.

Eventually, she reached the doors. And cursed his boyfriend’s name when she found them locked.

“Weren’t it always opened because nobody takes this place seriously?!” she hollered, kicking the pavement with rage.

She saw the bell by her left and rang it, paying all her frustrations with the innocent button. A buzzing and loud sound was heard. Dolley looked inside, seeing the counter completely empty as well as the whole entrance. She kept ringing the bell with insistence, now adding furious knocks on the door.
“Someone open already, god damnit!” she cursed, in a hiss.

She looked at the bag in her right hand, which she was pounding on the door with, and scrunched up her nose when she saw it a bit wet as well as her costume. Well, maybe the mud of her skirt would make her corpse bride impression more believable... She was about to look inside the paper bag to make sure the food was in perfect state (or, at least, still eatable) when another draught hit her mercilessly, almost making her to lose her balance. The bun she had tied her hair with that morning undid completely and the tie flew away.

Dolley didn’t have time for it, though, she was trying to keep her hair out of her face so she could see if somebody was there, opening the stupid door already. But the wind didn’t want to give her a break, and so didn’t the rain. She tried to protect the bag of food against her chest, but a lighting startled her and she finally lost her rigid posture, making it easier for the wind to make her hit the glass doors.

She groaned from pain and frustration. She thought she’d heard something from inside the building, but by the time she’d managed to get a hold on her hair, there was still nobody there. It was like something clicked insider her brain at the sight.

“To hell!” she decided, throwing the already soaked paper bag to the pavement. It wasn’t like James would be able to eat what was inside now. “To the freaking hell!” she screamed, going back to where her car was, in unsteady walking as she fought against the wind and rain again.

“But, Alexander, what did you see?” asked Angelica, pure concern in her words as she saw her brother-in-law trembling and with a terrified look.

They had to help him sit down and soothed him with words because he was more restless than usual. Washington and she had shared a glare, with which they silently decided he would be the one going downstairs to see if something was odd down there and she would stay there to help Alexander calm down, along with the rest of worried workers.

“I don’t even know what I saw” answered Alexander, when he thought he was calmed enough. He passed a trembling hand through his hair. “You people are driving me crazy” “Even when he sees strange things, it somebody else’s fault” said Thomas, shaking his head with
tedium.

“Thomas, please, the poor man’s shaking like a leaf” condemned Isa.

“Do you want an anxiolytic?” offered Madison again.

Alexander looked enragedly at the bottle. “Is that going to be as expensive as the mandarin?”

Madison frowned at him. “Then you’d complain about me not being nice to you…”

“What’s with the mandarin?” asked Lafayette.

“Don’t ask…” said Hercules, bored by only thinking about what all that could be about.

Washington came back, with a streaming mug of tilleul tea in his hand.

“I saw nothing out there or around the first floor” he informed, giving the financer the mug. He frowned at how cold his friend’s hands were. “Son, are you sure you saw somebody out there?”

Alexander tried to control his tongue at the doubt. “I saw a woman hitting herself against the glass doors” But he couldn’t control how sharp his words were spoken.

Libby paled at the new information. “What do you mean a woman?”

“We all are going to die” repeated Maria, teeth gritted.

“Maria” warned Aaron.

“All dressed in white, and the black hair all over her face…” kept explaining Alexander, though his lack of eye contact made them think he was talking more to himself than to any of them.

“It could’ve been a normal person” said Thomas, to keep things cool.

“Then, why wasn’t anybody there when Washington went?” asked Peggy, nervously. “She would’ve stayed there had she been a client or someone who wanted to shelter from the rain”

“We’re not an inn…”

“This is turning too creepy” commented Aaron, embracing himself.

“What do we do now?” asked Madison.

“I can always look for an exorcist” proposed Angelica, raising her phone.

“For the love of God…” muttered Thomas, passing a hand through his face.

“But we should discuss that” chimed in Lafayette.

“True, true, it can’t be a very expensive one” said Hercules, to which his boyfriend nodded.

“We can pay it with the company’s money” proposed Peggy.

“Burr, doesn’t your family know some good exorcists?” asked Laurens.
“They do, indeed” nodded the lawyer.

“There, call them” demanded Peggy.

“But ask them how much it’ll be” reminded Madison.

“But if they’re a family friend, they’ll help us for free, right?” asked Angelica.

“We can’t call an exorcist just like that” interceded Washington, with a frown

“Thank you. One that’s normal…” said Thomas, relieved.

“They can only act if they have a special permission”

“Oh, for God’s sake…”

“True, I saw that in some movies as well!” nodded Madison.

“Again, it’s a family friend” said Angelica.

“Actually, it’s my mother’s cousin” explained Aaron.

“Bf, did they get along?” asked Laurens. “Family’s a total bitch”

“The only thing with sense that somebody’s said this week” commented Thomas.

“He can also be part of the pushovers” said Lafayette, wanting to be optimistic.

“Well, I mean, Aaron has to take after someone” said Madison.

“The tough guy just talked” spat the lawyer, angry.

“People, calm down” said Maria. “It doesn’t matter. We all are going to die, anyways”

“Stop being so annoying with that!” complained Peggy.

“But are you hearing yourselves?” said Thomas, before anyone else could talk. “Really, just when I think you can’t outdo yourselves, you prove me wrong in the most surrealist way possible!”

“Alexander didn’t believe us either, and now look at him!” said Isa, as if that was enough proof for them to be in the right.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Please, this man goes crazy as soon as four raindrops fall”

Alexander threw daggers in his direction. “I was perfectly fine when I saw that, thank you very much” he argued.

“Yes, just as fine as when we were in that cabin?”

“Do you see things as well when you have to talk in public?”

Thomas frowned at the low blow. “Listen to me, gremlin…”

The fight died down when another lighting happened and thunder made the walls to shake slightly. The artificial lights turned off in the meantime, spreading the panic among the staff.
“We all are going to die!” said Maria once again, dramatically.

“Call your cousin, fast!” instructed Angelica, grabbing Aaron’s by his shirt. Washington and Alexander nodding behind her.

“It’s just for the storm outside!” countered Thomas, just to be completely ignored.

A taxi pulled over half an hour later.

Several kilometres away from the law firm.

Maurice looked out of the window, seeing the large building he’d told the driver to stop in front of. The man looked at him through the rear mirror.

“We arrived, sir” informed the dark-skinned man due to habit. His glare drifted away from Maurice’s reflection just a second, as he said: “So, are you going to pay in cash or…?”

The cab driver clicked his mouth shut when he saw nobody in the backseat, just the door wide open. Infuriated, he hollered:

“Yo! You didn’t pay!”

“Screw you, go back to your country!” shouted back the man.

That only made driver's mood to go worse. “But if I was born in New Jersey!”

“You’ll never catch me!” declared Maurice, as he stumbled upon one trash can and then continued his race, now limping slightly.

The driver sighed as his client ran away. “Fucking priests…”
Everyone was waiting for Aaron’s cousin to arrive, the tension and dread spreading throughout the building. Some whispered their worries, only making their suggestion to go wilder. Some others decided to light up the place with a few candles Mrs Washington had decided to buy a few months before just in case. George never loved his wife more than right now.

The group of four prankers were in one corner, throwing glares at Alexander, who was seemingly calmer, talking with his sisters-in-law; his frown not leaving his features, though. Angelica was doing her best to think rationally and coldly, despite starting to feel startled herself, while Peggy was letting her emotions to make her shake from time to time, ending up looping her arm with Alexander’s, both needing the physical comfort.

Libby showed an impressed look towards her group. “That idea of bringing a creepy woman really worked to make the sceptics believe this tale” she congratulated. “Who did you call?”

Maria threw her a scared glare. “I didn’t call anybody” she admitted.

“Neither did I” said Isa, paler than usual. Laurens shaking his head by her side.

Libby felt a shiver going down her spine. “What do you…? What did Alexander see, then?”

“I don’t know” answered the three of them, quietly.

“This is getting spooky” said Isa, rubbing one arm sheepishly.

“Told you we shouldn’t have disturbed the dead” rebuked Laurens.

“I was the one saying that” said Libby, harshly. “Though I agree, I think we got this too far”

“That or that finally everybody went crazy in here” proposed Maria.

“We should come clean” said Libby, sternly.

“In a bit, we still have to go through the last stage” promised the receptionist.

“What last stage?” asked the cleaner, suspicious.

“There he is!” informed Aaron, waiting for his cousin by the doors.

“I’ll be right back” whispered Maria. “Go along with me”

“With what?” asked Isa, her question unanswered as the receptionist went upstairs in a hurry.

“I don’t even want to know” assured Libby, frowning her lips.

They went to the entrance, where Aaron and Washington helped the man to get rid of his now wet jacket.

“Why didn’t you call a cab?” asked Aaron, as he dried the briefcase.
“I did, but the driver got the address wrong and I didn’t want to bother him” made up Maurice, taking a look at the taller man. “Mr Washington, I suppose?”

“Nice to meet you, sir” nodded the CEO, shaking hands.

The priest took a look around him, seeing the place lightened by candles. He looked puzzled for a moment, before he asked, jocosely: “Setting up the place?”

“The lights simply turned off” explained Lafayette, still pretty concerned.

“Just right after Alexander saw a creepy woman outside” pointed out Angelica.

“It had to be her!” said Isa, dramatically scared.

“Or because of the storm and/or our bad habit of not taking care of things in here” suggested Thomas, after an eye-roll. “Which is the most plausible”

“Don’t worry, now that I’m here we can sort this whole issue out” promised Maurice.

“And how much will it be?”

“Hercules!” condemned his boyfriend.

“What? My fears don’t make me rich!”

“Gentlemen, please” interceded Washington, severely. When they got silent, he turned his head to the priest, adding: “Let him answer”

“It’s alright. You’re friends of my cousin, so I’ll give you a special price”

“Sure, a 30% less for each two entities” joked Thomas.

“Let’s take this seriously, please” begged Libby, starting to have a bad feeling.

The secretary sighed in exhaustion. “This is ridiculous. There’s nothing in here”

“One can never know” assured the priest, rapidly. “Can you tell me what has happened so far?”

“And then I came here” explained Lafayette, pointing at his vacant swivel chair, untouched since the events he was now telling. “And I saw the doll I previously threw away sitting on my chair. And it moved on its own”

“The doll?” asked Maurice, nodding, gravely.

“No, no, the chair”

“And we’ve got a painting in the wall” added Laurens, pointing in the direction of the meeting room. “It says we all are going to die”

“Well, we had it” interjected Aaron. “I already painted a bit…”
Laurens scowled irritated. “You just have to be initiative today, right?”

“I need to do things when I’m nervous!” the lawyer excused himself.

“And Alex, tell him what you saw” ordered Hercules.

“Well, I think I saw…”

“No, you think, no” interrupted Isa, sternly. “He shouted at the top of his lungs” she told the priest.

“He does that every day…” commented Thomas, impassible.

“But he began to hyperventilate” Looking back at the priest, she added. “From the fear”

“Little startle” Alexander corrected her, blushing in embarrassment.

“He does that as well every time it rains” continued the secretary. “Really, today’s been a day like any other, but you’re just paranoid”

And then, a bang was heard from one of the offices; the closed door bumping incessantly, accompanied by a series of grunting and guttural sounds that sent chills down everyone’s spines. Laurens snapped out of it first and went to the end of the hall.

“Oh, I wonder what that could be!” he commented, in the meantime, making Isa to roll her eyes at how forced his ‘normality’ felt.

“No, Johnny, don’t go!” said Lafayette, worried sick. “Did Hollywood teach you nothing?”

Hercules grabbed his arm, keeping him in place. “Let fate be, Laf…”

Laurens opened the door, ignoring his friend’s complaints, and he was pushed to the wall across by a dishevelled Maria, who fell to the floor, writhing and still making that horrid sound, as if she were in pain.

They looked at the woman in shock for several seconds, Maurice paler than the whole staff, until Isa took action, understanding the woman’s plan.

“Oh, no! The woman possessed her!” she informed, in an exclamation.

“Told you we shouldn’t play with these things!” condemned Libby, and not even the group of prankers knew if her reprimand was pretended or not.

“Do something!” urged Madison, frowning at Maurice.

“Ah, true, true!” said the man, looking everywhere until his eyes landed on the briefcase. “Hurry, help me find the holy water and my Bible!” he commanded, though doing the action himself while
Aaron simply held the briefcase.

In the meantime, Laurens had walked closer to the receptionist, still twisting on the floor.

“Maria, hold on!” he comforted her.

The woman responded him by spitting some green liquid on his face and part of his clothes. Even Libby had to prevent a laugh with Isa when she saw the scene and the disgusted face of Laurens, as he passed a hand through his face.

“It’s the phlegm of Hell” said Isa, her voice trembling. Thankfully, everyone thought it was because of fear and not due to contained laughter.

“Another new shirt to the trash” lamented Hercules.

“Thank you, my friend…” said Laurens, sarcastically.

“That is. She ate something bad and got food poisoning” declared Thomas, getting his calmness back.

“Oh, now I remembered Dolley told me she’d bring me my lunch” said Madison, looking at the staircase. “Where could she be??”

“Do you think it’s the best time to wonder that, Dobby?” reprimanded Peggy.

“Aha! I’ve got it!” celebrated Maurice, raising a thermos upon his head.

“What a speed” fake-flattered Angelica, frowning her lips. “By the time you found that you’ve been possessed by seven demons”

“But what in the heck is that?” asked Alexander, once he saw the images on the bottle.

“This is where I always keep my holy water” explained the man, walking to where Maria was, growling. They followed him, hesitantly. “I’ve got another one for my tea. I’m nobody without tea”

“Good for you, but I was talking about the drawings” clarified the financer.

“Cousin, is that Dora the explorer?” asked Aaron, feeling a strong second-hand embarrassment.

“Not even the priests that come here are serious” lamented Washington, shaking his head.

“Well, all this started with a glass of Donald Duck” comforted Lafayette. “We’re on the same level”

“The problem is that our level is a negative number” complained Madison.


“Silence!” ordered the priest, stopping in his tracks all of a sudden. Maria and he locked eyes for a brief moment. “Get back, you horrid beast!” he hollered.
“What a show…” criticised Thomas.

Maria groaned in response, showing her teeth to the priest. “Your grandmother is a whore here in hell” she whispered darkly.

“When did Granny die?” asked Aaron, a bit hurt, looking at his relative.

Maria flattered at her slip-up. “Uh… Your great-grandmother”

“Nanny also died??” asked Aaron, now truly heartbroken.

“Man, call your family more often…” reprimanded Angelica.

Maria let out a shriek that turned their blood into ice and then started to mutter made-up words that left them confused. Maurice knelt in front of her, nodding.

“What’s she saying?!” asked Peggy, hiding behind her oldest sister.

“But how is he going to understand that gibberish?” said Madison.

“Hush” instructed the priest once again. “I’m trying to translate it”

“But do you really understand that?” asked Washington, puzzled.

“He’s an expert in these things” boasted Aaron, wanting to give his cousin some credit. “He used to have a TV show, late at night”

“Wonder why that is in past tense…” said Thomas.

Maurice turned to look at them. “She’s talking the Catputnikja”

“The what?” asked Hercules, lost.

“It’s a tongue that’s been dead for centuries. There are only three persons in the entire world that know it. And I’m one of them”

“Of course you are…” nodded Isa, a bit bothered.

“But he’s making it all up” complained Thomas, reaching the limit of his patience.

“Shut up, don’t make him mad” ordered Peggy, nervously.

“Well, and what did she say, then?” asked Alexander, crossing both arms.

“The woman says this is her home and has no intentions of leaving” translated Maurice.

“In that case, she can stay if she keeps her part of the building clean” mocked Jefferson.

“Don’t joke with this!” reprimanded Libby.

“We all are going to die!” hollered Laurens, dramatically.

“That’s the way she started!” explained Peggy, horrified. “It’s like a plague, we’re doomed!” she
screamed, grabbing her sister’s collar and shaking her.

“I can save her” assured Maurice, looking directly at Washington. “For 500 dollars”

“Yeah, man… We’d rather let the demons take her!” said the informant.

Maria looked at him, feeling betrayed. “Hercules!” she said, with her normal voice.

“She’s back!” celebrated Peggy, both arms up.

Maria vacillated once again, until she spat, in a deep voice: “Shut up, bitch!”, and slapped herself slightly on the face.

“She’s gone again!” lamented the youngest Schuyler sister.

“Maurice, we’re family!” complained Aaron.

“What a family, you don’t know who’s dead and alive” said Madison.

“Wish I had that…” commented Thomas.

“But she’s still there!” said Peggy, walking to the priest, with hands clasped in a begging manner. “Save her, father!”

“Someone give him the crucifix!” ordered Lafayette.

Aaron ran inside the meeting room, taking the crucifix he’d thrown there that morning and turned around. Maria eyed the object with hatred and leapt to the man, making him flinch and throw the crucifix at her, blindly. Maria dodged it and entered the room, growling like a rabid animal.

Aaron ran out of the room, paling considerably and trembling at the sight of his workmate, pacing wobblingly across the room, as she pulled on her hair, screaming in agony.

“She’s going insane, do something already!” pressured Libby.

“Fight, Maria, fight!” shouted Laurens, above her screaming.

Thomas smiled slightly at the sight. “Huh, she looks like Hamilton when we didn’t let him get his plan through” he remembered, making James to bend over in contained laughter.

“Haha! It’s true!” laughed Angelica, gaining an infuriated look from the immigrant.


Maria ran to the table and threw the eraser at the priest, making the staff to let out a small cry of fear, as the object hit the wall and Maria hollered loudly, going back to go in circles around the room.

“Help her!” begged Hercules, feeling bad for the woman. “We’ll pay you whatever you want!”
Maurice nodded, looking no less scared than any of them. He swallowed and walked into the room, opening the thermos with uncertainty.

“Leave this world, entity!” he shouted, receiving a growl from the woman across him. Maurice frowned at her and threw the tap of the thermos at his back. “Holy water to purify you! Leave this place!”

He threw the liquid contents of his thermos to her, bathing her completely. Maria screamed at the top of her lungs, from pure pain.

“She’s such a good actress” commented Libby in a whisper, to which Isa nodded, impressed.

“You son of a bitch!” insulted the receptionist, with her real voice. “That shit burns!”

“She’s coming back, keep going!” urged Peggy, happy for her friend.

Madison scrunched up his nose. “Doesn’t that smell like green tea?” he commented.

“He’s burning her for real” commented Alexander, eyes wide at how red some parts of Maria’s bare arms were turning.

Aaron hissed. “Uuh, something tells me the right thermos was the Winnie the Pooh one” he said, taking it out.

“We’re sad even when someone gets possessed” complained Angelica.

“Give it to him, Burr, he’s hurting the girl!” ordered Thomas, frowning at the still lawyer.

Meanwhile, Maurice had been throwing the remaining hot tea to Maria, who tried to dodge it as well as she could, her now wet hair getting in the way of her vision and making the task more difficult.

“Get out, evil entity! Take me instead!” shouted Maurice, louder than Maria’s screams of pain.

“Sir!” called Lafayette, taking enough courage to walk to the door. “Sir, stop it, you got those things mixed up!” he informed.

But Maurice had his whole attention to the now whimpering form of Maria, who rubbed her arms as she hissed and tried to take her long hair away from her face.

“I won’t give up!!” swore the priest, gesticulating with his arms as the girl had been doing before and
speaking gibberish.

“This man is crazier than all of us together” said Madison, in shock.

“Alright, I think this is enough!” decided Libby, running to Maria’s aid. “There’s something we need to tell you…”

“Careful, the wires!” interrupted Hercules.

They looked at the direction he was pointing, seeing a series of wires tangled with themselves on the floor. Maurice kept going in circles, absorbed in his task and not realising he was going towards those. Which were right beside the window.

The priest’s feet bumped into the wires, making him lose his balance and fall on his backs, against the window, which glass broke at the heavy weight thrown its way. They gasped as they heard Maurice screaming as he fell. Then, only silence. The staff exchanged a horrified look before sprinting to the broken window and looking down.

There, on the pavement, was the still form of Maurice, onto his back.

“Fuck, we just killed a priest” Angelica broke the silence, a hand over her mouth.

“Now, we’ll surely go to Hell” added Alexander.

“We weren’t doing much to be accepted in Heaven, anyways” said Madison, unmoved.

A taxi drove to Maurice’s side, suddenly, stopping right beside the lying man. The driver got out, knelt by the priest’s side, looked inside his pockets until he found a wallet and then took a few bills out.

“If you steal from Faruq” he began to say, walking back to his car. He continued once he was sat behind the wheel, prepared to leave: “Faruq will steal from you, with interests” 

And then he drove away.

The staff watched him go, not understanding what had just happened.

“Who the F was that?” asked Hercules.
“This building attracts nonsense” said Washington, scrunching up his nose in disgust.

“Oh, it fucking hurts…” a weak voice said from their rights.

They looked at Libby, helping Maria up and making sure the girl was as fine as she could be with those scalds. Peggy threw herself to her arms, happy.

“You’re okay!” she breathed out, relieved.

Maria hissed from pain. “Celebrate it at a distance” she pleaded.

“Oh, sorry” said the therapist, ending the hug.

“Well, at least Maurice’s death wasn’t in vain” said Hercules, wanting to be optimistic. “He did his job”

“And really gave us the perfect ending for the movie” revealed Maria, still a bit out of breath.

“What?” they all asked, frowning at her.

Libby blushed. “Yeah… That was what I was trying to tell you earlier…”

“I knew it…” muttered Thomas, shaking his head.

“What is going on here?” Washington demanded to know, his deep voice sending more chills than anything that they’d witnessed that day.

“You’ve been the protagonists of my first film ever. Remember this title: The Law Firm of Horrors” declared Maria, proudly.

“More than a title, it sounds like a good summary of this place” said Madison.

“Thank you! I think just the same” said Laurens.

“You knew?!” exclaimed Alexander, looking at him enraged.

“Really, John, you’re out of control!” screamed Lafayette, matching his friend’s ire.


“Does this mean everything was fake?” asked Peggy, angry.

“But are you all stupid, assholes?!” said Angelica, her face turning red.

Washington sighed loudly. “Really, sub-animals, you just took 10 years off my lifespan with the stupid joke!”

“For the shitty life you claim to be living I’m sure we made you a favour” countered Maria.

“If it depended on me, you all would be fired, bunch of buffoons!” shouted Alexander, kicking the floor with rage.

“True, guys, you overstepped the limit” supported Isa, just to mouth right after ‘I’m the new, I’m the
new, shut up’, throwing scared glares to their boss.

Thomas talked before Washington could keep reprimanding the staff. “Listen, I don’t care very much, but I think we should be calling an ambulance for the man”

“Or an undertaker” said Madison, frowning at the stillness of the priest.

“Last time I want to have a detail…” grumbled Aaron, angrily.

They turned around, prepared to go downstairs to make sure the man was as fine as he could be after such a fall. Washington kept reprimanding Maria, Laurens and Libby in a more levelled tone, but with the same harshness. The group had to stop abruptly when a person almost bumped into them. Alexander felt the colours draining from his face.

“It’s her! That’s the woman I saw!” he explained, taking a cautious step backward.

Angelica clicked her tongue, infuriatedly. “Another cousin?” she asked Maria.

Madison frowned at them. “That’s not a ghost, that’s my partner!”

“That’s just as shocking” commented Peggy, shrugging.

Dolley threw the group a glare and then went to give Madison a peek on the cheek. “Here, your lunch. I came earlier, but found the doors locked” she explained.

“Mystery solved” sighed Washington, exhaustedly.

“What a timing, Dolley” said Thomas.

Alexander whacked the accountant on the back of the head. “Inform us of those things, Dobby. You almost gave me a heart attack!”

“Why am I to blame if your friends are insane!” complained Madison.

“By the way, I saw an agonizing man on the pavement. Care to explain?” asked Dolley, raising one curious eyebrow.

“Are you open-minded?” asked Hercules. “Because it’s unbelievable” he clarified, eyeing the prankers with hatred.

Thankfully, Maurice was fine except from the broken hip, legs and right arm. The paramedics exchanged confused glares at the vacillating explanations they were given by Aaron, who was cursing his workmates inside his head. Dolley tried not to cackle while they were still there, not wanting to arise any suspicions for his boyfriend’s workmates.
“I swear to God, each time I want to work here more and more” she whispered in his ear, just gaining an eye-roll from Madison.

“What doesn’t happen in here, won’t happen anywhere else” complained Washington, with raspy voice due to his bad mood.

Aaron walked closer to the group, glad the paramedics told him they had enough information to help his cousin.

“Is he going to be alright?” asked Lafayette.

“Yes, don’t worry. Now, I’ll have to pray for my grandfather not to know” he explained, grumpily.

“Idiots, the bunch of you” cursed Alexander, still angry at his friends.

“You’re going to pay him the fake exorcism and his hospital bill” declared Angelica, looking directly at the three responsible people, who lowered their heads. Isa sighed, relieved, gaining a dirty look from them.

“Go back to work” ordered Washington, right after, being obeyed immediately, for a change. He walked beside Alexander, whispering: “And to think that this is still the calmest Wednesday we ever had” 

The financer sighed, nodding in agreement.

They walked in the building, the tension finally gone. Dolley kissed Madison farewell, demanding him to tell her every experience they had had since their law firm was founded later. Madison nodded, ceding, as Thomas shook his head at how happy the woman was for the promise. One of the paramedics walked to him, who got in the building last.

“Excuse me, isn’t anybody going with him?” he asked, a bit puzzled by the lack of interest from their part.

Thomas nodded sarcastically. “Yes, the Holy Spirit. Didn’t you see it flying in?”

He left, leaving the man standing there, exchanging glares with his workmates. None of them understanding a thing.

Chapter End Notes
BTW, I started a new series on AO3 concerning the plot of Thomas' family and situation with his daughters. It's a new take on it. Just in case you want to check it out.

Thanks for reading.
Happy Halloween and Día de los Muertos!
Sursum corda!
Chapter Summary

Alexander knew already what to expect when the phone rang that morning before he went to work. He wasn’t even surprised when he saw the ID showed Washington’s name.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alexander knew already what to expect when the phone rang that morning before he went to work. He wasn’t even surprised when he saw the ID showed Washington’s name. Sighing in resignation, he answered, knowing what was about to come.

Eliza saw it all unfold before her eyes, as she herself also getting ready to go to work. She began to prepare her husband his thermos full of tilleul tea. A wee smile making its way onto her lips. At least, that morning, Alexander would offer himself to drive Philip to school and Angie and John to daycare in order to have a little bit more of time for himself. Every cloud has its silver lining.

She heard her husband’s louder sigh of frustration before her suggestions became a reality:

“Hey, Betsey, do you mind if I drive the kids to school today?”

Eliza’s smile grew wider. She was starting to like Washington’s random free (Wednes)days as well.

When Alexander arrived at the law firm (half an hour later than he was supposed to) he locked the glass doors. Maria lifted her glare at the noise and made a face.
“Washington’s not coming?” she asked, already knowing the answer.

“What do you think” replied Alexander, dryly.

“So, the meeting at 3.30?”

“I’d like to have none at all” admitted the financer.

Maria’s face lightened at that. “Well, I mean… Nobody’s gonna tattle if you give us the day off” she offered, swinging on her chair.

“No” Alexander was rapid to break her dreams. “And stop that” he added, taking her wrist and making the swinging to stop gently. “It’s the last Wednesday before Christmas break” he reminded her.

“But that’s next week” pointed out Maria, looking at the calendar that she had on the counter, confusedly.

Alexander huffed, humourlessly. “Yeah, right. Like any of you is going to take that last week seriously…”

“But… What about that last Friday? Washington always makes a little meeting to discuss what we’ve done so far in the year” she tried once again, refusing to give up.

“Same answer” replied Alexander, frowning his lips. “It’s no use, Maria. Tell the others the meeting will be at 3.30, and to have everything in order”

“Which paperwork? Only December, right?” she asked, pouting slightly.

“I guess. To be honest, I don’t even want to know how way behind we’re from schedule”

“I don’t even know what was the last month I gave…” said Maria, more to herself than to her workmate, scratching her head in confusion.

“Lovely…” commented Hamilton, scrunching up his nose. Heaving another sigh, he wanted to be positive. “Well, at least Adams doesn’t work here anymore. A bit more of mental peace for me…”

And just as he said that, said man walked out of the breakroom and down the hall, box of chocolate in his hands as he devoured the bonbons. Alexander blinked a couple of times to make sure he wasn’t starting to imagine things. Maria looked at their ex-co-worker with indifference, before going back to write whatever all those disorganised papers on her desk was.

“Adams?” called the financer, seeing the man turning his head to him and stopping his bites.

“Yes?” he said, cautiously, mouth full.

“What in the world are you doing in here?”

“Eating”
“Why?”
“I was hungry”
“But what are you doing in here?” exploded the financer, quite easily.
Maria sighed by his side. “We started soon…”
“Be hungry at your own house!”
“I don’t have one anymore” reminded the unemployed lawyer, saddened.
“That’s not my problem! You have a roof over your head, don’t you?!”
“Yeah…”
“Why aren’t you there, then?”
“I slept two days in a row and was bored out of my mind this morning, so I came here”
Alexander just grew angrier at the explanation. “What do you think this is? The park?! This is a serious law firm…!”

Maria and Adams laughed sheepishly at that, making the financer’s face redder.

“Don’t laugh!” he admonished.
“Don’t tell jokes, then” retorted the lawyer.
“Adams, I don’t want you here”
“That’s cruel” commented Maria.
“And real” said Alexander, throwing her a warning glare. He looked at Adams dead in the eyes as he said: “You were fired and you can’t be here! Less for walking throughout the hallways like a lost soul!”

“Please, Hamilton, I’ll be in one corner, I won’t bother anyone” promised Adams, resuming his eating.
“No! You’re always bother wherever you go!”
“Huh, you’re sounding like Thomas”
“Hey, don’t insult me in such an ugly way” complained the financer, narrowing his eyes.
“I did not…”
“And stop eating our food”
“Madison bought me this because I promised to be good”
Alexander groaned, as he passed a hand through his face. Maria contained a laugh, shaking in her seat as she pretended to be writing to not lift her glare and lock eyes with the financer.

The CFO startled them both when he marched down the hall, directed to where the secretary’s office was. He opened the door as he knocked on it, not minding about manners anymore. Thomas barely blinked an eye at his mannerisms.

“Good morning” he said, wanting to keep things civil.

“Don’t fucking ‘good morning’ me” Alexander, as usual, had other plans for their conversation. “Why is Adams here?”

“I don’t know”

“You don’t know?” echoed the financer, unbelievingly.

“No, I don’t. The less I know about him, the happier I am”

“Listen, he’s…”

“Go tell Madison” interrupted Thomas, returning his attention to his paperwork. “He was the one who wasn’t comfortable with leaving that being alone”

“And where is he?” asked Alexander, upset at the older man’s behaviour.

“I don’t know”

“… Are you going to be like this now as well? With that annoying automatic response I barely…?”

“Boy, what’s gotten in your way this morning for you to come talking my ear off?” complained the secretary, again not waiting for Hamilton to be finished talking.

“And what’s gotten into you today?” retorted Alexander, angrily. He didn’t realise Adams had walked to them and was now behind him, watching the whole quarrel first in line. “Talking back and with that vinegar face?”

Thomas frowned at him. “That my head’s hurting like hell today and I’m sick of standing everybody’s bullshit, alright, you fucking midget?”

Madison had come back, steaming cup in hand, by the time Thomas was spitting at Alexander. He half closed his eyes as he took a seat beside his friend.

“Thomas, for God’s sake…” he began, just to be interrupted as well by the secretary.

“Look, here he is. Tell him off” he instructed, uninterested. In an annoyed mutter, he added. “Driving me crazy, first thing in the morning. What else?”

James sighed with tedium. “He’s so bitter…”
“I wonder why…”

“See what I have to live with daily?” asked Adams, wanting to gain some pity. He made Alexander jump in spot from a startle. “Let me have a little vacation”

“You live in a constant vacation, rascal” blurted out Thomas.

“Look the way he talks to me…” kept complaining Adams, performing his best puppy eyes.

“It’s normal” nodded Madison, taking a sip of his drink.

“You just didn’t have a better day to bring him than today, when I have to take care of the meeting” complained Alexander.

“Again?” asked the accountant.

“Yes, son, again” nodded the financer, bitterly.

“The day can’t get any better” complained Thomas, under his breath.

Alexander threw him a hateful glare before sighing in defeat. “I’m too tired for this crap and we haven’t had the meeting yet…”

“Don’t have any, then!” proposed Maria in a shout, from her counter.

“Maria, don’t eavesdrop!” reprehended Alexander.

“Let the poor man be here” said Madison, suddenly. “He’s got the chocolate to keep him busy, anyways”

“I’ve eaten all already” revealed Adams, turning the box upside down and dropping the crumbs and few wrappers to the floor.

Laurens came their way just in time to see that, slurping an orange juice loudly.

“Oh, we can throw things to the floor now without consequences? Sweet” he said, throwing the empty bag of chips he’d brought with him.

“No, we can’t!” admonished Alexander, red in the face, as he took the bag and tossed it in his friend’s way. “Throw this in the trashcan”

“Dull…” insulted Laurens, squinting his eyes.

“And you, Adams, clean that…” ordered Alexander, pointing at the things the lawyer had previously thrown. He looked at it, thoughtful. “Come to think of it… Clean the whole building, you’ll be entertained that way”

“Can’t I simply lie down somewhere until the day it’s over?” whined Adams, tired just by thinking of his task.

“No”
“For that, you should’ve stayed home” commented Thomas, still with eyes glued to his paperwork.

“He’s attacking me all day…”

“I can’t blame him, for once” supported Alexander, cocking an eyebrow. “Come on. Start taking the Halloween decorations off and keep them somewhere in the storeroom”

“What Halloween decorations?”

“… I don’t know. Maybe those spiderwebs scattered all throughout the building?”

“Ah, those aren’t real?”

“How in hell are those gonna be real, mister?!”

“I thought Libby didn’t clean and came here to spend the day”

The cleaner was just getting out the breakroom when Adams gave that response. She frowned at him, taking easy offense.

“Excuse me, but I do my job just fine!”

“Huh, if you clean as well as you do back at home, then you can’t blame me for thinking that”

“Mr Clean just talked…” mocked Thomas.

Lafayette walked out the breakroom with his boyfriend, throwing a sideways glare to Thomas. “Huh, such venom. We’re gonna have an action-packed meeting”

“When don’t we?” asked Hercules, tediously.

“Guys, wait. The meeting is this afternoon” informed Alexander.

The couple groaned loudly. Libby raised an eyebrow at that.

“Why do you complain? Better for us, more time to do the paperwork”

Hercules clicked his tongue as he shook his head. “You innocent and silly girl. Here, when a meeting is in the afternoon, means that Alexander is the one taking care of it”

“So?”

“Huh, so clear you’ve never been in one of those” said Adams, with a bitter feeling in his mouth at the memories.

“It’s only been two of them” grumbled Alexander, taking easy offense.

“When you see yourself trapped in here even after the hour of leaving has passed, you’ll understand” explained Lafayette, taking a sip of his café au lait.
Alexander frowned at that. “You’ve never stayed late. You always get away when I get a little distracted!”

“Like anyone’s going to stay here to stand your ramblings” said Thomas, nonchalantly.

“Man, eat a biscuit. Let’s see if by that your mood turns a bit sweeter” complained Libby.

Hercules cackled. “Fuck, that was so good”

Peggy and Angelica joined the group, stopping their conversation.

“Hi, what’s this? A party?” asked the youngest.

“Peggy, you’re out of control with the parties” reproved Angelica.

“The bride of Christ said” continued to comment Thomas.

“He has for everyone” said Madison, a bit impressed.

“I don’t even gonna answer, because I want to have a peaceful day” replied the vice president, though with clear offense in her tone of voice. “Now, let us through, we want to eat something before the meeting starts”

“The meeting is this afternoon” explained Alexander again. “Thomas, do you mind…?”

“Yes, I do” interrupted the secretary, once again. “Write the memo yourself”

“… … …” Alex inspired through his nostrils to prevent a murder to happen.

“Wait, are you going to take care of it??” asked Angelica, eyes wide.

“Yep” everyone but the financer replied.

“Why didn’t Betsey tell me!!” grumbled the oldest Schuyler, fetching her phone and typing like crazy.

“Oh, no, fuck, oh, hell, I hate you all in here, damnit!” whined Peggy, kicking the floor repeatedly at each curse.

“But Peggy, you knew!” said Alexander, perplexed at the surprise of his sister.

“And you didn’t tell me either!!” gasped Angelica, dramatically, putting one hand over chest.

“I didn’t know!!” said Peggy, looking confusedly at Alexander. “Why do you always want to start infighting!!”

“It’s in his nature” answered Thomas, throwing the financer’s words in his face.

Alexander caught the hint right away, and threw a hateful glare in the secretary’s direction, before confronting his sister. “Peggy, I was complaining about the whole thing while in the car with you this morning!!”

“I wasn’t listening to you!”
“Excuse me?!"

“Alexander, I love you, but I love my sanity even more. I have to stop paying attention to your ramblings some days”

Alexander’s comeback was cut off when Aaron also walked to the group gathered in the hallway. He looked at them all, knitting his brows.

“What’re you doing in here? Losing time to not go to the meeting?” he joked.

“It’s this afternoon” everyone explained, tiredly.

Aaron showed a face of disgust. “I liked my theory better”

“So did I” the group, but Alexander, nodded.

“Alright, enough” the CFO spoke up. “If you all know the drill already, go to your offices and…”

“Hey, people!” Isa interrupted the immigrant from afar.

“Nothing, we’re stuck in here…” complained Alexander.

“Have any of you see Washington today? I have to discuss a few things with him” she said, showing them a few papers she’d brought with her.

“Washington’s not coming today” explained Thomas.

“Ah… So, no meeting?”

“This afternoon. Alexander’s taking care of it” elaborated Lafayette, finishing his coffee.

“Ah… … So, day off??”

The contained laughter of his workmates for the question made Alexander to finally explode.

“Alright, that’s enough! You all know how this goes, and the ones who doesn’t, ask somebody that’s not me!” he ordered, kicking the floor in the end for emphasis.

“Man, chill, I was joking…” said Isa, rolling her eyes.

“Work!” shouted Alexander, before marching upstairs.

“I would’ve stayed home had I known…” complained the blonde woman.

“Same” agreed her workmates.

“I still don’t know what I’ve gotta do” said Adams, lost.

“And then he doesn’t understand why people talk to him in bad manners” sighed Thomas, in
frustration.

It had only been a couple of hours before a huge fight was heard from the ground floor. Alexander admitted it was a very good record, taking into account he was talking about his workmates. Still, he got up from his seat exhaustedly.

The screams didn’t get any better the closer he walked to the place of discord: the breakroom. Where else?

Alexander didn’t know if the voices grew louder because he’d cut the distance or because the two protagonists were losing the little control they had over their tempers. As he made his way to the door, he distinguished Angelica’s voice – not a surprise there, you could really know how the Devil would look like if you got on Angelica’s bad side. The shock came when the financer realised the other voice belonged to Lafayette. It was then when Alexander trotted to know what had happened for those two to argue, and that loud.

He stopped right in the doorframe, where he found Adams sitting on a chair, in a comfortable position, as he ate a bag of chips, watching the show of the two friends shouting at each other, faces red. Alexander threw him a glare of disdain before frowning in worry at his sister-in-law and fellow immigrant. Hercules noticed his presence and walked to him, surely to beg him to find a solution for the fight (and Alexander tried not to huff at how ironical that would be, him ending an argument), but he beat the informatic to it.

“What happened?”

“Angelica took Laf’s milk by accident” was the explanation he was given.

Everything became clearer then. Lafayette was a very tranquil man, but he could turn very shaken if he saw somebody had touched his things or moved them from its correct place (a righteousness only Lafayette understood, in all honesty). Alexander kept frowning. If it had been an accident, which Alexander didn’t doubt, he still couldn’t comprehend why the Frenchman was making such a big deal out of it.

“Fuck, Lafayette, after all the shit you’ve endured with that man living in your house for free and now you…!”

“Hey, hey, hey!” Laurens didn’t hesitate in jumping in as soon as he saw Angelica pointing at him.
“Don’t get me into this! I didn’t steal anything from him!”

The woman’s face grew redder than a tomato at the verb. “I have not stolen anything from anyone!” she swore, at the top of her lungs.

“Angelica, please, the volume” said Madison, feeling bad for his friend, who was the only one (except from Adams) sat at the table, supporting his aching head with his hand.

“The volume?!” echoed the vice president, enraged. “This man just accused me of stealing…!”

“I did not accuse, I say things as I see them!” said Laurens, matching the woman’s ire. “If I see a milk carton and read a name that’s not mine, I don’t…”

“But I didn’t read it” repeated Angelica, for the zillionth time, slowly, as if talking with a kid.

Laurens gave her a sided smile. “You didn’t read it?”

“No, I did not”

“Angelica, please…”

“What?!” she squealed once again, making Thomas (and a few others, to wince). “I did not read the damned name!”

“Please, pleeease!” said Laurens, exaggeratedly, while Lafayette stood to the side, shaking his head in disbelief and crossing both arms from impotence. “The name is in bold. Black bold on a white paper. On the two faces of the carton”


“It’s the first thing you see when you take the carton. I know because sometimes I confused it with ours” kept arguing Laurens, now in a calmer tone but with the same harshness.

“Aha! You drank from it as well, then!”

“No, I just said I know first-hand you can’t get confused because I realised that before taking it”

“And that’s saying something when it comes to him” supported Hercules.

“Thanks”

“That’s not an actual compliment…” said Isa, squinting her eyes in confusion.

“Don’t interfere, don’t interfere…” advised Madison, between gritted teeth.

Angelica clicked her tongue. “Well, so what if I drank it? So what if you had drunk it in its day? It’s milk. We’re gonna buy more once we run out of it”

“You do that with your milk” interceded Lafayette, once again, pointing at the whole group. “But when it comes to my milk, I am the one who pay it”

“Am I to blame for that?”

“No, but there have been some times when I had to go buy it myself because it didn’t match with the day we’re doing the weekly shop”
“I still think we should do that each month” opined Aaron, to which Alexander nodded.

“But that’s not my fault” insisted Angelica, almost gently. “I am not to blame if you’re a picky preppy”

“Angelica…” warned Hercules.

The woman turned to him, hardening her glare. “A picky preppy” she nodded, in reaffirmation. “He decided to have his own milk, because he thinks ours is not enough for his likings”

“I decided to start doing this because I’m following a very strict diet and I can’t drink any milk…”

“Diets, diets, all day diets…” mocked Angelica. “Eat normally, the meals you have to daily…”

“But are you going to tell him how to eat now as well?” exclaimed Laurens, beyond shocked.

“If he’s going to…”

“But he just wants to drink the milk he likes the most” opined Libby. “Where’s the drama?”

“The drama is that…” tried to explain Lafayette.

“None!” interrupted Angelica. “We can’t make a drama out of a glass of milk!”

“The last glass of that milk” pointed out Laurens.

“But it’s only milk!”

“But it’s not your milk!”

“This is coexistence, for fuck’s sake!” exploded Angelica, slamming the table with fury. “There is not mine, your, ours, the other one’s…!”

“It’s coexistence when it best suits you!” Laurens threw in her face.

“No!”

“Yes!”

“But for God’s sake, we’re screaming because of milk” said Madison, bewildered. “Let’s calm down and think rationally because I…”

“Shut up already!” ordered Angelica, with disgust.

“See? See?” said Laurens, almost glad the disrespect had occurred. “Now, coexistence is shit for this lady”

“You’re…”

“The man was speaking his mind, because he has the right to do so, and you interrupted him…”

“Ah, now he’s taking your side and you like him”

“No, no. I hate him with all my might. I despise the fact that he still breathes”

“But what have I done to you?” asked Madison, puzzled as the rest of the team.
“What I was saying: when she doesn’t like what we’re saying, coexistence is shit, but when…”

“We cannot fight and make this whole issue because of milk” insisted Angelica, exasperated.

“You can also apologise for something that was done wrong” said Libby, all of a sudden.

Angelica turned slowly to her, almost challenging. “Excuse me?”

“If you know the story of the milk, why did you…” tried to explain the Mexican, a bit nervous under the fixated glare of the vice president.

“Am I supposed to apologise for drinking milk?” questioned Angelica, repulsed by the sole idea of it.

“For drinking a milk that wasn’t yours” stated Laurens, sternly.

“But all this is very easy” said Aaron, rapid enough to interrupt whatever response Angelica was going to give the southerner. “Independently of if you knew the milk was Lafayette’s or not, you already know you did wrong. Say you’re sorry and all this can finally…”

“But I’m not going to apologise for drinking…”

“For God’s sake, Angelica, it’s not about drinking milk, it’s about taking something that’s not yours!” argued Isa.

“But you’re blowing all this out of proportion!” countered Angelica. “He’ll get more as soon as he runs out of milk!”

“But his milk is never added to the grocery list!” exploded Laurens. “He told you before he has to buy it himself, because as he’s the only one taking it…”

“Supposedly” added Lafayette, bitterly. “Sometimes, it runs out before it was supposed to” he revealed.

“What’re you trying to say? That I’m a thief now?” asked Angelica, offended.

“I’m just saying that I know how much I drink, and I don’t drink that much for the milk to evaporate as fast as I sometimes see”

“This is fucking amazing. Now he says I’ve been stealing his milk for I-don’t-know-for-how-long!” laughed the woman, humourlessly.

“Well, I don’t know if it’s you, but it’s very suspicious!” said Lafayette, raising his voice. “Can I say it’s suspicious how back at home I never fail but here I do?”

“You are implying that I am a thief, and I’m not going to tolerate you…”

“But you just called him a preppy before” said Libby, with tiny voice.

“Ah, the cinnamon roll. The cinnamon roll wants to be part of this as well…” mocked the vice president.

“But, Angelica…” tried to say Aaron.

Libby surprised them all when she also slammed the table. “Well, what’s going on in here? Only the usual four can argue and shout and be disrespectful?!?”
“Libby…” tried to warn Madison.

“No! It’s always the same in here! All day fighting for stupid crap and I can’t say my opinion?! My opinion, said with respect?!” She pointed at Angelica, accusatorily. “That’s what’s missing in here: respect!”

“Point another way with that finger” said Angelica, darkly.

“No. My finger wants to express itself as well” argued Libby, shaking said finger repeatedly, in a teasing way. “And what I wanted to say was that you cannot ask for respect when you give none!”

“Excuse me???” shrieked Angelica, gasping dramatically. “I don’t res… But do you hear yourself?”

“And you? Do you hear yourself? The petty excuses you’re giving because you can’t simply apologise?”

“Apologise? For a glass of milk?!”

Thomas had had enough. “Oh, for Christ’s sake, Angelica. How many times will we need to tell you it’s not about the damn milk?! It’s about you taking something that’s not yours…”

Angelica frowned at the man, feeling affronted. “Who gave you a candle for this burial*?”

“The fact that I’m sick of this already. It’s milk, it was a confusion, let it slide, both of you” he scolded, throwing a hard glare to the two fighting friends.

“Well, can I complain?” questioned Lafayette, indignantly.

“Of course you can, but you can’t complain for three hours…”

“But do you think it’s normal you’re the one lecturing me about that? You? Who spends hours and hours complaining about certain workmate?”

“Well, you know what? Yes, I do think it’s normal I’m the one complaining. Because here, James, has been robbed his pills, which are his, which he pays, and he never says a thing” revealed Thomas, getting up and ignoring his pounding head (which, ironically just made him madder than he would’ve felt any other normal day).

The accountant held both hands up. “Hey, don’t get me into this”

“But is it true that they’ve taken your pills or not?” asked Thomas.

“Well, yes, but I don’t think it’s necessary to make a fuss out of such a thing”

“But can you admit it’s annoying as hell?” now asked Lafayette, also in a pressing manner.

“Oh, please, that’s not the same!” complained Angelica. “We all know those meds are his, because he’s a hypochondriac…”

“Another insult. Keep going with the party!” laughed Libby, dryly.

Madison turned to the vice president before she could retort to the Mexican. “Well, for being such a hypochondriac, those pills evaporate in a blink of an eye. Maybe I’m not alone”

“Now, you’re gonna call me drug addict as well?”
“Angelica, you spent one afternoon out of here, walking around the streets, presumably looking for a pill” Thomas defended his friend.

“And I did! I was looking for a pill!”

“But what kind of pill is that that you didn’t find in any pharmacy?!”

“One special I need for my headaches”

“Look, darling, you can fool everyone around here with that tale, but I’ve lived with migraines my whole life and I know that can’t be true”

“Well: thief, drug addict, liar… Do any of you want to add some other pretty thing to the list?”

“But, Angelica, for God’s sake, the only thing we’re telling you is that if you did something wrong, on purpose or not, say you’re sorry” insisted Aaron. “It’s two words”

“I’m not going to apologise for drinking what’s on the fridge”

“Fuck’s sake…” whispered Thomas, darkly.

“And I’m not going to tolerate any of you to throw false accusations against me” she swore, looking directly at James.

The accountant sighed. “But, please, I wasn’t accusing anyone…”

“You just said…”

“Why are you feeling so attacked?” asked Hercules. “If it hasn’t been you, you don’t need to be so defensive”

“How do you want me to not be defensive, with so many attacks?”

“What attacks?” asked Thomas.

“Like yours, for example”

“But, Angelica, when I have not done something I don’t give it so much mind” said Hercules, wanting to keep things quiet.

“Well, if you’re a pushover that’s your problem”

“But stop insulting!” exploded Libby.

“Well, I’ll say whatever the fuck I want!” Angelica exploded back, facing the young girl. “And I’ll call everyone in here by their names!”

“But nobody can call you anything!” said Isa, rolling her eyes.

“You’ve called me all the words in the dictionary!” countered Angelica.

“But we’ve been fighting over milk for half an hour!” complained Madison, kicking the floor slightly. “Stop it already. Say you’re sorry, don’t be so prideful, you’re acting like your brother-in-law!”

“That’s a low blow” said Angelica, in a hurt, dark whisper.
“Well, it’s true! And when Alexander has made something wrong you’ve roasted him alive, woman. You’re being very hypocrite right now…”

“And you’re a fucking crafty, kissing his ass because now he’s doing you both a favour” Angelica threw in their faces without hesitation.

“But what does that have to do with any of this?!” shouted Thomas.

“That has nothing to do with the issue at hand” commented Isa, supporting her friend.

“Just as much as the problem with his pills” said Angelica, pointing at the accountant with fury.

“I didn’t even take that subject out” pointed out Madison, sternly. “In fact, I wasn’t planning to talk about it any time soon, or… Or ever. I don’t want shows for such a thing, like the one you two are making” he declared, looking at both Angelica and Lafayette. “Someone else brought it up, and as that is my business, I talk and opine about it”

“True, sorry” said Thomas, lowering his tone.

“It’s alright” dismissed Madison, with a wave of hand.

Libby pointed at the two. “See? See how easy it is?”

“But, please, this is ridiculous!” insisted Angelica, both hands at the sides of her head, flipping out.

“You can’t make such a fuss because I drank milk”

“There she goes again!” complained Laurens, rolling his eyes. “It’s not about milk, it’s about you refusing to see your mistakes”

“But I didn’t know it was his milk. I just found out about this whole thing today”

“But, darling, they’re telling you that you need to apologise because it bothered him” explained Thomas, summoning the remaining of his patience.

“Well, and your friend’s not going to apologise for saying…?”

“But I didn’t say that!” said Madison, fed up. “I’m just saying, because I’ve got my right too, that I’m freaking sick of always finding the cabinet where I keep my meds almost empty. Can I?”

“Yes, you can, but don’t say…”

“I barely say anything in here” interrupted the accountant, sharply. “I barely talk in here, with the bunch of you always screaming at each other, and I’m left in one corner”

“There goes the victim…”

“Not the victim, dang it! You all can throw in my face plenty of things, but not that I’m always stirring up. That’s everyone but me!”

“Okay. Nothing, then. Alright”

“Girl…”

“Yes, yes, you’re right. You’re a saint and we all are demons. Poor you, waah, waah…”

“But do you think this is normal…?”
“Waiting for the best occasion to arise to throw this past shit to the air, create a bigger commotion, but, hey, we can’t say anything because he’s a poor soul with tiny voice… Jackass…”

“I brought it up, because it makes my blood to boil to see that happening, alright?” spat Thomas, defensively. “And calm down, relax”

“I was relaxed until the whole of you decided today was ‘Let’s bug Angelica until she explodes so she looks like the bad guy’ day”

“Then, I’m the victim in here” muttered Madison, bitterly.

“This all would have ended sooner if you just say ‘Oh, it’s right, sorry, Laf’ or something of the sorts” said the Frenchman, returning to his tranquil demeanour.

“Until I’m not begging for forgiveness…”

“It’s not that either!”

“Angelica, please…” said Aaron, tiredly.

“I’m not…”

“Well, you wanna know what?” snapped Madison. “After all the insults you threw and all the things you said with the clear intention of hurting…”

“What’re you talking about?” asked Angelica, showing a face of genuine confusion.

“We all have certain conditions, that we talk about with Washington, because he’s the head of this and we all, you included, report directly to him; your time has not come yet, so calm down…” he added, rapidly, at last second.

Hercules threw an impressed whistle at the comment. “Huh, Dobby pushing the right buttons…” he whispered to his boyfriend, who nodded, also impressed for the jab.

“When you’re the head of this, you can decide if someone can bring his milk or… Or whatever, but until then…”

“I’ve asked for certain conditions as well” said Angelica, her words sharper than before as she talked to the man. “And sometimes, I couldn’t have it my way”

“Well, Lafayette and I did, there must be a reason for it” spat Madison, with a kind of mocking tone dancing in his tongue.

Angelica made a face as she clenched her jaw, making the rest of the staff to stiffen in spots.

“And I think the most logical and mature thing to do in here is to apologise for not realising a thing that bothered a workmate, who is usually very calmed, so if he’s shaken up by this it must be because it really bugged him…”

“But it was an accident…”

“Nobody’s doubted that” assured Madison. “I had to apologise for things I didn’t realise I was doing
wrong and I’m still alive. So have no fear”

“But it’s such a stupid thing…” continued Angelica.

“Well, if it’s such a stupid thing, I don’t understand why you’re making this a big issue”

“He’s done that” said Angelica, pointing at Lafayette.

“No, he just got mad because you gave excuses and didn’t show a bit of humility. Say: ‘I did this wrong, sorry’, it’s okay”

“Thank you, Madison” said Lafayette.

“Well, okay. You’re all marvellous people and I’m the Devil. Alright” decided Angelica, walking to the doorframe.

“We’re not saying that, Angelica” said Isa, exhaustedly.

“Judging me, for a gulp of milk…” said the woman, hurtful, shaking her head in denial. Casting them one last look she declared: “After all the things I’ve done for you… And you repay me by judging me for a simple and sad gulp of milk, bollocks!”

And with that, she left, hoofing on the floor in a bad mood. They watched her going upstairs with a sour face, muttering curses under her breath. Alexander threw a tired sigh to the air and looked at them all, slowly.

“Alright, I’ll talk to her later. She needs to cool down” he informed.

“A fucking class of chilling the fuck out, that’s what she needs” grumbled Isa.

“Please” begged Alexander, looking at her gravely. His glare turned softer when he dedicated it to Lafayette, who was now with arms crossed, looking at the ground. “Laf, I can send someone to buy your milk and some other things that might be needed right now”

“No, no, if I’m not going to drink more milk today” said Lafayette, quickly.

“… Beg your pardon?”

“I already had my café au lait”

It was Alexander’s turn to raise his voice. “Then, why the hell did you start all this?!”

“Because I caught her drinking my milk and you know I can’t with that. I simply can’t”

“… … … Go to your offices” he ordered, lowering his tone in a dangerous way. “Now” he added, throwing them a sharp glare that shut their mouths immediately.

His co-workers left the place, muttering with the persons they were closest by, casting scared glares at Hamilton, who stood in the doorframe, rubbing his face in annoyance while dedicating another round of insults to them.
“Hey, Alex” called Laurens, stopping in front of his friend.

“What…” he said, dryly. Looking over his friend’s shoulder, he saw Jefferson waiting there for their conversation to be over.

“Do you know if Lee’s coming today?”

“I don’t know if he’s still alive…”

“It’s just that I need to give him some reports for today’s meeting”

“I’ll try to contact him later. He must be there as well” promised the financer. “So, I take that as you have your work done?”

“Yes”

“Good, finally some good news…”

“I’ve got my moments as well” laughed Laurens, walking to his own office.

“Okay, that’s settled…” whispered Alexander to himself, in order to keep the things he had yet to do organised inside his head.

“Hamilton” called Jefferson, walking closer.

“Yes?”

“I need you to talk to your sister-in-law…”

“Yes, I’ll talk to Angelica later…”

“No, Peggy” clarified Thomas, rubbing one hand against his forehead. “She hasn’t given me anything this month”

Alexander sighed with tedium. “One good news for a bad one, I guess” he complained, passing a hand through his hair. “Alright. Yes. I’ll go now to see what happened”

“Thank you”

“Is your head better?”

“No”

Alexander was taken aback for the unexpected honesty. “Did you bring the lavender?”

“Yes, but it’s not about that”

“Well, if you feel too bad, you can go home”

“No, I’ll be fine” assured the secretary, walking in his office and not convincing Alexander in the slightest.

“If you need anything else, tell me” added Alexander, at last hour, throwing a knowing glare to Madison.
“I’ll be fine” repeated the secretary, ignoring the strange rapport between his friend and Hamilton.

“Alexander, are you going to talk to Peggy?” asked Madison, walking to him with a few sheets in his hands.

“I am. Why?” he asked, eyeing the paperwork with suspicion.

“Well, uh… I guessed you may want to read this” he simply said, giving him the papers and avoiding meeting his glare.

Hamilton read the accounts his workmate had given him, his brows frowning more and more as he advanced.

“Not this again” he finally said.

He returned Madison his paperwork and trotted straight to the staircase, going up two steps at a time.

“Be prepared for the second act” joked Thomas, grabbing his pen as he read what he had left to do.

Alexander went directly to where his sister-in-law’s office was. He knocked hardly on the door and then swung it open, not waiting for an invitation. He gritted his teeth when he saw what was inside of the room.

Peggy groaned and tossed around the big bed she was on. Bigger than the previous one she got at the beginning of the year. The girl sat up and examined the room with squinted eyes, adjusting to the natural light coming from the hallway. Eventually, she made out the figure of her brother-in-law, who was looking back at her, arms crossed and tapping an impatient foot on the carpeted floor.

“Are you serious right now, Peggy?” he spat more than asked.

“…What?” she asked, groggily.

That just ignited the fire Alexander had tried to keep under control during Lafayette and Angelica’s fight. “Are you serious right now?!” he repeated, raising his voice and with a sterner voice.
Peggy never had the chance to answer, as a second lump Hamilton hadn’t noticed in his infuriated state, moved beside Peggy. Maria’s head stuck out the covers, looking at the immigrant with bother.

“Man, turn off the light” she grumbled.

“That light is the sun” explained Alexander, concealing the shock of seeing the receptionist there as well.

“Well, then, close the blinds” she groaned, hiding the face under the pillow.

“What in the world are you two doing in there?”

“Sleeping, you naughty” replied Maria, her voice muffled, her mocking tone clear, though.

“Sleeping?! You should be working! Especially you, Peggy! Jefferson just told me you haven’t given anything to him in all this month!”

“I still have time to deliver that…” pouted the girl.

“What? A week? The infamous last week of work in which you do less than usual?!”

“Gee, maaan…” whined Maria, turning to look back at Alexander, matching his annoyance. “Don’t you have any other place to do this? I’m exhausted”

“From what?” asked the financer, unkindly.

“I just had a binge last night”

“Nice”

“Of Netflix, evil-minded…” she clarified, rolling her eyes. “And I didn’t sleep all my needed hours to be functional”

“I don’t mind. You’re at work now”

“C’mon, the doors are locked. Nobody’s gonna get in”

“That’s irrelevant”

“Sure…”

“You can’t sleep in here. And less buy this monstrosity…”

“Hey, don’t you dare to insult the only good thing that ever happened to me!” shouted Peggy, beyond offended.

Alexander threw the mattress a glare of disdain. “Yes I will. Especially if you keep buying them with the company’s money”

Peggy narrowed her eyes. “Madison, fucking snitch” she insulted.

“He must inform me. And thank goodness he did now and not at last hour or next year”

“Oh, man, yes, we’re all useless but you. Go buy yourself a whim and come back when you’re in a
better mood” snapped Maria, losing her cool.

“This is amazing. This girl, who sleeps at her work hours, is telling me off for telling her, in good manners…”

“Good manners? Bumping on the door and screaming at us?” interrupted the twentyish.

“The best I can perform while being so angry. Yes” nodded Alexander, enragedly. Then, he proceeded to rant. “I just walk in today and have to stand the presence of a man that no longer works in here and refuses to leave; a fight between two persons whom I thought to be the most rational and mature in here because one of them drank milk, and now…”

“Who just fought?” asked Peggy, waking up at the new information.

“Angelica and Lafayette”

“And we just missed it?” asked Maria, regretful.

“Damn…” muttered the two girls, crest-fallen.

“That’s the only thing they care about… Recording and doing shit”

“Agh, man, who shove a stick up your arse today?” asked Peggy, boringly.

“The whole of you with your shitty attitude!” exploded Alexander. “Get up from there! If you’re late to the meeting or don’t have your paperwork done, you won’t get in! And say bye to the Christmas bonus!” he threatened, slamming the door shut, not wanting to keep going with the conversation.

The girls stayed there, looking at the recently closed doors with puzzled looks. Peggy looked at Maria, who had grabbed her phone.

“So, are we getting up?” she asked, not wanting to even propose it.

“Nah, I’ll put the alarm for a bit before the meeting starts” said Maria, putting the phone back on the floor, where it kept charging.

“I love this friendship of ours”
A couple of minutes later, Burr came back, walking downstairs along with Alexander. Lee tapped his fingers impatiently on the knob, seeing as Alexander unlocked the door for him with normality. He almost hit the immigrant in the nose when he opened it vehemently.

“What the hell?” snapped the manager. “After all the tantrums I’ve seen you throw, and now you’re completely at ease?”

Alexander blinked a couple of times, exchanged a glare with Aaron, and then looked back at him.

“What’re you talking about?”

“Washington called me to inform me about something being wrong with the building again” explained Lee, furiously. “And I come here and I see you not giving a damn, this man even eating a cookie…”

“I’m in the middle of my break” said Aaron, indignantly.

“And no one in here to welcome people” continued Lee, ignoring the lawyer right away.

“Okay, hold on” interrupted Alexander, frowning his lips in contained anger. “First, nothing’s wrong with the building”

“Beg your pardon?” asked Lee, dumbfounded, all his bravado gone.

“Second, you’re nobody to give those lectures. Less to one of us”

“But Washington just told me…”

“I called him to see if he could make you come. Today’s a meeting, he couldn’t come, and so I’m in charge and I want you here. Even if it’s just for three times in the whole year…” explained Alexander, calmly.

“… I came here for nothing then?” asked the man, angry and completely ignoring the digs Hamilton threw his way.

“No, you came because it’s your obligation” stated the financer. “And you should feel ashamed of yourself for not doing your duty as the adult you are”

“You lie to me and have the nerve to scold me?”

“Yes, because you’re not being responsible, just a scoundrel” lectured Alexander, sternly. “Go to your office and have your paperwork ready. The meeting is in a bit”

“I don’t even know what we’re going to discuss today”

“Me neither” admitted the immigrant. “When it comes to you all, I never know what to expect from a meeting. The only thing I know is that I’ll make sure nobody’s leaving until I say so. For real this time. Which reminds me…”

He walked to the doors, made sure they were locked and when he found that wasn’t the case, he locked them, with satisfaction.
“There. No more slip-ups on my part” nodded the financer. He turned to his workmates. “Get ready, please”

They turned around, making their way to the elevator. Lee kicking the air in annoyance while Aaron took a few steps away from the man, throwing him glares. Hamilton was about to go back to his own office when he decided to turn to his left and walked directly to the secretary’s.

He knocked the opened door, seeing Thomas writing alone in the room, with his head resting on his right hand. Alexander smelt the slight smell of lavender inside, the information calming him a considerably bit. Thomas looked up briefly before resuming his work, just to let him know he’d acknowledged his presence.

“How’re you feeling?” asked Alexander, entering and leaving the door as he’d found it.

“Better” answered Thomas, absent-mindedly.

“And is everything going fine?” he asked, more cautiously this time.

“I haven’t heard from my sister in all this time, so I guess so” shrugged Thomas, finishing one sentence and putting his papers aside.

“If anything happens, let me know”

“Will do” promised the secretary, still not meeting his glare though his paperwork was now at one side of the desk.

Alexander patted him on the arm as he made his way back to the door. “I’m here if you need me”

“Alright” nodded Thomas, politely.

Hercules came Alexander’s way as he reached the first floor, his panicked glare setting off red flags inside Hamilton’s head.

“What’s going on?” he asked, before his friend could even try to start small chat to pretend.

Hercules comprehended, with his sharp question, that the simple thought of beating around the bush was ridiculous, and answered: “The elevator broke”

... ... ... ... ... ...

Hamilton’s lips morphed into a wee (and, in Hercules’ humble opinion quite creepy) smile as little huffs tried to get out his sealed mouth.
“How fucking marvellous, Herc!” he exclaimed, with a cutting tone that sent shivers down the informatic’s spine. “Is there a surprise within the good news? Maybe someone got stuck inside?”

“No, no… Well, I almost did, that’s how I know…”

“Alright” nodded Alexander, still smiling with ire.

“I was getting in to go down…”

“It’s one of the two possibilities I had in mind” commented the financer, mockingly.

Hercules laughed with no humour, just fear by his reaction. “And… Well… I… The doors slid closed…”

“Aha”

“And then I pressed the button”

“Aha”

“And it didn’t move. And I fought with the buttons for a while until the doors started to open”

“Aha”

“And I stepped out”

“Good reflexes. Yeah”

“And the doors closed, and opened and closed for a few times”

“Mmmh…”

“And now it’s not responding”

Alexander nodded exaggeratedly, his lips pressed as he listened and the vein in his neck turned more noticeable. “So, how long did the poor thing last?” he asked.

“Well, uh…” mumbled Hercules, scratching the back of his head, nervously.

Hamilton, in the meantime, had been counting under his breath. “Around ten months. It didn’t even reach the year”

“Yeah, I guess…”

“Amazing. Truly impressive”

“Um…”

“Anything else you want to tell me? Maybe Washington is a psychic and a wall did fall down once again”

“I dunno… Do you want me to check?”

Alexander clicked his tongue, his bad mood growing stronger. “I want you in your office, where you should’ve been in the first place”
“I wanted to grab a snack before the meeting” Hercules defended himself. “Besides, I barely used the elevator. I spent almost the whole day in the break room and went to the bathroom on that floor”

“That bathroom is for clients” Alexander reminded him. “And that defence just makes you look even worse”

“Well, I’m not the lawyer here…” muttered Hercules, blushing slightly.

Madison and Adams made their way down the hall, the shorter man in front of the unemployed one, a series of sheets he tried to organise in a hurry in his hands. He looked over his shoulder, casting a hateful glare to his flatmate.

“Adams, stop following me around; you’re making me look like that child from ‘A monster calls’” he spat, stopping in front of the elevator and pushing the button with a little more of force than the necessary.

“It’s not working” informed Hercules.

“What?” asked the accountant, eyes wide, surely knowing what was about to come because of such an event.

“It’s not working” repeated Alexander, still with that serene smile that stood in juxtaposition of his boiling blood. “It’s broken, dear” he added, clicking his tongue at the end. He sighed loudly. “So, better be prepared to adjust the accounts for the Christmas present”

Madison made a face. “Can’t I give you that after the holidays?”

“… … …”

“I just finished these and I’m not feeling up to it right now” he admitted.

“… … …” Alexander inspired slowly through his nostrils. “God, give me patience because if You give me strengths I might kill somebody in here…” he prayed, looking up. He fixated his glare in the three men across them. “Tell the others, you two. And you, Adams, get the meeting room ready”

“Why me??” whined the man.

“Because you’re here because you didn’t want to get bored” he replied, throwing him the key. “So, clean to keep yourself busy. Go, go” he hurried, clapping his hands to emphasis. He turned to keep going upstairs, mumbling in anger under his breath.

Hercules looked at Madison with a frown as Adams made his way, unwillingly, to the meeting room, clearly crest-fallen.

“We’re gonna have quite the meeting…” he said, exhausted by only the mental image of it.

Madison shared his mood. “Yeah… For one day being ill would’ve been nice, and here I am, healthy as an apple…”
"Who gave you a candle for this burial?" ¿A ti quién te ha dado vela en este entierro?: Our way to say "You have no fish to fry in here; this is not your business; this has nothing to do with you". It can also be said as: "No tener vela en este entierro/To not have a candle for this burial", and similars.
Chapter Summary

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour, Hamilton rambling 2.0.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Chapter Notes

It's been a tough year and everybody needs to explode at some point.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was past four by the time Alexander could talk with a mechanic and agreed on a price (more like, Hamilton making the man agree on what he thought was the better for his law firm and not leaving the man breathe until he agreed, but, well, details…). He hurried to put his things inside his briefcase, grab some pens and markers (and making sure they wrote before doing so) and walked out.

He was about to walk directly to the meeting room, but decided to, instead, trot to the ground floor, to make sure the front doors were locked. They were, and he gave another nod of satisfaction. He looked at the break room, by the end of the hall. He hesitated before deciding to simply go for whomever might be in there, being late, and forgave it, as he was in that group today. For external reasons that didn’t concern him directly and he was not to blame, but… He was still there.

Hamilton was surprised to see the room almost empty, if it weren’t for Jefferson who was sat at the table, waiting for a tea to be made. His right hand was once again in its place, resting on the man’s forehead, this time holding a bag of frozen chips against it. Thomas looked up at him, and Hamilton took it as an invitation to enter.

“It didn’t calm down?” he asked, walking directly to the microwave, where a single cup had just stopped dancing in circles. He received a shake of head. “Does it bother you too much?”

Thomas simply shrugged at first. “A little more than usual” He accepted the steaming cup with a nod. “Might be the weather”

“Maybe. Do you want to skip the meeting?”

“No, no” hurried to say Thomas.

“It’s not a big deal. Give me whatever you have to deliver today or tomorrow if you couldn’t finish it and…”
“No, no, I’ve gone there with worse migraines than this. I just need to drink this…” he promised, leaving the bag on one side of the table.

Hamilton frowned down at it. “Grab a proper ice bag” he said, turning to the fridge.

“There’s no ice. Do you think I picked this to be a clown or what?” he added, his sharper tone a bit more subdued than usual.

Hamilton froze midway, moving his tongue inside his mouth and clicking it with exhaustion.

“You’re all pulling on my dick today” he groaned.

“Don’t ask questions you might not like the answer to” shrugged Thomas, taking a sip of his drink. “By the way, it expired” he added, pointing at the bag.

“Fantastic. Everything in here is just wonderful…”

Hamilton decided to look for the ice tray, as Thomas watched him, sipping his tea slowly. After a couple of grumbles from his workmate, he decided to speak:

“There’s no tray for the ice either”

“… … …”

“I’d have done that earlier had it been” added Thomas, before taking the last sip from his drink.

Hamilton did nothing more than giggling under his breath, trying to control his temper.

“This is just getting better and better” he mumbled, after exhaling slowly through his nostrils. He gave the secretary a sideways glare as he had gotten up to wash the mug. “Let me. Don’t be on your feet more than necessary if your head’s bothering you that much” he proposed. “There’s soap, at least, right?” he asked, not sure if he was joking or not.

Thomas took a little too much to answer, for Alexander’s likings. “A bit”

“… For God’s sake…”

Surprisingly enough, Thomas obliged. He gave Hamilton the mug and proceeded to step out of the break room, surely going to the meeting that should have started a long time ago.

“Wait, let me go with you” said Alexander, scrunching up his nose in disgust at how the soap was
more tap water than anything else.

He groaned frustratedly as Thomas responded. “I’ll take the elevator, don’t worry; it’s getting better anyways” he assured.

“No, the elevator broke, you’ll have to go upstairs” explained Alexander.

He heard a frustrated sigh as the man waited for him. Once he turned around, Alexander saw him resting his right side against the doorframe, with a resigned aura. They made their way upstairs, Alexander restraining his usual speed and making sure the older man could match his steps properly.

They bumped into Madison in the third floor, as the accountant was making his way down. His hands again full with paperwork.

“Ah, I was going to look for you” he said, scrutinizing his friend with a concern glare. He then looked at Hamilton as he handed him the papers he’d brought with him. “Here, I re-did great part of it so we know how much money we can spend on the repair”
Alexander grabbed it with a thankful nod. “Ah, thank you, dear”

“That’s why I couldn’t make it to the meeting in time” he added, as an apology, walking to be by Thomas’ side.

“We neither. Don’t worry” dismissed the CFO, resuming his walking.

The three of them made their way through the last steps and reached the last floor. Alexander was ahead of them, walking at his usual quick speed as he skimmed the papers, nodding in the meantime, as Madison made sure Thomas was feeling better.

When they arrived at the end of the hall, where the meeting room was, they were shocked to see all the blinds down and not hearing a sound in the whole floor. Alexander frowned and trotted to the door, shaking the knob with insistence until he gave up, sure it wouldn’t open.

“I’m sure I gave the key to Adams and told him to clean the room before the meeting started” he said, cocking one eyebrow.

“He doesn’t move a finger back at home, he’s gonna do it now, in the place he was fired” huffed Thomas.

“He was there” said Madison, knitting his brows in confusion as he pressed one ear against the large window. “And I saw people getting in” he added, confused at the lack of noise.

Alexander’s left eyebrow ticked at the information. “Hold me this for a moment” he pleaded, handing Madison his paperwork back and heading straight to the end of the hallway, where
Washington’s office was. He took his keys out to unlock the door. “We started good and they want to end the year on a large scale” he muttered, bitterly.

The two friends exchanged a glare and the taller of the two threw another tired sigh to the air. Going home was sounding better by the minute. Maybe he should’ve gone home with Libby when her workday was finished, as she had suggested him before leaving. Maybe he should’ve simply done that and face the consequences next day.

Hamilton hooved over the floor as he made his way back out of the room. He closed the door with a bit more of force than necessary – both Madison and Jefferson guessed he only controlled himself because it was Washington’s door – and then made his way back to the meeting room, where he put the key inside the hole vehemently. His face contorted in one of pure rage as he groaned curses to their workmates’ names.

He opened the door by a kick, just to vent some of his growing frustration. Madison and Jefferson walked to the doorframe once Hamilton was in, and they saw them all there, in a group standing in the back of the dark room, talking in whispers to not be noticed. Their faces paled at how they’ve been busted.

“Nice” nodded Hamilton, eyeing them all with severity. He ignored the passing forms of Thomas and James, who made their ways to their respective chairs. “Nice” repeated the immigrant, as he slapped the switch to turn on the lights. All but him blinked in discomfort at the flickering lights at first. “Beautiful” he said, the venom in his tongue turning more evident.

“And we didn’t even clean it” joked Lee, to break the tension (and failing miserably).

“Do you ever?” spat Alexander, slamming the door shut, marching to his spot at the table and throwing his things there with a thump. “Sit down” he ordered, as he looked for a marker. “Do you think it’s funny? If Madison hadn’t seen any of you getting in or Adams cleaning, we three could’ve been waiting out there for only-God-knows-how-long” he reprimanded.

“That was the plan” mumbled Maria, pouting.

Alexander threw her a hard glare. “Shut up, Maria. Shut the hell up. The whole of you. I don’t want to hear a voice unless you’ve been allowed to speak, understood? By me, not by anyone else, including yourselves” he instructed, untapping his marker and turning around to the board. “Then, you’d whine about me being angry all day” he kept saying, throwing a hateful glare over his shoulder. “You give me no reason to be happy in here!”

Hamilton turned his head again, seeing the board was used already, adorned by doodles and drawings. He clicked his tongue and erased half of it, not wanting to lose more time than necessary, and began to write a list of issues he wanted to discuss that day. His eyes drifted for a moment to the left bottom of the board, where a doodle was, which seemed to be a person, though Alexander couldn’t tell for the pointed teeth that came out of the drawing’s ridiculously big mouth, in comparison of its small body. On the top of it was written: ‘Cryol’.
Alexander rolled his eyes with irritation, grabbed the rubber and erased the word, correcting it right after, writing ‘Creole’ in a clean hand-writing. He nodded at it and then resumed with his list. He couldn’t resist to throw another reprimand to the staff:

“Let’s see when you finally learn how to write, people. Even if it’s just for insul…”

Hamilton stopped midway of a word when he realised whom the doodle and the nickname were directed to. He trembled in spot from rage, took the rubber (more vehemently than before), erased the whole thing and left it in its rightful place, all while his workmates laughed at his backs. He threw them a sideways glare.

“Hush!” he instructed. Then, between gritted teeth, he added: “Smarty-asses, the whole of you…”

He went back to his chair, taking a seat, as his workmates still giggled, some of them already red in the faces for containing an outburst.

“Allright…” he began to say, clearing his throat. “Something happened at last…”

“Hamilton” spoke Adams, raising his hand.

The CFO casted him a disdainful look. “What” he spat, dryly.

“Can I go to the toilet?”

“… … Are you fucking kidding me right now?” shouted Alexander, losing it in less than a second. “For the love of God, we just started and there are people asking for going to the toilet?!”

“When the nature calls, Hamilton, the nature…”

“What nature or dead child*! No, you won’t go anywhere!”

“But…”

“Should’ve leveraged the half an hour you spent in here, pretending nobody came”

“Fuck, he’s gonna have ammunition for 2030 now…” complained Hercules, under his breath.

“But, Hamilton…”

“No. Shut up. You won’t go anywhere. If you don’t like it, you should’ve gone home this morning, as I told you you had to do” he argued, not giving room for a discussion of any sort.

“But…”

“I said no!” finished Alexander.
“But I couldn’t go after lunch because you sent me here!” whined the unemployed man.

“And you spent half an hour here, acting like a clown” insisted Alexander, a dark frown taking over his features.

Adams mumbled a few things under his breath, crossing his arms as he kicked the floor, trying to put his tantrum under control. Alexander sighed tiredly at the sight.

“When will you all understand that you’re my responsibility?” he asked, almost gently. “When will you comprehend that we’re Washington’s responsibility, but when he can’t come from X reasons, when Washington’s absent, and he says I’m the one in charge, you became my responsibility immediately, you’re my responsibility from 7.30 to lunch break, and then from 3.30 to 5.30pm” he insisted.

“4.10 you’ll mean” interjected Lee, quite annoyed. “Because you were late today”

“He’s always late” chimed in Adams, resentfully.

Alexander turned his glare slowly to the two scowling men. He clicked his tongue, in anger. “Yes, I was. Did you know why I had to be late today, misters? Because I was helping a workmate out, who’s not feeling well today. Because, in case some of you don’t know, when people work hard and do things as they’re supposed to, they suffer from pains and malaises due to stress and anxiety.

“Especially if they’re surrounded by certain specimens who toss their works at them and then have the poor shame to rebuke them if they made a simple mistake. Then, these kinds of things intensify to one thousand. But, of course, I’m sure only a two, maybe three, persons in here know the feeling”

Hamilton got up from his chair suddenly, startling a few. He walked to the board, to point at the first issue he’d written there, tapping the marker furiously against the white surface, his face turning redder and redder as he talked.

“And because the elevator broke and I had to spend a lot of time looking for some good repairers because I’m sure the lords and misses wouldn’t want to contribute with a bit of their bonuses, which you don’t deserve, despite this being your freaking fault for irresponsible sloths”

He crossed his arms eyeing them all with ire as they looked back at him, some with a regretful expression.

“The workmate who was feeling bad had to reach this floor, the last floor, by foot. Because some of you thought it was funny to fool around with the elevator. An elevator. It’s a mechanism that goes up and down, what’s the magic in it? Why the obsession? It wasn’t an alien from another dimension, a god you had to worship. You don’t have to call the elevator for going from floor one to two, people.
“Maybe the persons in here who suffer from migraines, who had fallen ill or any of the sorts should. I understand them and I’m not talking about them, but the rest? The rest had just bugged those people who were treating the poor thing right and didn’t even use it when they needed it just for give it a break, because the children were all ‘Ooooh’, ‘Baaaaaah’, ‘Uuuuuuuuh’” he mocked, exaggerating amazement. He showed a face of repulsion at the mental image. “Grow up. Take life seriously and take care of things.

“Ten months. That’s how long it lasted. Great Christmas present. Now, the kids go to have fun during their vacation, the one they’d worked so hard to get… Now, they go to have fun, eating biscuits, dinners, drinking and having the party of their lives and come back in January expecting to see everything fixed so they can break it again.

“Well, you know what? I won’t. I deserve that holidays more than anyone in here and Washington does as well. Neither of us are going to spend our free time on fixing your idiocies. We’ll do it when we come back to work, and while we do…”

Hamilton made the movement of walking steps, stationary in spot. The sight made Maria to look down, shaking from contained laughter. The ones around her saw that and shared her struggle.

“Steps” revealed Alexander, as if they were playing charades. “Take the steps, as I’ve been doing all this time. I barely get tired anymore. I don’t want you hanging in the break room, using this as an excuse. Pick the staircase and let’s see if you have such urges to go up and down all day. I’ll be paying attention”

He made his way back to his chair, dropping on it with a loud exhalation. He shook his pen absent-mindedly as he took a glimpse at some paper nearby.

“Alright, who has their part of work done?” he asked, lifting up his glare.

Laurens got up, walked to him and handed Alexander his paperwork. Both friends nodded and the freckled man made his way back to his seat. Hamilton skimmed the papers and then waited for a bit, but he was given nothing else.

“Nobody else?” he asked, glaring up and he was met with averting eyes. Alexander tapped his fingers on the table, growing impatient. “Nobody else has their work done? Only John?” he asked, starting to get angry. “Half of it?” he tried, receiving no movement from the others’ part. “A single word written on a piece of paper?” he asked, indignantly.

He saw, with the corner of his eye, Thomas moving back and forth in hesitation as he frowned at some paperwork.
“Do you have anything or are you simply practising bachata?” he asked, bluntly.

“… I’ve got my part, except from your sister’s part” explained Thomas, after a moment to breathe and not snap at the immigrant.

“What sister?” asked Alexander, as Angelica squinted her eyes at him.

Thomas ignored her easily, as he replied: “Peggy”

“I talked with Peggy earlier” said the CFO, turning to look for his youngest sister. “Peggy, why don’t you…? PEGGY!”

The therapist, who’d been staring at her phone openly, jumped in her seat. She looked at her brother-in-law, blinking in surprise.

“What?”

“What’re you doing on the phone?”

“Keeping myself busy”

“You’re in a meeting, not in the dentist’s waiting room”

“These are way worse than a visit to the dentist” complained Lee, under his breath.

“Well, man, you’re discussing things that have nothing to do with me” said Peggy, holding both hands up, in a calming manner.

“We are now” contradicted Alexander. “Moreover” He turned around to point at the board, where he’d written ‘Peggy’s bed’ on previously. “You’re part of my list of issues”

“Well, when it’s my turn call me…”

“I already did”

“What then?” groaned the girl, tiredly.

“Do you have the paperwork done?” asked Alexander, deciding to go straight to the point to not embitter his mood any further.

“What paperwork?” asked the girl, genuinely shocked.

“What pap… Yours, girl, whose else?!”

“Em…”

“The one I went to talk to you about earlier. When you were napping on your new bed”

“So annoying with my fucking bed…”

“Because you bought it with the company’s money and without telling us!” admonished the CFO,
“Don’t scream at me…” complained Peggy, idly.

“Where’s your paperwork?” repeated Alexander, angrily.

“I don’t know”

Alexander stared straight at her for a long moment, before sighing loudly. Passing a hand through his face, he said:

“Is that your answer for everything, people? ‘I don’t know, I don’t know’… I’m so fed up with that bullshit…”

“Well, it’s true, I don’t know where…”

“Have you even started it?”

“No”

“Then it can’t be anywhere!”

“That’s why I don’t know where it is!”

“That has no sense! Be honest and say ‘I haven’t started it yet, Alexander’!”

“Well, I haven’t started it yet, Alexander” repeated the girl, almost in a mocking manner.

“Why not”

“Because I still have an entire week to do that”

“… But why don’t you start it already so you have time to do it all calmly?”

“Because I still have an entire week to do that”

“But, dear, you can’t keep postponing things for last minute” explained the Caribbean, gentler. “I’ve told you plenty of times”

“But I still have an entire week to do that”

“You and I know nobody takes that week seriously, Peggy. You say this now, but when the day comes, Jefferson will still have nothing from you, and so he won’t be able to give those to Washington, and so Washington won’t have all settled before the holidays”

“But I still have an entire week to do that”

Alexander moved his jaw in a nervous manner. “Yes, dear, I know in what day I live in and I’m aware that we still have one more week of work before Christmas; but you can’t keep procrastinating”

“But I still have an entire week to do that”
“But some other people are depending on you. If you want to live overwhelmed by last-hour work, that’s your deal. But don’t drag anybody else with you in that horrible habit”

“But I still have an entire week to do that”

“For fuck’s sake…” complained Hercules, under his breath.

“Peggy” spoke Alexander, his tone harshening considerably. “In what language do I have to talk to you so you finally understand me?”

“But I still have an entire week to do that”

“Can this be possible…?” mumbled Alexander, indignant.

“Look, let it slide. It’s not a big deal, I can wait…” said Jefferson, tired of the interaction.

“No!” hollered Alexander, slamming one hand on the table. “I know this girl and I know what her stupid excuse means!” He looked directly at her as he said: “You have an entire week to do nothing, just goofing around, and then, on the night previous of the final day, you’ll start doing that and drag me along with it, because you need people to hold your hand as a little child while you work. Well, I refuse to do that again. Better start acting responsibly as the adult you are because I’m going to start to treat you as such. Did I make myself clear, Peggy?”

“… … … … But I still have an entire week to do that”

“I FUCKING KNOW YOU STILL HAVE AN ENTIRE WEEK TO DO THAT CRAP, GIRL, I FREAKING NOW. WHAT YOU DON’T SEEM TO KNOW IS THAT I KNOW YOU AS WELL AND I’M TELLING YOU NEED TO FUCKING ORGANISE YOURSELF ONCE AND FOR ALL!”

“Why are you screaming at me?” she asked, though barely perturbed by the outburst.

“Because I’m sick it’s always the same song with you, Peggy! Do things right and with time!”

“Then, where’s the emotion of being alive?”

“Girl, do you want to laugh at me?”

“No, I’m serious”

“True, that’s the worse part of this… You were born like this and you’re planning on dying like this, for what I’m seeing”

“Ooooh” said Maria, suddenly, her eyes wide as she recalled something important. “Alex”

“Yes, dear?”

“Washington sent me an e-mail for you” she revealed, taking one red folder from her purse and passing it to him. “Here, I printed it before coming”

Alexander eyed the folder with tedium. “Another one that’s just the same” he complained, shaking his head and grabbing the folder with more force than necessary. “Thank goodness she told me now and not when we were about to be finished”

“When I remembered” complained the receptionist.
“That’s exactly what I’m talking about, woman! These things can’t be ‘when you remember them’, they’re informed about when they have to!” reprehended Alexander.

“Okay. You’re welcome” spat the girl, crossing her arms upon her chest.

“God raised them and they got together in the nearest mattress store”

Some people giggled discreetly at the remark, while the two girls squinting their eyes at the immigrant.

“Okay, let’s see what we’ve got here” he mumbled, reading what Washington had sent. “Ah, but wait, is this…? This is from the complaints book”

“What’s the complaints book?” asked Isa, confused.

“A book where we can write our complaints along the year” explained Lafayette.

“As the name indicates” added Laurens, throwing her a judgemental look.

“Thought we discuss all that in the last meeting of the year?” asked Angelica, raising one curious eyebrow.

“Surely the man has given up making you take that seriously” theorized Hamilton, nodding at what was written there. “So, the list of issues is way, way longer than this…”

They exchanged a glare at his whispered words, fearing how long the meeting would take. Hamilton passed a few pages, reading slowly and in silence, and making the tension grow. Eventually, he sighed and shrugged.

“Lee” he called, and the man in question stiffened in his seat. “Here Washington wrote you haven’t given him the paperwork he needs to have all your part covered…”

“That’s a lie” interrupted the personnel manager.

Hamilton lifted his eyes slowly, fixating his glare on the top of him. “Pardon, Mr Lee?”

“I wanted to give him my part the other week, and he didn’t pick it up or even read it…”

“Did he give a reason why?”

“Uh, well, he said something like ‘That’s not the proper way you must do paperwork’. But again, he didn’t read it”

“Do you have it here?”

“Yeah”

“Can I see it, please?”
“Yeah, of course”

Lee grabbed his handbag and looked for it a bit until he finally took a few (wrinkled) sheets out, putting them on the table unceremoniously. Hamilton took his glasses off as soon as he saw the state Lee’s paperwork was in, and massaged the bridge of his nose, doing breathing techniques to keep his cool.

“Here, it’s…” began to talk Lee, oblivious to it all and about to get up.

“No, no, don’t get up, I…” said Hamilton immediately, making a gesture with his hand to emphasize his order. “I understand it all now… Take that away from my sight”

“What’s wrong now? You haven’t even read it either!” complained Lee, frowning in offense.

“I don’t need to. With just seeing it like that is enough” said Alexander, pointing at the papers with his pen, disdainfully.

“… But… Why?” asked Lee, perplexed.

“Do you think that paperwork is presentable, Lee?”

“Yeah”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah”

“No”

“No?”

“No”

“Why?”

“Because that’s shameful, Mr Lee”

“Shameful?”

“Yes, shameful; said of a thing that’s reason for feeling ashamed” defined Hamilton, sternly. “Like the piece of crap you’re holding. With good reason Washington didn’t pick that up…”

“But it’s all done, look!” insisted Lee, walking by the immigrant’s side.

Hamilton sighed and put his glasses back on, unwillingly. “Do you think that handwriting is presentable as well?” he asked, after he took a small glimpse of what was on the paper.

“What’s wrong with it?” asked Lee, starting to feel annoyed.

“Can you read, Mr Lee?”

“Of course I can!”
“And do your reading skills tell you that handwriting is normal?”

“Absolutely!”

“… … Lee…”

“It’s my handwriting!”

“Well, improve it, dear, otherwise your paperwork will never get picked up”

“Why not?”

“Because it looks like the Korean and Arabic characters had babies after a crazy party with litres of alcohol!” exploded Alexander, slamming the table once again. “Not even the punctual marks can be read, got it?”

“But it’s my handwriting!” complained Lee.

“Your illegible handwriting” insisted Alexander, stubbornly.

“I have no other”

“Get that solved, because I insist nobody would want to pick something written like this up”

“Well, I understand it” argued Lee, going back to his seat in a bad mood.

“You understand it because it’s a language you made up, but we all would love you to write in English. Clearly, if possible, please” finished Alexander, picking the photocopies up once more. “Alright, what else is in this book of wonders?” he queried, faking an exciting tone. Then, he started to read: “On Thursday, August 22nd, Mr Mulligan lost, by accident, the paperwork of three years and the rest of the staff have previously thrown away, because they thought it unnecessary to keep the physical paperwork in’… Wait…” he stopped, squinting his eyes at what he’d just read.

“Wait, this is my handwriting” realised the immigrant. “Yes, true, I wrote this before taking my holidays” he recalled, taking his pen blindly and nodding as he remembered the events of that day.

He threw a humourless laugh to the air. “Huh, I don’t even remember what I live in here anymore. It’s so much unprofessionalism to process that sometimes my brain can’t function correctly. Thank goodness I have the habit of writing it all down. God only knows how many things you’ve told me or done to me I could forget if I didn’t have it all written down” he commented, as he wrote something next to where his complaint was. “This is already solved, anyways. One of one thousand, from what it seems…”

He rubbed his left arm absent-mindedly as he wrote some more notes besides it. He frowned. “Gee, is it me or it’s too cold?” he asked, raising his glare to look at the people who were sat closest to him by that side.

Hamilton looked behind them, half-closing his eyes when he saw the window broken, with a hole and letting in all the cold wind of December.

“Of course, how is this room not going to be cold with the window still like that and with the fan
He got up, lazily and went to close the blinds, finding the task expectantly hard.

“Be careful, you could get hurt” warned Hercules. “That’s what almost happened to me yesterday”

“The freaking window should be already fixed, anyways” said Alexander, fighting against the cord. “It’s been almost two months since your fucking joke” he grumbled.

Maria, Isa and Laurens exchanged a funny glare of rapport.

“Those blinds are broken” explained Adams.

“No, really?” asked the financer, sarcastically.

“Yep, they broke shortly before I left” kept saying the man, not noticing the mocking tone.

“That was back in August”

“Yeah”

“Why didn’t any of you say anything?”

“That way we air the room” was the excuse Lee gave.

“Air the room? We only come here once a week, and that if the majority of you have a nice day” retorted Alexander, pushing the cord a little bit, frowning at how it didn’t make the blinds to move one inch. He sighed in frustration. “Besides, you’ve got the blinds down all day. With good reason you don’t remember if you left the others windows opened… The electricity bill is pretty in here…”

“Because it’s cold with the wind getting in without something in between” kept arguing Lee.

“The sunlight makes you cold as well, Mr Lee?” asked Hamilton, in disbelief. “Especially you, who always sit by the end of the table, hidden so nobody calls you. You know more than a snake*”

“I’m cold” insisted the personnel manager.

“Do you think it has something to do with the fact that you always have the fan working, on three way switch?” asked Hamilton, pointing at the object. “And that’s not the only one to suffer. All nights, before going back home, I walk around the whole building to see if you left the others on as well. And I always find positive answers. The poor things are going to meet a similar fate of the one from the elevator…”

“Because it’s too hot in here, Hamilton…”

“Didn’t you just say you were cold? Make up your minds, people” he reprehended, going back to his seat.
“Besides, we can only have that one opened because the other one hits that guy over there…” complained Adams, pointing at the other fan that was on the opposite wall, facing the one functioning, and then at Madison. “…says he falls ill if the air of the fan hits him”

“Taken him long to name me” complained the accountant, under his breath.

“Not ‘that guy’, Adams” admonished Hamilton, as he wrote something down. “Madison. He has a name, as everybody else in here”

“Yeah, well…” huffed the man.

“And a fan can’t be opened, unless it’s being checked in case something is wrong with it” kept correcting Hamilton, calmly. “It is on, you’ll mean”

“Yeah, that”

“And I don’t understand what that issue has to do with what I was talking about”

“It does, because if he let us op… Um… Turn this fan on, we could let the other rest a few days…” elaborated Adams.

“Well, first of all, you can’t use the pronoun ‘we’ anymore because you no longer work in here” Hamilton threw in his face immediately, enjoying the sour face his ex-workmate dedicated him. “And, second of all, do you really think I’m going to believe that trumpery you just said?”

“What’s trumpery?”

“A nonsense bigger than a cathedral” Adams’ sullen face just went worse at the explanation. “And why’s that?”

“Because I don’t believe you would really let this fan off if you turned on the other. You’d leave the two working, making the problem worse. Because you’re very irresponsible, the great majority, as well as a bunch of incoherent”

“Why incoherent?” asked Adams once again, offended.

“Because fighting over if a fan should be on or not in the middle of the winter is the epitome of incoherence” explained Alexander, ignoring the cutting tone of Adams and trying to keep the conversation calmed. “It’s December, people, it’s bitterly cold outside. We all, except from a few who seem that they just come out from a DanActive commercial, are wearing our jackets despite being indoors…”

“I’m simply not cold” Maria defended herself, as she was the only one, along with Aaron, that was wearing just a shirt.

“Are you hot, then?” asked Alexander.

“Nah, I’m comfortable”

“Yes, that’s the other option” nodded the financer. “Is somebody in here hot?” he asked, receiving no positive answer. He looked at Adams, almost as if challenging him to keep going. “See? What’s the matter, then? Incoherence at its finest”

“I don’t see the incoherence” argued Adams, proudful.
“… Incoherence: the quality of being illogical, inconsistent, or unclear” defined Alexander, sharply.
“Do you understand it now, dear?”

“Yes, I know what the word means, but I don’t understand why you’re dismissing my point saying is incoherent”

“Because arguing about if we turn on two fans in a meeting room where nobody is hot is everything but coherent” snapped Thomas, with a cutting tone.

Adams showed a face of boredom. “Well, took him long enough to get in between something that was not his business”

“Of course he does! They’re friends” defended Isa, frowning at the man.

“Besides, he’s got a point” added Maria.

“And actually, it took you long enough to get James in between a thing that’s not his fault” countered Thomas.

“It is” contradicted Adams. “Because…”

“And you’re not even working in here, so you don’t have a say” added Thomas, hurriedly, not interested on what he was about to say.

Adams clicked his tongue, annoyed. “But I was working in here for three summers and I recall not being able to turn the fan on because your friend could’ve fallen ill”

“And it’s true. The air of the fan or the air con does him no good”

“Nothing does him good” complained Adams. “Why would he care about if I want the fan on…”?

“But health comes first!” said Isa, getting angry at the man too.

“What health?” asked Adams, in disbelief. “The only problem he has is inside his head. He’s a fucking lunatic…” he insulted, his voice turning into a growl for how upset he felt.

The word triggered a great part of the staff, who exchanged glances and made a few to take part into the discussion.

“Don’t you even dare…” warned Thomas, leaning on his seat and between gritted teeth.

“Man…” said Hercules, sharing a glare of bewilderment with his partner.

“But is this man real?!” shrieked Isa, gasping in shock at the words she was hearing.

“Adams” tried to interrupt Alexander, harshly.

The man ignored him, casting the accountant a derogatory glare. “You need medical help, but other kind” he finished, satisfied with the look that crossed his flatmate’s eyes.

“And you need a few classes of respect and manners” spat Peggy, turning completely on her chair to look at the man that was one chair away from her. Lee lowered his head to not receive part of the
sharp glare of the youngest Schuyler.

“But do you think it’s normal to call someone that just because he’s ill?” asked Isa, throwing him the deadliest glare she could perform.

“All for a fan” added Aaron, shaking his head.

“I think the one who’s sick of the head is you” spat Angelica, venomously.

“Adams” called Hamilton, raising his voice considerably. “If you use those terms again…”

“Look who’s talking about…”

“You shouldn’t be here in the first place, mister!” shouted Alexander, face red. “And I simply let you here because I didn’t want to lose more time on you, but if you dare to interrupt the meeting and talk to one of us in that way, with those terms, I’ll no hesitate in throwing you out literally, no matter how long it’ll take me. I did it once, and I’ll do it again if you push me, got it?”

“Well, okay, take it out on me. He’s the one bothering everyone because he’s…”

“He’s not” interjected Thomas. “You’re the bother in here. And back at home. You’re living there thanks that this man keeps things cool, because if it was for me, you’d be in the streets. So, be thankful” he threw in his face.

“What does he want from me, now? To butter him up as you do?”

“You… I do not butter anyone up”

“The hell you don’t”

Isa spoke her mind, unable to keep quiet any longer: “The one who butters people up is you. Don’t you remember when we worked for King, a bit more and you’d have passed as his shadow…”

“Mind your fucking business!” shouted Adams, rudely.

“This is my fucking business! More than yours!” she shouted back.

“Get over yourself. You passed from a sad receptionist to head of whatever-the-fuck and now it’s gotten to your head”

Isa’s face turned red as a tomato in a millisecond. “I earned my position as well as you earned your fucking firing! You gave Washington the finger because you’re so stupid that you didn’t even bother to see if you had the fucking ticket right, asshole!”

“Isa…” called Thomas, seeing the girl was starting to gesticulate and slap her hands to emphasize her words. Never a good sign.

“Disgusting pig! Living off of your ex-friend despite you betrayed him! Dog! Douche! Scoundrel! Judas! Dimwit! Slacker! Your wife deserves heaven for having married you and a prize for finally leaving you, you little bugger! Stupid goose, deadbeat, you’re nothing, you scumbag! You’re… What? What’re you? What have you done with your miserable and sad life?!! Nothing! You’re nothing, yobbo, just a speck! Like this, little, little, little speck!”

Isa joined her index and thumb fingers, both almost touching, as an example of how she
imagined Adams as she’d insulted. She ended up gasping from air, face red and hair a bit dishevelled from her low bun from how much she’d moved during her heated speech.

People looked at her in shock, not having expected that reaction from her. They silently turned their glares to Adams, who was just as shocked and also had paled considerably as the woman belittled him in front of them all without hesitation.

“Do you want another round, jerk?” she asked, when she’d caught her breath.

“No, no…” spoke Adams, with tiny voice.

“Don’t piss me off, then”

“I adore her already” declared Maria, smiling in satisfaction at Adams’ expression.

“She’s gonna fit right in and all” commented Laurens, under his breath.

Peggy alternated her glare between Isa and her brother. “Huh, though you’re married to my sister, I must admit I just shipped you two”

“Peggy!” admonished Angelica, while Thomas made a face at the commentary.

“What? Imagining is free…”

Alexander cleared his throat, making them to go back to the actual issue. “Alright, so, to sum it up: the fans for the summer and respect for the whole year”

“But, in Adams’ defence” talked Lee, throwing a cautious glare to Isa, who watched him like a predator. “Some of us are not to blame if we feel hotter than average, even during winter…”

“Well, and James’s not to blame if his immunologic system is weaker than the average” countered Isa, rapidly.

“Listen, if you’re hot, just open the windows” decided Hamilton, before the girl could give the man another verbal rod. “One of them is gonna be permanently opened, from what it seems…”

“I’m not saying he’s to blame” said Lee, looking at Isa. “I’m just saying that he can go and sit at the end of the table, and the air won’t reach him”

“A man that does his job perfectly fine and on time must go sit at the end of the room just for three lazy asses can enjoy the air?” questioned Hamilton, his voice’s turn to turn harsh. “And then you say you’re not incoherent”

“Excuse me, but I’ve got my paperwork done” complained Lee.

“Yes, and illegible as well” spat Madison, fed up.

Lee showed a face of repulsion at the intermission of the accountant. “Aw, wait, after one hour, Dobby finds his voice”

“I was expecting for some of you to talk directly to me or let me talk. Foolish of me, honestly” he countered, with a sharpening tone.
“Well, talk, little one, talk. Chiquitito, tell us your truth” mocked Lee, ignoring his words.

Madison moved the tongue inside his mouth, clearly annoyed, and then clicked it with hatred, blurting out, right after:

“I may be small of stature, but the heart I’ve got makes me the biggest person in this place”

“Dang!” laughed Peggy, giving the man the thumbs up.

“I applaud you even with my ears, Jemmy” declared Isa, as she clapped proudly. Maria joined her quickly.

“And, by the way, the days I spend at home” continued James, once his workmates had quieted down considerably, barely perturbed by their comments. “I spend them doing my work, not matter if I’m ill, exhausted or in the mood. You and your buddy, who talks wonders of you when you’re not present, by the way” he told Lee, with clear sarcasm hanging from his tongue, “can’t boast about the same”

“Jeez, the venom that man had inside” commented Lafayette.

“Because when you’re all day harped upon, you end up exploding” said Aaron, quietly, to which Angelica nodded vigorously.

“Yes, explode with the lesser of two evils” added Lee, immediately. “See how he says those things to me but not to that man” He called out, pointing at Hamilton, who showed a genuinely shocked expression. “Because he knows the gremlin eats him alive”

“But what’re you talking about?” interjected Hamilton. “This man’s told me to go to hell five times just this month”

“Look, Hamilton’s not my favourite person, but I can admit the only problem he has is that he’s got no self-control when he talks, but he’ll grow over that with the age. You can’t, because your problem is that you’re plainly and simply mean”

“Thank you!” exclaimed Laurens, in relief. “Finally someone says it!”

“Yes, there’s a lot of malice in here” agreed Angelica.

“Yeah, well… I’ll drink a bit of milk, see if by that I feel better later” spat Lee, venomously.

“You’re a troublemaker, man” Peggy went to her sister’s aid, right away. “In French: problemé-fairér” she made up.

“She’ll never have remedy…” lamented Lafayette.

Angelica’s face contorted in one of pure ire, despite the defence of her sister. “Listen, asshole, I’m gonna hit you so fucking hard not even your mother will recognise you”

“Angelica…” said Aaron, shaking from fear at the deadly tone of her voice.

“Alright, calm down” pleaded Alexander. He looked at his watch, sighing when he saw it was about to be 5.30. “C’mon, we’ve got a lot to talk about yet” He was about to pick the complaint book
again, but made a face and decided to put it aside. “No, I don’t want to keep reading this. I forgot my thermos back at home and I don’t want to have a heart attack”

“Geez, it’s not such a big deal” commented Maria, rolling her eyes as she switched on her chair.

“Not a big deal?” echoed Alexander, looking at her with a serious expression. “Did you read this?”

“No, I thought it wasn’t for me, and I’m not nosy”

“The hell you’re not… Camera with legs…” commented Thomas, casting her a judgmental glance.

“Well, better for your mental health, then” replied Alexander, ignoring how the girl flip Thomas off without even looking back at him. He frowned at other thing that put him on his nerves quite easily. “Maria, I told you to stop with the swinging”

“I do it by instinct” was her defence.

“Instinct? What’re you, a monkey?”

“Maybe I was that in another life” joked the receptionist.

“I think I was a pig in another life” commented Adams, out of the blue and with a thoughtful expression.

“And in this one as well” said Isa, rapidly.

Peggy burst out laughing at that. “Dude, I declare myself your number one fan”

“Thanks, I deserve a club, honestly” agreed the woman.

“Maria, stop it” insisted Alexander, throwing a few glares to the rest of the staff in the meantime. “Please, you could get hurt”

“I’m immortal”

“Yes, that was what Jackie said and five minutes later he was choking on gum”

Laurens blushed at that. “He only knows to remind my mistakes…”

“As if you did anything else in your life…” said Hercules.

“Please, stop it” repeated Alexander, grabbing her wrist and pushing her forward gently. “There…” He tapped his pen on the photocopies. “We’ll leave this for the last meeting, alright?” he said, receiving nods, everyone eager to finish the sooner the better. “Something tells me I’m gonna be in charge of that one as well” lamented Hamilton, under his breath.

“Alexander” called Aaron, with a confused expression.

“Yes, dear?”

“What’s written there?”

“Where?” he asked, turning on his seat to look at the board.

“The last point”

“Ah, the ice tray” explained Hamilton.
“We’re going to discuss an ice tray in a meeting?” asked Lee, with condescendence.

“The ice tray is the exemplification of how much disorganisation there is in here” elaborated Alexander, taking in a deep breath to not snap at the man. “There was a workmate who was feeling bad earlier and he couldn’t use a sad ice bag because there was none. Neither was there an ice tray”

Hamilton stopped talking when he heard a series of whispers as background noise. He looked in the direction of the noise, seeing his group of friends talking hurriedly, Hercules throwing a hateful glare to Laurens, who seemed the most shaken up from the three. Lafayette, on his behalf, passed a hand through his face.

“Something you’d like to share?” asked Hamilton, after a moment of watching in silence.

The trio flinched at his demanding tone and avoided his glare. Alexander eyed them all, knowing them like the palm of his hand and having a theory of what was going on.

“Jackie” he pressured, squinting his eyes at his ex. “Something to say?”

Laurens gulped, seeking help in his two flatmates, but the couple averted his puppy eyes. He grumbled, feeling betrayed, and then dared to look at Alexander, who had his eyes on the top of him. Laurens let out a shaky, nervous laugh, before talking.

“Well, uh… It might be… I mean, from what you said, I think that… It seems plausible that I…”

“The idiot took the ice tray for one of his party nights and lost it” explained Hercules, stone-faced, but with the same tone of voice proper of a fed up parent.

Laurens frowned at him. “Oh, for that you come to my rescue, huh?”

Angelica laughed with superiority at the news. “Ha! And then I’m the thief!”

“Oh, bong sang!” complained Lafayette, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“The truth always comes out, ladies and gentlemen!” proclaimed Angelica, raising both arms in triumph. “And the truth is that thieves think everyone’s like them!”

“Hey, hey, I’m not a thief!” complained Laurens, frowning at the woman. “Alright, I lost it, but I was thinking of giving it back!”

“But you took something that wasn’t yours on purpose! I did it by accident!” countered Angelica.

“Yeah, sure…”

“Yes, sure!”
“Besides, you were reproaching her that she didn’t want to accept her mistakes, earlier” chimed in Peggy. “And now you’re doing just the same. Maybe you should be in the group of hypocrites as well”

“That’s my sis!” said Angelica, giving the girl the thumbs-up.

“Yeah, well, at least I only take little things, as flash drives or ice trays, you take money to buy whims” Laurens threw in her face, crossing his arms upon his chest.

“Excuse me, but I need my sleep so I don’t kill you all” said Peggy, frowning darkly. “So, you’re welcome for making coexistence easier. Unlike some people in here”

“Say it out loud, sis!” encouraged Angelica.

“Alright, please…” said Alexander, massaging his forehead.

“Besides, flash drives are not little things” interrupted Hercules, not having heard his friend at all. “They save our work”

“Yes, until someone doesn’t read the warning and delete it all” huffed Laurens, cruelly.

“Oh, for the love of God!” hollered the informatic.

“Well, in his defence, he’s right there” commented Isa.

“But the man only made a mistake” Lafayette supported his boyfriend right away. “Laurens has done plenty and nobody says shit. Hercules does one thing wrong once and you don’t stop stoning him since”

“Oh, oooh” exclaimed Angelica, dramatically, as she rolled her eyes. “Stoning… Drama kings…”

“Yes, Angelica, stoning!” reassured Lafayette, nodding.

“Because he stones the rest of us when we make mistakes!” argued Laurens.

“Actually, he only ‘stones’ you” said Aaron, finger-quoting.

“More than enough for me to do this, then!”

“It’s not the same, John. Hercules does it because he cares; you, because you’re a vindictive toddler” elaborated Lafayette, sternly.

“Well, you spent quite the time defending the vindictive toddler” Laurens reminded him.

“Don’t be unthankful, then” chimed in Thomas.

“Mind your own business” spat the HR manager.

“You went to look for me in my own house to fix your mess” Thomas recalled, bitterly. “So, this is 100% my business now”

“What?” asked Alexander, squinting his eyes in confusion.

“See how everybody throws my mistakes in my face?” asked Laurens, looking for support across the table. “But then I do it and I’m childish”
“It’s true” nodded Lee, leaning on his seat and wanting to speak his mind. “Mulligan made one mistake, but it was a very big one…”

“Agh, shut the hell up. I don’t even know what you’re doing here!” complained Laurens, with a face of pure tedium.

“He was defending you, you idiot!” insulted Thomas, exasperated.

“Dumb. He’s dumb” told him Hercules, shaking his head in defeat.

Lee threw daggers in Laurens’ direction. “Now, I won’t defend you. Screw you, asshole!”

“I don’t need it” declared the southerner, pridefully.

“Look, look at that face he makes” said Hercules, scrunching up his upper lip with disgust. “Look at that face proper of a spoiled brat that needs a couple of slaps to grow the fuck up once and for all”

“Hercules, I don’t want violence on my watch” warned Lafayette. “No violence on my watch!”

“But, for the love of God” interceded Madison, boringly. “Why are we talking about that, anyways? It’s solved already”

“He’s a shit-stirrer” insulted Hercules.

“Actually, it was Angelica; she brought up the issue of the milk again” said Isa, pointing at the vice president.

“Because I’ve been strongly insulted for an accident for then to be told this man steals” explained Angelica. She looked disdainfully at Laurens. “Is it you the one who steals the toilet paper as well?”

“What I would want toilet paper for?” asked Laurens, disgusted.

“Who knows. I stopped trying to understand your mindset long ago”

“To be fairs, I’ve not seen that toilet paper back at home” said Hercules.

“Thank you” said the southerner, not meeting his flatmate’s glare.

“What it is, is”

“Well, someone’s stealing it” insisted Angelica. “Just in case you want to theorize it was me too…”

“Oh, pour l’amour du ciel, Angelica!” exploded Lafayette. “You drank the fucking milk, on purpose or not, and you can’t change that!”

“Judging me for milk…”

“What an annoying woman” muttered Maria, under her breath.

“It’s not the milk, it’s about that you finished it and now he has to buy more!” Thomas defended his friend.

“I took milk from the fridge. If he doesn’t like people messing with his things, he can simply get a little fridge for himself and…”

“Hey, hey” interrupted Lafayette, offended. “I’m not going to put my things apart like a pariah,
“huh?”

“If you don’t want confusions to be made…”

“Respect and look what you’re doing” ordered Lafayette, growing angry once again at the woman.

“Honey…” said Hercules, fearing irascible expression.

“Do as you say, Angelica. You spend your life telling people off but you’re the worst of them all, because you act like a goddess who can do no wrong and that’s waaaaay far from the truth!” he reprehended.

“Calm down…”

Angelica snapped at his words. “Oh, yeah? That’d make two of us! All your life going all pacifist on people but then, for a gulp of milk…”

“It’s not the milk, it’s that you can’t even apologise!”

“For a gulp of milk!?”

“For being an inconsiderate and a prideful asshole!”

“Well, you know what, my dear?”

“What”

“I fucking knew it was your milk” she revealed, grinning evilly. “And I drank it all on purpose because I’m fucking sick of seeing that thing with the name of ‘Lafayette’ on as if your things have to be untouchable”

There were a few surprised ‘oooh’s and gasps of shock at the new information. Alexander leaned closer to his older sister, a frown on his face.

“Angelica, you shouldn’t…”

But he was interrupted once again.

“I knew it!” exclaimed Lafayette, between gritted teeth; nobody could tell if he was angry or happy for having gotten it right. “I fucking knew it! KNEW IT!” He looked daggers at Angelica, who was smirking at him. “This is war, woman! THIS IS FUCKING WAR!”

“Laaaaaf…” said Hercules, worried.

“Are you threatening me in front of witnesses, baguette au lait?” asked Angelica, frowning darkly.

Thomas huffed at the thought. “Like people in here were sane enough to go to testify…”

“Alright, that’s enough!” said Alexander, slamming the table to bring the attention back to him.
“Everybody calm down. We’re all tired, it’s been an exhausting year, you’re all eager for the holidays. I get it. But you need to relax, because you’re getting nowhere like this”

“Huh, where’s that trail of thought when you’re the wounded one?” muttered Angelica, deeply offended.

“Relax” repeated Alexander, throwing her hard glare. “Now, the ice tray is actually not that important, neither is the milk…” He hurried to raise a hand to silence whatever retort Angelica and Lafayette were about to say. “It’s just an example of how disorganised and self-centred we’re being. Things like flash drives or ice trays must not exit this place, they’re for the workplace. Nowhere else. And if there’s a workmate who wants to bring their own food or drinks, because health issues or because they want to, I think it’s more than…”

“It burns my fucking soul” interrupted Angelica, in a growl. “It burns my eyes when I see the fucking milk, first in line, with the name of ‘Lafayette’ on, and then the rest of the things in the back and scattered, but his shit is all in the front so only he can take it…”

“Well, there’s a difference between you and me” spoke Lafayette, solemnly. “You can’t apology, even when you admitted you did it on purpose. But Johnny is going to, and to buy a new ice tray for the law firm”

Laurens laughed at his words. “Yeah, what am I now? Rich?”

Lafayette frowned at him, reprehensively. “Johnny…”

And his words were all Hamilton needed to finally break and explode at full force.

“It’s a fucking ICE TRAY, JOHN!” he screamed, reaching the limit of his patience. “IT COSTS YOU ONE FUCKING DOLLAR IN THE NEAREST SHOP!!!!”

“If it’s nothing, why are you screaming?” asked Aaron, boringly.

“BECAUSE HE DID THE SAME WITH THE SHITTY FLASH DRIVE WERE HERCULES COULD’VE PUT THE WHOLE FUCKING PAPERWORK!!!” answered Alexander, casting a hateful glare to the lawyer that made him shrink in his seat.

“Heeeeey, ttts, eeeeh” said Laurens, cockily. “I may have lost that, but we had a flash drive, and Hercules didn’t…”

“For fuck’s sake, for how long will I have to be reminded of that one mistake I made?” complained the informatic.

“Read the freaking warnings, man…” reprehended Laurens.


“Man, chill…” tried to soothe Peggy.

“I CAN’T! FOR BUYING A FUCKING BED YOU HAVE ENOUGH BILLS, BUT FOR A
Peggy grumbled under her breath. “I’ll not hear the end of it with the filthy mattress of hell…”

“Well, no, because the little girl bought it with the company’s money!” Hamilton corrected himself, with a sardonic smirk. “And without warning. They do it and maybe pray for me not to notice. Well, newflash, idiots, I end up finding out everything! Got it?! I’M THE FUCKING CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER FOR A REASON. ALL THAT CRAP COMES TO ME AT SOME POINT. YOU’RE DELAYING THE INEVITABLE!”

He now punched the table, contorting his face into one of pain for a mere second but kept going. “Use your heads! You have your heads for something else that to have it resting on your fucking neck! Use your brain, as little as it might be and thiiiink, thiiiink, THIIINK FOR A GOD DAMNED TIME!” he shouted, his voice turning hoarse. “And if it can be of your workmates, so much the better!”

“Hamilton, relax, you’re shouting for an ice tray” said Thomas, looking puzzled at the outburst his workmate was performing.

“There he goes too! It’s not the ice tray! It’s the fact that you’re all a bunch of selfish bastards! And thieves! Those things must not be taken out from here, they’re for your use and enjoyment in here! HERE AND NOWHERE ELSE, ALRIGHT?! The only thing you had to calm your headache was a FREAKING BAG OF FROZEN CHIPS! DO YOU THINK THAT’S HAVING GROUNDS?! IN A LAW FIRM FULL OF GROWN-UPS??!”

“… I don’t mind” lied Thomas, wanting to tranquilize him.

“You don’t mind?” parroted Alexander, in absolute disbelief. “What now? You finally embraced the fact that you’re a fucking clown?”

“But what does that…”

“I’m so fucking fed up with this shit” said Alexander, not minding the secretary’s words. He breathed in and out a few times, almost sobbing. “I can’t anymore” he admitted, with broken voice. He hid his eyes behind his hand as he rested his forehead on it, shaking it with impotence. “I just can’t anymore, I can’t with all this, it’s beginning with to be too much and I’m seeing myself so alone because here everyone just care about themselves and nobody else… Selfish bastards…” he sobbed, shivering in his seat. “I’m so alone, but so fucking alone… Fighting against the current with nobody collaborating. Because nobody collaborates in here…

“Do you want to pass something to your laptop? Buy your own flash drive and keep it in a vault, wouldn’t want an irresponsible thief to take it away from you… Do you want ice, honey? Go to the nearest shop, wobbling from pain, and if you collapse in the middle of the street, you collapsed, I’m too busy being a selfish prick to care… Wanna have a meeting to discuss how we sort the financial matters out? Go fend for yourself and come to my house to have dinner, but don’t expect me to pay for the gas or be easy on you, because you’re an ignorant…”

“The little bastard will never let me forget it…” complained Thomas under his breath, making a face. “Don’t let my lack of sleep and speed of writing fool you, I’m human too, huh?” Hamilton reminded them, passing a hand through his hair. “I’m human too and I don’t know how much I’ll be able to put up with this or for how much longer… I’m sick of so much extreme narcissism in here. I’m not going to tolerate it anymore, did you hear me? Not a single one more… I’ve got a blood pressure unlike for people my age, you know? And for what? For coming here and see everybody looking at
the fucking clock?

“I’m tired as well, okay? Both physically and mentally. I haven’t stopped since I came back in September. You have one meeting per week, where you joke around and take nothing seriously, but Washington and I have had at least ten per week to solve everything before the year ends and can start the next one in a better foot, but it’s no use. You don’t care. I haven’t seen so many indifference in my entire and short life. For your own job and good. This is your job, people. It. Is. Your. Fucking. Job.

“Because when the end of the month comes, you run to stand in line and wait for your salary and get angry outrageously of someone dares to touch it. Do you think you deserve the salaries you have? Do you, really? It’s the salary you must be given for your position, but, honestly, I think most of you don’t deserve the positions you’re working in.

“I see people in lower positions that know more than the heads of departments. I’ve seen Jefferson rewriting Lee’s work because when his handwriting is half decent, his orthography is deplorable. But then he comes here, under pressure, to make matters better, and talks to the man that’s spent his nights re-doing his job so Washington doesn’t do it or gets angry or loses the sanity the poor man still has… And Lee talks to him with such disgusting airs…

“I’ve seen Hercules helping people out as if he were the real therapist in here. I’ve seen Madison losing his time doing Adams’ job when that… that… That walking disaster still worked in here and the man was so shameless he dared to yell at him when he was the one who explained it wrong… I’ve seen Maria with more initiative each time we’ve gotta do something than any of the heads has ever shown.

“I’ve seen Libby, in the short period of time the girl’s been working here, taking her task seriously, because you’re all a bunch of toffs unable to hold a clothe for more than three seconds. I’ve seen her noticing things faster and easier and speaking truths and being fairer than any of us. And yet the girl’s not here because she comes two times a week for cleaning and then leaves.

“If only you knew how much it hurts me to pay these people the salaries they have, because is way, way lower than what they deserve, and I feel a fucking impotence that I’m not able to put into words. And it gets even worse when some of the others come and order them around as if they were lesser beings…

“We should try to give them all the holidays at the same time. Let’s see how things would turn out to be. ‘Go do photocopies’, ‘go clean’… Huh… I’d love to see how many of you have the initiative to do that for the sake of it, and without complaining or making a fuss. I’d really love to see that. If we come here and at the first reprimand they got they turn into demons. Gods and goddess of the Olympus, they’re above humankind, they can’t make any mistakes…

“And don’t you even dare to say we’d have to hold onto our belts because something happened and there’s no other way to solve it than taking a bit, a bit, of money from the salaries as well because here things broke so quickly that we’re always in the red… Well, in the red… Huh… We’re in the purple, because we’ve got so much debt that the numbers back at the bank account are suffocating each other for lack of space…”

Hamilton lowered his head, thoughtful. He inhaled through his nostrils slowly, chest rising considerably, the staff exchanging glares of guilt or worry. The alarm on Hamilton’s watch went off, startling them all but its owner. Alexander waited for a moment before silencing it and threw an uncomical laugh to the air.
“5.30 and we did, what? Screaming for milk, picking on the health of certain workmates, throwing past shit to the face, refusing to accept the blame and screaming for milk again” recalled the immigrant, still not meeting anyone’s glare, just the wooden table as if it were the most interesting thing on the planet. He exhaled, placing a hand upon his chest, as in pain. “I’m feeling a strange feeling here…” he admitted, more to himself than to anyone else but alarming the rest, nonetheless. “I’m gonna have a heart attack during one of these things, I swear… You’re going to kill me one day. And when I’m fucking dead and six feet under, the bunch of you will surely go to cry and give me flowers…” he rambled, staring into the nothingness, maybe imagining the macabre scenario.

He scared them all again when he punched the table for a fourth time, with even more rage, and he started to scream again. “Shove your fucking flowers up your arses, motherfuckers! I want details and loves when I’m fucking alive, so I can give it back and thank it properly! I don’t want you to give me anything when I’m gone, or to even flatter me! Fake! You’re all a fake! Faker than the second sentence on the Declaration of Independence! The fuck ‘we’re created equal’… I wouldn’t have worked my ass off or proved time and time again I’m here for my own merits if that were fucking true.

“And they’ll surely go to my funeral to cry me the seas they’ve tried to drown me with while I was alive…” He showed a face of repulsion to one and each of them. “Bunch of hypocrites, cynical assholes, brown-noses… If you hate me in life, hate in death as well, sons of bitches! I clean my ass with your tears of a faker! Tell me things in the face and while I can still retort you, bunch of cowards! My back’s not voicemail; if you’ve got something to tell me, tell me in the face!

“And I told you back in summer that if you truly think I’m useless, don’t go look for my help when times get rough! Now, for fixing the elevator, that I have not broken, I’ve spent my time calling and negotiating a good price, and I’ll be the one who tells Washington about it too. Then, they laugh, and they create conspiracy theories about why the man only trusts me and talks to me and does everything with me… Because I’m the only fucking person who knocks on his door and tells him everything that’s going on in time so he can act? Maybe?

“Ah, it only bothers them when they can’t take something from it. When he leaves me in charge of something or let me make a decision because he can’t be present, everything is insults, nicknames, very strong accusations of which you possess no evidence at all, huh? Did you forget about that? Because I did not. And I’m not planning on it. Now months have passed, they see I can do what they don’t want to, like talking to Washington about the last of your incompetence, and now they think everything’s forgiven and forgotten.

“No. I don’t forgive those things, less forget about them. Those rumours, those theories, those… disgusting things you said about me without knowing me deserve no forgiveness of God. They’re not things I wish upon anybody. Not all of you did, I’m aware; but I know very well whom I’m talking about right now. And they know as well. Whom I’m referring to and what I’m talking about.

“I should’ve played with their jobs and salaries once I was assigned the position I’m in, should’ve played with them and taking advantage when their time came to live a hard time. Should have. There are nights when I regret it. But that’s not my style. I leave that to the professionals, of which this law firm is almost full of, with a few honourable exceptions.

“Shameless. You had no shame when you needed help and came ask me for it as if we were normal colleagues who act civil and maturely to one another, who don’t go around saying things like those, playing with a topic you know is sensitive, no matter whom it’s about. People with a little bit of emotional intelligence know that. But, of course, some of you lack both that kind of intelligence and
“And there’s come a time when I simply don’t know what to do. Yes, I know I’ve gotta fix things, like the window, the elevator. And to buy things when they’re finished. But neither Washington, Angelica or I are made of money. We don’t plant it and reap it by the end of the month. To the people out there I say I’m a CFO of some company, but in reality, I’m a juggler.”

He then proceeded to perform the famous circus music, making a few to smile despite the bitterns turn the speech had gone to. “That’s what I hear in my head while doing my job, because it’s surrealist. You come here only to eat, drink, spend the time, go to the toilet, sleep, fight if someone calls you out on your bullshit and go back home way before you’re supposed to… I come here and I see memos hung on the bulletin board that are… I don’t know if there’s a right term to define those things. And I don’t even know why they’re written, because nobody reads them…

“And I’ve reached a moment in which I don’t know what to do anymore. I don’t fucking know what to do anymore when I’m doing the math in here. I don’t know if I… I… I… If I should hang myself in my office, or cut my wrists with the paperwork and lie down on my own pond of blood, dying slowly from repugnance and… and… and shame… Because I feel ashamed when I tell people I work in here, yes, I admit it, I feel ashamed.

“I feel ashamed of telling people I work in a place in which you walk in and see a Christmas tree – poorly decorated because you’re lazy even for doing such a thing – in the middle of March, or a giant stuffed spider in the middle of December, that I don’t know how nobody’s died from a heart attack when they come in search of a lawyer… And, ah, of which part of its staff must be traced down and dragged in here so they come to the freaking meeting or hand their paperwork. And they’d want a prize for it. For doing their job, their obligation…”

The silence fell again, heavier than before. The only sound was Hamilton’s uneven breath, as he tried to calm his nerves. He was now looking at the floor, shaking his head and frowning his lips in total defeat.

“You’re dismissed” he said, surprising them (and not for the good, as they’d have expected the news to make them feel). “Go home, we’re more than done here. I won’t fight anymore for something that has no solution. We’ll see how the next year goes, but I’m warning you that I won’t lose my precious time fighting for people who don’t give a damn”

They exchanged a glare. They got up and left the room in eerie silence. For once, the sound of a pin dropping could’ve been heard in the place. The only one who stayed was Peggy, as she’d carpooled with Alexander and lived with him. She sent a glare to her sister, who was also looking concerningly at Alexander, both wanting to comfort the Caribbean. They decided against it at last minute, thinking it was the wiser option to let him be for the moment.
Washington was informed by the Schuyler sisters of what had happened (and Eliza had begged him to be more comprehensive than usual with her husband if he lost his temper with him, of all people, an occurrence both knew Alexander would hate to happen and never forgive himself for it). Washington didn’t think it twice before assuring his friend’s wife that he’d try for everything to go as smooth as he could manage, and would keep an eye on whoever that wanted to start up a fight with the immigrant for the next few days.

Hamilton met with him at some point in the afternoon, both men working through what was needed to be fixed before the year ended and trying to have it all covered for when 2019 came. The foreign calmness (and, dare he say it?, indifference) Alexander showed throughout the whole meeting worried the older man deeply, but decided to ignore it to not make it worse. He’d some experience with these scenarios, as random as they were.

When the workday was about to be over (for the rest of the staff, honestly, they were going to have to stay a few hours more for the remaining of the year), Washington was surprised to see what his personnel performed before going home.

Lee came by, a bit more subdued that he used to act in front of them, and handed Washington some paperwork, asking if the handwriting was clear enough and offered to re-do it all again if that wasn’t the case. Washington dismissed it, surprised to see he could make out most of the words. Then, Hercules dropped by, with Isa by his side. They handed their boss a couple of flash drives where they’d saved all the plans they’d thought about to call the attention of new clients for when next year rolled by. Hercules also told Washington he was free to send him whatever opinions or improvements he could think about, no matter the time. Isa even gave him her phone number and e-mail address, two things the girl has been postponing on purpose since she was hired.

Madison came next, handing Hamilton a few papers where he had made a neat copy of part of the paperwork they’d done that year and discussing a few things with the immigrant, trying to reach an agreement on how they were going to fix the elevator and keep things stable among the personnel.

Lafayette and Angelica came right after the accountant. The woman told them she’d talked with a few law firms her father had worked with in the past that were willing to consider make an alliance with them, while Lafayette explained he’d done as much but in the foreign field, so they could grow in a more international way once they’d managed to have a considerable number of workers. He even offered to translate whatever they could be sent no matter the time, as his partner had said.

Even Adams knocked on the door at some point. He walked in, dressed up presentable, more than they had ever seen him, and handed Washington a written apology for his behaviour, including the one he performed before the whole incident with the lottery. He also said he understood if Washington decided to not change his mind about his firing, but that he thought he needed to do this
because they deserved it.

A few minutes later, Maria also made an appearance, her hands holding two boxes, one in the top of the other, and asked for the key of the storeroom, to put the Halloween decorations in there and start adorning the office for Christmas tomorrow. Washington gave it to her, offering help, which she turned down, stating the shocking information that Adams was helping her while he was there.

Burr came when it was about to be 5.30, almost in a hurry, saying he could help economically with the elevator if they left him (which arouse a passive argument between Hamilton and him, an event that left Washington numb and puzzled, as he witnessed it all, first in line) and then informed them he’d been talking with a few of his and Alexander’s ex-workmates that were considering the idea of starting anew somewhere else. He gave Washington a piece of paper where he’d written their names and the needed personal information so they could be contacted.

Jefferson decided to pay a visit at last time too. He offered two hot coffees to his boss and Alexander, to whom he’d also bought a sweet bun so the financer could have something in his stomach. For once, they didn’t say anything to one another, just shared glare only they knew what it meant. The secretary was clearly a bit more uncomfortable for the exchange than Alexander and so, ended it first, turning on his heels and biding farewell to both of them before exiting the place, as quietly as he’d entered.

They saw Laurens waiting outside, oddly crest-fallen. He nodded when Jefferson passed him by and walked in through the door the Virginian had left opened for him. Laurens avoided Alexander’s stare as he put a couple of ice trays on the table and handed his friend a drawing he’d made, with the clear intention of apologising for something. Washington watched with curiosity as Alexander gave a simple ‘thank you’ and Laurens left, maybe a little too fast.

And last but no least, Peggy ended up coming as well. The girl seemed the shiest of the group as she walked to the desk, putting a check with the money the mattress had cost her and the part of paperwork she was told to give Jefferson yesterday. She waited there, throwing cautious glares to her brother-in-law, expectant for his reaction. Alexander read the check and skimmed through her paperwork. Eventually, she showed them what she’d been holding behind her back in her right hand. Washington and Hamilton cocked an eyebrow when the girl offered her brother a paper flower. The financer scrutinized it for a moment, before saying:

“Jackie did it, right?”

The girl hesitated a bit, before replying with a timid: “Maybe…”

Alexander took it nonetheless and stretched out his arm, welcoming Peggy into a hug the girl accepted without a second thought. He rubbed her back a bit, as he whispered something in her ear
that made her tightened the embrace.

“Can we have McDonalds tonight?” she asked, at some point, when she felt the land was safe enough.

“Yeah, I think we all need a bit of garbage food after this week” agreed Alexander, humorously.

Washington watched her leave, in a more outgoing manner and clearly happier. He casted a look at Alexander, who simply took a sip of coffee and kept working as if nothing had happened. After a moment of silence, the older man couldn’t contain himself anymore and asked:

“What did all of that mean?”

Alexander shrugged at first. “If you threaten to take an easy life away from people, they’ll start taking things seriously and even do it for themselves in order to keep things as they are”

And if Alexander was smirking mischievously as he gave the explanation, that was something nobody else but them needed to know. The change would feel nice until it lasted.

Chapter End Notes

*You know more than snakes (Saber más que las culebras): To be very clever for your own benefit

*To ask for pears to the elm tree (Pedir peras al olmo): Our version of "to ask for the moon" or "to make a silk purse out of a pig's ear".

I'm gonna try to post a special on Christmas, as I did last year, but if I can't... In my country it's Christimastime till January 6th, just saying...

Sursum corda!
The children's interlude II

Chapter Summary

What? I haven't given Eliza's orphanage plot a place in here yet? Let's solve this...
Fluff and hamliza.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

This was supposed to be up on the World Children's Day. But since when have I done things right?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alexander didn't know why he hadn't done this before. Eliza had proposed it several times since she started, but he always found an excuse to pass. And not because he didn’t want to go, he truly, really did, but because it was true that work tended to get in his way of doing other things. And especially the last couple of weeks in his office, in which one of them he had to substitute once again. Eliza simply let him be, knowing it’d be useless to make him go somewhere when he was so involved in his paperwork.

But their marriage consisted on little surprises given by the two parts. And that afternoon, after lunch, Alexander did his part, giving his wife one of the best surprises of the year.

“Hey, Betsey, do you want me to go with you to the orphanage today?”

Eliza had frozen as she zipped up her jacket. She blinked once, twice. A smile spread on her face and next thing Alexander knew, she was enveloping him in the tightest hug he’d received from her since they knew.

“I do, I do, I do, I do!” she exclaimed, almost squeaking.

Peggy shushed them rudely from the couch, where she had made a cocoon to fall asleep for the rest of the day.
“Peggy, you watch the kids today” informed Eliza, still smiling and not changing her happy tone one bit.

Both laughed when the youngest Schuyler sister whined, covering her whole body with the blanket.

“You’re gonna love them!” assured Eliza, as he parked on her parking spot. Alexander was surprised she had one, when she’d only been working there for eight months, a very little amount of time in comparison with the rest.

He smiled softly. “I wasn’t doubting it’

“And I’m sure they’ll love you too!” she continued, jumping out from the passenger seat in excitement.

“We’ll have something in common, then’

Eliza rolled her eyes, playfully. “I’ll pass you that because you made me the happiest woman on Earth today”

Alexander laughed as he locked the car. “Should I feel offended, as you’re counting our wedding day in that raking?”

“They’re different types of happiness” replied the woman, right away. She lopped her arm with his and dragged him to the entrance.

Eliza opened the door for him and Alexander was greeted by a tan-skinned woman who seemed to share their same age. Her dark green eyes lightened up at the sight of Eliza, and Alexander’s jaw clenched, his smile turning a bit more forced, as the women hugged, as two old friends. Alexander scrutinized the worker; her oval-shaped face wrinkled for how much she was smiling as she held Eliza tight; her raven hair just altered by the single thick lock dyed in ruby red.

She was slightly chubbier and the same height as Alexander, but he couldn’t help but remember Vera when he looked at her, a bittersweet nostalgia falling on his heart. The woman locked eyes with him, finally releasing his wife as Eliza introduced them.

“Ruth, this is my husband, Alexander” spoke Eliza, her sweet voice thankfully grounding him. “Alex, this is the co-worker I’ve talked to you about, Ruth”
“Good things, I hope” joked the woman.

“A pleasure” he said, nodding politely and stretching out his hand.

Ruth rolled her eyes, landing them on Eliza with rapport. “Lawyers, office workers… So serious and formal!” she complained, with a shake of head.

“He doesn’t like new people in his personal space” warned Eliza, placing an arm in between Alex and Ruth.

“Polar opposite attract each other” added Alexander, raising an eyebrow at the straightforwardness of the girl.

She laughed whole-heartedly. “Absolutely! You can ask my partner for that!”

“How’s everything going so far?” asked Eliza, changing the subject easily and throwing a curious glare to her husband, which he simply ignored.

“As usual. Can’t you see?”

Ruth stretched her two arms and turned around slowly, letting them see her clothes were stained by random colours that didn’t match neither belong to the original shirt or jeans she was wearing. Also, once she stopped, they took closer attention to how her up bun looked like everything but. Eliza and she shared a laughed.

“The art classroom really gave you a challenge today”

“I left that place alive by a stroke of luck, actually” Ruth looked at Alexander, a hand on her hip. “Why don’t you show your husband the place, while I get myself clean to make dinner?” she proposed. “Hope he gets his voice back once I return”

“Leverage it while you still can” advised Eliza, casting Alexander an amusing glare with slight yet noticeable bits of worry.

Worry she didn’t hesitate in verbalise once they were left alone.

“Alexander, is everything alright?” she asked, her smile long gone. And he felt a pang of guilt in the left side of his chest.

“Yes, don’t worry” he dismissed rapidly, marching with her down one hall.

“Alex, if you’re feeling bad because…”

“I’m alright” he interrupted before she could complete her statement. “It’s… Your friend reminds me of someone” he admitted, knowing Eliza wouldn’t drop the issue any time soon.

She blinked a few times, not having expected that answer at all. “Is it a bad memory?” she asked, carefully.
“No, all the contrary” he laughed, an empty sound that didn’t make Eliza’s mood better. “Ruth reminds me of a woman that helped me when I needed it the most, it took me by surprise”

“Alright…” nodded Eliza, thinking about the best way to approach this. “Alright. But if you feel bad at some point…”

“I won’t”

“But if you do…” she insisted, frowning her lips. “Just tell. I won’t mind. I wasn’t forcing you to come because I knew…”

“Betsey” he interrupted again, more sternly than before. “I’m fine. These places don’t bother or trigger me or anything”

“Okay, okay” she said, holding both hands up in a surrender manner. “I just want you to have a nice time. I mean, it’s a miracle you left the house” she teased, with the phantom of a smile dancing on her lips.

Alexander was glad for the change of topic. “I take full offense at that”

---

Eliza showed her husband the art room as she tidied up the place, already changing into a working mode. Alexander helped her a couple of times, receiving a few stories of the artist behind the drawings they saw on the tables as they cleaned them.

“This one must be Adrian’s. He’s been obsessed with mermaids since we watched The Little Mermaid the other day” she commented, fondly, as she kept it with the others she picked up to put them on a safer place. “And this one…” She giggled. “This one must be Wyatt’s, he loves the medieval… And this one… Oh, look at this! Judith has already drawn a whole person!”

Alexander smiled along with her, enjoying her enthusiasm. This was surely what Eliza needed, he was glad she got to work in a healthy environment and with such good workmates (judging by Ruth’s behaviour when she talked about her task, he wanted to believe only people like that were hired in there). But he was even gladder for the kids. He wished he’d have ended in a place like this when he was little.

He tried to push those memories on the furthest corner of his mind. He didn’t want to embitter his wife’s workday, especially when she was smiling so brightly. Just one look at her and his heart beat slower and his nerves and the bitter taste in his mouth disappeared.

His eyes landed on a piece of paper that truly called his attention among the whole gallery Eliza had been explaining to him.
“Betsey, and this one?”

Eliza turned around, halfway of putting a new amount of drawings inside a cabinet that was almost full. She raised an eyebrow when she saw the paper her husband was holding, completely blank. Her eyes went automatically to the left corner of the sheet, and she shook her head with affection.

“This one is Hugo’s” she explained. “He always makes the most original. Wonder what he was thinking about today”

“About nothing” a childish voice answered from the doorframe. Turning around, they saw a kid above the age of ten. Alexander frowned in sympathy when he took a glimpse at the eyes of the youngest; it made him seem older than he surely was. Alex could relate. “I didn’t have inspiration, so I left it as blank as my mind”

Eliza, again, shook her head affectionately. “Only you” she said, keeping the blank sheet also in place.

“Hey, it’s modern art!” complained Hugo, with a wee smile. His eyes finally noticed Alexander. “Oh, um… Hi” he greeted, changing his whole demeanour.

Alex smiled, feeling bad for how nervous Hugo showed himself in front of him. “You should think about calling a museum” he said, after a nod, supporting the kid. “Who knows, maybe in a couple of years, it costs a lot”

Hugo seemed a bit taken aback by his words, before playing along. “Huh, yeah, once I’m famous and rich… I’ll title it ‘My humble beginnings’”

The two of them laughed, the kid more sheepishly, but equally sincere. Eliza alternated her glare between the two, with a smile.

“Eliza, Ruth wants to talk to you in the kitchen” said the kid, clearly more relaxed.

She raised one eyebrow at that. “Is everything alright?”

“I heard her complaining about Miss Emily”

Eliza’s eyes squinted at the mention of the name. “Dear God, what is it now…” she muttered, marching to the door immediately. “Hm… Do you mind showing my husband the place, Hugo?” she decided, at last minute. The kid just shrugged. “You don’t mind, right, Alex?”

“No…”

“Thank you!” she said over her shoulder, her whole posture oddly rigid.

Hugo sighed at the sight. “Another argument” he commented, under his breath. Before Alexander
could question anything, he turned around and was looked up and down by the child. “Do you want me to help you, Mr…?”

“Alexander will do” he told him, immediately. “And just if you don’t mind…”

“Nah” said Hugo, finally walking in after some thinking, though keeping the distances. “I’m used to this, anyways”

“You’re the older brother of this place?” joked Alexander, with the intention of knowing the kid a bit more and getting him to loosen up.

“Sorta, yes” shrugged Hugo, putting some chairs in place. “I always wanted to have a little sibling. But not the whole litter of 101 Dalmatians”

Alexander laughed. “Hey, that means they like you. Good job”

“I guess…”

“Are you the oldest in here?”

“Nah, just the one that puts up with them the most, I guess”

“There’s your answer. Kids appreciate those things”

“I guess… They act the same around Eliza and Ruth, so I think I must be doing something right” muttered Hugo, closing a cabinet after keeping the brushes there.

“Don’t doubt it” encouraged the immigrant, cleaning the table Eliza had left unfinished. He frowned at the memory of how her good mood changed drastically. “I suppose the same does not go to Miss Emily?” he started, cautiously.

Hugo huffed, humourlessly. “No. Why do you think she’s the only one we call with a ‘miss’ before the name?”

“I was thinking maybe she was in a higher position” Alexander shrugged. He remembered to call all his carers by their names, even the worst ones. Just Mr Jackson being the exception and that pretentious principal, whose name Alex had long forgotten. Thank God.

Hugo huffed again. “No. Don’t call for bad weather… She’s just a shitty snooty” He panicked for a second, whipping around with a pleading look. “Oh, sorry, it slipped!”

“Kid, you’re talking with the inventor of the majority of the swear words in the dictionary” dismissed Alex with a wave of hand. He counted Hugo’s laugh as a victory. “But she treats you well, right?” he asked, forcing his smile to not drop.

Hugo shrugged. “She made a few kids cry, but that’s normal”

Alexander wanted to tell the kid it was not, but his younger self flinched in agreement. In the end, he opted for:

“It shouldn’t be”
Hugo huffed for the third time. It seemed he did that quite a lot, maybe to prevent to say something that could get him into trouble. “I’ve been to enough care systems to know it is”

Alex smiled in empathy. “Yeah, well, welcome to the club” he admitted, getting up from where he’d been knelt and admiring how shining the round table now was. Until the next paint war, that is. He turned his head before the lack of verbal response, finding the shock expression of Hugo. “Shut your mouth, you’ll get flies” he joked, throwing the clothe to the nearest surface.

“Sorry…” apologised the kid, still surprised.

“And I also had my own Rottenmeier while growing up, so fear not if you want to vent about Miss Emily” he added, now saying the name with a bit of disdain.

“Uh, well, I don’t… I mean…” stuttered the kid, blushing slightly. “I don’t want to badmouth her…”

“Just suggesting” said Alexander, wanting to calm the kid. “Would you want to tell me where everybody is?” he asked, changing the topic to one more comfortable for the kid. “This is way too quiet for being a place riddled by children”

Hugo smiled slightly, forgetting about his previous discomfort. “They’re upstairs. Some in their rooms, others are in the library, and some went with Liam to do some exercise before dinner” he explained.

“Exercise and me is not a good mix” he joked, making the kid to laugh in agreement. “I’m more of a book guy”

“Huh, maybe you’ll get along with Paige just right” he commented, tilting his head to the side in thought. He made a gesture and both of them left the art room, closing the door behind them. “Though, come to think of it” he added, with a bit of uncertainty. “I think everybody might like you just as much as they love Eliza”

“Well, that’d be a first” laughed Alexander, a warm feeling in his chest at the chance Hugo was giving him (and, according to his words, the rest would give him as well).

“I’m serious” said the kid, as he guided him upstairs. “I like you already and that’s difficult to do”

“I take it as one of my greatest victories, then”

And both knew Alexander meant each word.

On their way to the library, Alexander took in how good the place looked. Eliza had commented how beautiful and care after it was within her first weeks working there. Alexander was left speechless at how the building breathed out life and modernity despite its old age. And he guessed it was very difficult to do that with a place that had been founded and on the run for two centuries.
What stuck with him the most was the sensation of comfort and security the place had. Again, his mind drifted to worse years, what he normally felt as centuries now felt as if it had happened yesterday. A sudden desire to escape took over him, as if he had to run away from an imminent danger. He shook those irrational fears away, and breathed out as discreetly as possible, not wanting to alarm Hugo, as he’d done to Eliza later.

He grimaced. She’d surely ask him again when they were back home if he’d felt alright. He hated to be looked after as if he were still a little child. A bitter taste returned to his tongue at the thought. He’d needed to be looked after a long time ago, and nobody’d done it, now he didn’t need it. Though Eliza’s (and the rest of his friends’) intentions were good, reality was that he hated to be treated as some porcelain doll that could break at the smallest touch.

But other part of him felt nice. It felt nice to have people who cared enough to look at him and read his mannerisms to see if everything was going alright with him. It felt nice to know he could go to any of them if he needed the aid. He was glad these kids had Eliza in their lives, her light, her good heart, her well-meaning nature. Alexander knew how sad and lonely one could feel as a child with no family, constancy and a steady home.

“Here” said Hugo, taking him out of his thoughts, stopping in front of white double-doors, one of them slightly ajar as the sound of quiet voices made their way out, along with the smell of books. Alexander couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face at the scent. “There are some playing a board game” he explained, letting him go first. “And there’s also another door that leads you to a part with a TV, where we usually play videogames”

Well, surely orphanages (or whatever they called it these days) had changed a lot since he was a little kid. As long as it was for the better, Alexander was happy.

The library was large, with seemingly endless shelves full of different types of books and a few tables, as the ones he’d seen back at the art classroom, and a few poufs of different colours, especially in the section of the room that was clearly for youngest children, if the thinness and the colourfulness of the books were any indication. His eyes landed on a girl that clearly stood out of the crowd for the thick book she had on her hands. Her eyes seemed unable to unglue from the pages, even when, a couple of feet away, there was a group of children that raised their voices from time to time, when they lost at the board game on the floor.

“My name is Paige” introduced Hugo, with a knowing smile. “The bookworm of the house”

“I like her already” said Alexander, as they walked to her.

The girl didn’t notice their presence until Hugo snapped his fingers in front of her nose. She jumped on the pouf, frowning up at him.
“Not funny, Hugo”

“Aw, did I interrupt Bastiana from her latest adventure?”

“Ha ha” she laughed in sarcasm. She blushed slightly from embarrassment when she saw the new face in the room. “Om… Hi…”

“Hi, there” nodded Alexander. “What’re you reading?”

“Om… ‘Coraline’”

“She loves the movie and didn’t stop pester ing until Abe bought it” explained Hugo, falling on the top of the pouf to take a glimpse of the book.

“Well, books are usually far better than films” supported Alexander.

The girl smiled up at him. “I like you. Name’s Paige”

“Alexander”

“Are you another new carer?” she asked, a slight hope in her voice.

Alexander hated himself for breaking it. “No. I’m here accompanying someone”

“He’s Eliza’s husband” explained Hugo.

“Ooh…” she said, glaring up and down at him, something in her glare changing drastically. Alexander knew why she was so disappointed. He tried not to think about it.

“Anyways…” interrupted Hugo, again erasing an uncomfortable silence from the environment. “Don’t you think you’re too little to be reading that?” he teased, poking the girl on the cheek.

Paige slapped his hand away, slightly, raising a challenging eyebrow. “Might I remind you I just turned seven in October?”

“Yes, the month of the witches” kept teasing the older, with a smirk. “And I’m just warning you because it gets dark sooner”

“I like risks”

Alexander laughed at the interaction. “You’ll get along just fine with my son” he commented.

“Your son seems like a decent guy. Unless some other boy I know” she said, leaving the sentence hanging in the air as she looked at Hugo with the corner of her eyes.

Hugo gasped dramatically, a hand upon his chest. “You can’t replace your older brother!”

“Actually, he’ll turn seven next January” explained Alexander.

“Agh, for one year…” lamented the girl.

“You’ll never get rid of me” celebrated Hugo, patting her head with affection. His face changed for a more sombre expression, as he added. “Especially when I’m about to turn thirteen next year… Ouch!”
“Don’t be a bird of mill omen” condemned the girl, hitting him right in the face with her book. “You’re turning thirteen, not ninety”

“Turning into a teenager is the end” retorted the boy, rubbing his aching nose. “When did you get so strong, anyways?”

“I was fostered when I was sixteen” interjected Alexander, wanting to cheer the kid up. Paige’s eyes widened at the new information, though maybe not as much as Hugo’s. “Did you?” he asked, hopeful.

Alex nodded, glad to see the gleam in his dark eyes. “And they were wonderful people too”

“Told you!” exclaimed Paige, hitting him again, now on the arm.

“Stop that!”

One of the kids that had been playing on the floor ran to them. He stopped when he saw Alexander standing there, throwing him a curious look behind his square glasses, before turning to the two arguing friends and stopping their quarrel (which Alexander found quite amusing).

“Hugo! Do you want to play with us?” he asked, showing him a series of cards with drawings on them. “Milo says he doesn’t wanna play the next round”

“My head’s been cut off three times in a row” a blond kid, presumably Milo, complained in the distance, as he hoofed over the nearest corner to sulk in peace. “Three times in a row!”

“There are not enough magic potions to safe you from your own clumsiness!” a freckled girl told him, rolling her eyes.

“I think I pass too” responded Hugo. “I’ve been cleaning the art classroom and I’m exhausted” he said, making the words longer with an exaggerated laziness.

“I bet that’s not true” said Paige, looking at Alexander for a reaffirmation.

Alex simply shrugged. “Betsey and I cleaned the great majority of it before he came”

Hugo gasped more dramatically than before. “Everyone betrays me…”

“What about you, Paige?” asked the kid, when everybody’s (and his) laughter had died down.

“I’m on chapter three” was her excuse. “Besides, last time I played nobody saved me from being eaten by that ugly ogre”

“Welcome to the club!” Milo screamed from his corner.

“I have to save my potions!” pouted the freckled girl.

“What in the world are you even playing at?” asked Alexander, his curiosity taking the best of him.

“One of those role plays” explained the kid, showing him the cards he’d brought with him. “Magic, knights, puzzles… You know the quill”
“The drill, Cedric” corrected Paige, again with her nose stuck in the book.

“Uh, that…” blushed the kid.

“Well, I’m actually more familiar with quills” joked Alexander.

“Why don’t you play, Alexander?” asked Hugo.

“Sure, we haven’t beat an old man before” teased the freckled girl, almost challenging.

“Reb!” exclaimed Cedric, with a frown.

Alexander smirked back at the girl. “Oh, you’re on!” he declared, making the rest of the group to cheer.

“I’ll tell you the rules” laughed Hugo, jumping from the pouf.

Paige closed her book in the meantime, now interested. “I need to see that!”

After an arduous battle (which Alexander lost, being comforted by his group while the rest of the kids celebrated), Hugo called it a day, saying dinner should be ready. A few cheered even louder as they ran out of the room, piling by the door and the staircase. Hugo told a few off, trying to make them stop and go slower. Paige and Alexander stayed behind, with a littler group of children, seeing it all unfold with amusement.

Once the mob was calmed enough, they made their way downstairs. A few other kids joined them, some even making easy conversation with the first child they saw. Alexander saw some of them had their hairs wet, and witnessed a couple running wearing robes.

“The ones that were in the gym with Liam” explained Paige, when she saw his confusion.

“What’s for dinner today?” asked one kid with messy hair, who clearly had been sleeping until he heard the commotion and understood what time it was.

“It’s Wednesday, so leftovers” answered Paige, once again.

“Ah… What did we eat yesterday, then?”

“Pot roast”

“Ah… Nice”

The kid looked up at him, confusion clear in his eyes.
“And who’s this??” he asked, clearly curious.

“Eliza’s husband, Alexander” replied Paige.

“Ah… You must be nice, then”

“I hope” laughed Alexander.

“Thiago” the kid introduced himself.

“Nice to meet you” nodded the adult.

“Are you going to come with Eliza from now on?”

Alexander froze at his query. Paige also looked up to him, with another gleam of hope shining in her hazel eyes. Alex really wanted to learn how to say no to little kids; it’d also do him good on the long run while raising his own children. But he’d never managed to deny anything to a kid, especially with those puppy eyes they could perform perfectly. He wondered if it was a trait everyone lost once adulthood hit them.

The worst part, for a change, wasn’t the fact that he had to tell the kids that no, he was only visiting and if there would be another visit on his part, it would be in a very far future, knowing how he could be when the issue was about paperwork vs life. The worst part was that Alexander considered it for a moment, he imagined himself coming here with Eliza whenever he had a little time. He also imagined bringing their children there so they could meet these wonderful kids that still managed to stay positive and energetic despite the fate they had to face.

And the mental images of him doing something else but paperwork, spending time somewhere else that wasn’t his workroom or his office, didn’t bother him one bit. In fact, it almost plastered a smile on his face (that he contained in case it could give the kids the wrong idea). How ironic life could be, for Alexander had spent his whole youthhood trying to get away from orphanages and now he was considering spending his free time in one.

Life truly had a strange sense of humour.

He never got the chance to answer. As soon as they reached the dining room, they were welcomed by a heated argument. Alexander spotted Ruth’s voice immediately. He also heard hints of Eliza’s serene tone, trying to calm the quarrel, her marriage giving her the patience and experience enough.

He saw the faces of resignation the kids had, in juxtaposition of the joy they were showing a couple of minutes ago. He felt Paige closing the gap between them and hesitating if grabbing his
hand or not. Alexander simply patted her on the head for reassurance, and then frowned, looking forward. His eyes locked with Hugo’s for a split second, the soon-to-be-teenager sighing with tedium.

“Miss Emily, for sure”

Why did there always have to be an annoying asshole that had to ruin the mood?

“She’s always fighting the rest until they do her will, so she shuts up” added Reb, frowning her lips in weariness.

“Huh, wonder if that’s why I always won my cases” joked Alexander, to lighten up his mood.

“Well, enough already!” Eliza exclaimed from the kitchen, everyone unable to see anyone but hearing them thanks to the door connecting the dining room to it being ajar. “Emily, this is not debatable. The sche…”

“Shut up! You came here the other day and think to be the boss in here!” a new female voice interrupted his wife, sharply.

That was all Alexander needed to snap and trot to the kitchen. The kids exchanged a glare and then followed him.

Alexander didn’t bother to knock. He thought it was unnecessary with how loud Emily was reprimanding his wife for doing absolutely nothing wrong. Ruth noticed him immediately, her cheeks turning a carmine tone. Behind her, there was a tall and thin man with face of deference; behind his circle glasses, his eyes showed clearly how fed up he felt by the whole ordeal. Another man, a bit more muscular, with his hair also wet and frowning in discomfort, stood between the two arguing women. He winced each time the high-pitched voice of whom Alexander supposed was Emily spoke. He looked at his wife with worry when Eliza sighed quietly, pinching the bridge of her nose, exhausted.

“This has nothing to do with our current conversation, Emily” said Eliza, interrupting the woman but gentler. “We’re talking about you wanting to change the menu…”

“For something healthier!” insisted the brunette, stubbornly.

“Well, why don’t you do it next week?” asked Ruth, annoyed. “Because this week we had it all sorted it out!”

Emily huffed with condescendence. “Oh, yes. Three days of leftovers from the previous day. That’s truly a lot of thinking”

“That’s actually a lack of money” grumbled the man with the glasses. He turned to face the frowning
woman, who watched him with eyes closed, as if challenging him. “You want to come here and act all Ramsay on us, but you don’t contribute in the slightest”

“What?” huffed the woman, non-comically. “Am I a walking bank?”

“You’re an annoying little shit”

“Ruth!” the brawny man reprehended.

“What?”

“Alright, calm down” insisted Eliza, a bitter expression on her face. “This is ridiculous. Just let Ruth finish dinner, and tomorrow you can…”

“But I already was cooking my…”

“Well, in that case you should’ve talked to her first!” exploded Eliza, and Alexander walked a step backward. It was odd to see his wife losing control over such a little issue. That was more his thing. “We need to serve the pot roast today because it’s a leftover, and we can’t have it one more day in the fridge, bored to death, because you decided…”

“Tts, eeh…” interrupted Emily, raising one hand and squinting her eyes at the woman. “Relax. Relax, honey, you’re very shaken up”

Was that the phantom of a smirk in her lips? Okay, that was it.

“Because you’ve shaken everyone up in here, lady” spoke Alexander, walking to be by his wife’s side.

“Alexander…” Eliza said, in shock of seeing him there. The surprise only grew when she saw the children there as well, and a blush came over her cheeks when she remembered how she lost her cool in front of the children.

“And who are you?” asked Emily, scrunching up her nose in disgust.

“My husband” introduced Eliza, almost in defiance.

“I’d say a pleasure, but I don’t like to lie in front of children” added Alexander, making a few laugh and Eliza to nudge him in the side.

Emily scrutinized him with the glare. “Huh, not even a year in here and you’re already pulling strings to hire somebody you know?”

“He’s visiting the place” Ruth came to the rescue without a second thought. “Just as your friends, who spend the whole afternoon in here before going out to party all night. Zip it”

“Ruth…” reprimanded the bulky man.

“Well, it’s true!”

“The one who has more to shut up about, is the same one who criticises the most” said Alexander, sharing a glare with Ruth.
Emily squinted her eyes at him. “Excuse us… Alexander, did you say?” asked the woman, dedicating a glare to Eliza. Alex didn’t like one bit.

“Mr Hamilton will always do with people like you, miss” explained Alexander, crossing both arms upon his chest.

“Mr Hamilton, then” nodded the woman, curling up her lips in disgust at his pretentious attitude. “We were discussing a matter that just concerns the staff. So, please…”

“You insulted my wife” interrupted the immigrant, sharply. “If you insult my wife, you insult me and it becomes my matter”

There was a tense silence. The kids looked at each adult in the room, expecting some reaction from them. Ruth was biting her bottom lip, containing her laughter at how direct Alexander was acting in front of the brunette woman; Liam, the brawny man, took a step backward, almost collapsing against her, slightly scared of the deadly glare Emily had on her face and that Alexander didn’t doubt in reciprocating; Abe put his glasses back in place again, as they had fallen down the tip of his nose, alternating his glare between Alexander and Emily, as if they were a tennis match; Eliza looked at the ground, a slight blush on her face. She felt Alexander’s fingers intertwining with her own, and she flushed even harder.

“I have not insulted…” Emily broke the silence first, her fists clenching unnoticeably.

“You told her to shut up in a scream and then talked to her in a derogatory manner when she was trying to keep the peace” recalled Alexander, strangely calm. Eliza supposed it had something to do with the kids’ presence at the door. “You’re working with children and so are more of an example than the average adult; it is part of your work, miss”

“Do you go around telling people what their jobs are about, Mr Hamilton?” asked Emily, putting a hand on her hip and tapping one finger on it, furiously.

“To people that forget what they should be doing and think to be more than they are? Absolutely. I can call my tenant if you don’t believe it” responded Alexander, with a smirk.

Eliza turned to look at her other workmates, who were looking at her with a questioning glare. Throwing a sigh of defeat, she nodded, admitting what her husband had just said was more true than pure teasing.

Emily clicked her tongue. “Alright” she ceded, between gritted teeth. “Alright, feed them whatever you want, then. I don’t want to know anything about it”

“I’m not seeing any kid with health problems due to the food, miss” continued to counter Alexander, despite the woman had already turned around and was exiting the place; her heels echoing in the tense silence. “Besides, that can also be fixed with exercise and a change of menu – if asked with better and more polite manners – while you’d need to meet humility to solve your rudeness first”
Emily stopped right at the doorframe, the kids that were standing there taking a step backward, especially when the woman turned around to stare at Alexander with a face of pure and genuine disgust. She didn’t dignify his scold with an answer. She left without another word.

Ruth burst out laughing. “That was an absolute roasting! Hope it makes her be silent for the next week, at least”

This time, his co-workers didn’t say anything about her declaration, silently agreeing. Hugo casted a look at his friends and then at Eliza.

“Can we eat, please?” he asked, on everybody’s behalf.

Eliza smiled gently at the kids. “Yes, dear, just give us a sec”

“Go choose the tables” instructed Abe, his features finally softening as he smiled honestly.

“Let me help you set the dishes” said Liam, jumping into action, wanting to forget the quarrel.

Eliza squeezed her husband’s hand, still holding hers as if a grounding technique. “You’re crazy” she whispered, tenderly.

Alexander rolled his eyes, peeking her on the cheek. “You still love me”

And another blush took over her face; she really, absolutely did.

“So”

“So?”

“Emily”

Eliza stiffened in her seat.

They were doing the dishes as they already had supper ready back at home, thanks to Eliza’s organisation with her work schedule. The rest of the staff was eating with the children as they had to stay the night.
She waited until her dish was done, feeling the fixated glare of her husband on the left side of her face. In the end, she knew procrastinating and playing coy with Alexander was useless.

“Yeah, about that…” she began.

“About that” interrupted Alexander. Eliza wasn’t either bothered or surprised. “What the hell, Eliza? How comes I’ve never heard of this woman before?”

Eliza sighed. “Alex, I… She’s just a little stain in this whole brilliant place” she explained.

“Has she ever talked to you like that before?” he inquired, squinting his eyes.

“Maybe…”

“Eliza”

“We have a lot of disagreements” she relinquished.

“Why haven’t you told me?” insisted Alexander.

“Because I didn’t want you to think this place was doing me more bad than good just for a rotten apple” she admitted, looking him in the eye.

“I wouldn’t have thought that”

“What would have you thought, then?” she asked, finally meeting his glare.

“That you’re a human being that needs to vent from time to time” replied Alexander, right away. “Just as I’ve done countless times before. Betsey, I’m not telling you to tell me everything, but you should know you can always come to me to complain about something or someone that fucked your day up”

She slapped his arm slightly. “Do not swear in here”

“There are not even kids in here…”

Eliza rolled her eyes, but ceded. “She’s…” she started. “She just has it for me, I guess” she admitted. “I don’t know why, though”

“Because you’re nicer, more beautiful in and out and children love you more with good reason” elaborated Alexander, automatically.

She blushed once again. “You’re just saying that because you’re my husband”

“I’m your husband because all of that”

“… Thanks” she said, with timid voice.

“Anytime, honey”

“I mean, I’m not an angel” she said, unable to stop now that she’d started. Alexander huffed at her words, but she ignored it. “But she’s a total B”

“A total B?” repeated Alexander, arching one eyebrow.
“I’m not going to say the word” she said, stubbornly, pointing with the head in the direction the children were eating.

“As if you haven’t said worse to me while fighting”

“That’s different, that’s the privacy of our house”

“Privacy? With your sister living there…”

“You invited her”

“And John with a spare key? John, Betsey. John Laurens. That man one got to be locked up in his own car with the keys on the pavement”


Their giggles were interrupted by a knock on the door. Turning around, they saw Hugo standing there, holding a thin notebook. He walked to Alexander, nodding politely in Eliza’s direction, and handed the notebook to the man, who dried his hands first.

“Told you they’d like you just as much” was the only thing the boy said before walking back to the dining room.

Eliza looked over his shoulder, curious. Alexander opened the book, finding a series of signatures (some done wrong, but he attributed it to their young age), drawings and a few nice words toward him. Alexander looked at it with wide eyes, amazed by the dedication and feeling that had to be behind all that. Eliza giggled, with pride.

“They made something for you. That’s the point of no return” she teased.

Alexander, for once, didn’t have anything to say.


“What have you done to my children, Alexander”

The Caribbean raised his glare from his paperwork at his wife’s dry words. Eliza stood in the doorway, hands behind her back and an unreadable look. He tried to think back about any thing that could’ve slipped while the kids were with him. Those little sponges with legs, parroting every word that came out their father’s mouth.
Despite his best efforts, Alexander found nothing. And that was even worse, as he didn’t know what to expect from this conversation.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about” he admitted.

Eliza walked to his desk, and then dropped a stack of papers in front of him. Alexander blinked dumbfounded. Taking a glimpse of what was on them, he finally understood what kids his wife was talking about.

“They’ve been asking when you’ll be back” explained Eliza, her tone getting gentler now that the mystery was over.

“Have they?” asked Alexander, looking at the drawings the children had made for him.

“Constantly, persistently, incessantly” nodded Eliza, very serious. “What have you done? Did you put some kind of drug in the roast when we weren’t looking?”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “It’s called my charming personality. It usually has this effect on people”

Eliza smiled playfully. “I’m not complaining; they’re driving Emily crazy. Especially the littlest, repeating the words they found more amusing from your speech”

Alexander laughed whole-heartedly, as he declared: “I adore those children!”

Chapter End Notes

Ruth means "loyal companion" or "friend".
Emily is an English version of the Latin Aemilia, which comes from the word for "rival".
Hugo means "Man of great spirit" or "He of great intelligence".
I called Paige after Paige O'Hara, the dubber of "Belle" in Beauty and the Beast.

Sursum corda!
The prank call: George King

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda. This is based on a few phone calls plus things I came up with on my own.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Washington had decided to stay late that day. It was one of the rare times when he could hear his own thoughts for the lack of external sound. He wasn’t even accompanied by Alexander’s unceasing typing, as the immigrant had asked for leaving sooner than normal to celebrate his wedding anniversary. Washington smiled at the sight of his friend able to stop and spend time with his loved ones from time to time. He wished for that marriage the better and didn’t hesitate in bidding farewell to Alexander as he left sooner, but not after helping him out a bit with crucial decisions to be made for the company’s sake.

That was why he was startled to hear a loud laughing coming from down the hall. Washington waited a moment until it subdued a bit and then went to check. He found Isa in her office, with tears of laughter streaming down her face as she read something on her phone. She didn’t acknowledge her boss’ presence until Washington cleared his throat for the third time.

She looked up and smiled wider at the sight. “Washington! Didn’t know you were here!”

“Same” nodded Washington, eyeing the woman from head to toe. “So? Why aren’t you home?”

“I told Herc I’d stay to fix a few things we worked on today” she explained, waving one hand to dismiss the action.

Washington cocked one eyebrow at the unexpected reply. He still didn’t know what Alexander had told the staff the last time he substituted him, but Washington hoped for its effect to not disappear any time soon.

“I’m glad you’re here” kept talking Isa, rolling up something on her phone. “I don’t have to wait until tomorrow to show you this”

“What?” he asked, his curiosity taking out the best of him.

“Have you heard the last of King?” she asked, getting up and showing him the screen.

Washington thinned his lips. “I’d rather not know much about him, actually”
“Well, it turns out he’s trying to change of phone company for a very long time” she explained, ignoring the bitterness in the older man’s tone. “And you know how impatient he can be”

“Yes…”

“And, well, he’d tried to contact the phone company, but they’re giving him the runaround…”

“Wait, how do you know all this?” he asked, perplexed.

“I’ve got my contacts” she dismissed again. Washington didn’t push the issue any further, thinking having someone like this on their side was very beneficial. “And well, he tried to call them again during work, and he exploded when they didn’t answer. And they sent me an audio, and I can’t, I simply can’t when the man goes off his trolley” she ended the tale, again laughing hardly.

“Enjoy that you can laugh freely now” commented Washington, the phantom of a smile dancing on his lips.

“Absolutely. The man deserves it, anyways” she nodded, in agreement.

Her boss squinted his eyes, in thought. “Do you want to be part of this karmic revenge?”

Isa’s eyes shone with delight. “What do you have in mind, sir?”

“I just need to make one call” he promised.

He looked for Lafayette’s contact on his phone and pressed call. Maybe he was starting to spend too much time with his employees, this wasn’t something he was supposed to do as a CEO, but a part of Washington told him to screw it, it was Christmas and this could be his present.

__________________________

Martha prepared a few snacks their guests accepted with gusto. She was glad to finally know Isa and Dolley in person, and also congratulated Alexander and Eliza for another year of marriage. Washington watched it all with a fond smile. These were the kind of visits he liked: short and to the point.

He explained what he had in mind to Alfred, warning him to be careful, for King’s temper was well-known and feared among everyone who knew him a little.

“It’s alright, sir” dismissed the man. “I think I’m jaded after the one I made to Alexander and Adams” he recalled, shaking slightly at the latter’s memory.

“I’m serious. He can be very abrasive if you’ve never dealt with him” insisted Washington, a tiny part of him thinking this was not the wisest option.
“Don’t scare the man; you’re limiting him” reproached Martha, once she was over with the greetings. She tapped Alf on the arm. “Do what you must do”

Washington rolled his eyes. “You just want to see him lose his mind…”

“So do you”

“I just want to give him a lesson” excused Washington, solemnly.

“Whatever you say…”

“Dolley, do you want me to add you to the work group chat, so I can send you the audio too?” asked Angelica.

“The doubt offends me, darling”

“I don’t even know why we insist on calling that the work group chat, when it’s everything but” pointed out Hercules.

Laurens sighed. “Agh, don’t start being a spoilsport, man; we came to have fun”

“Oh, Hercules, I’m allergic to seafood” revealed Alfred.

“Ah, look, just like you” said Peggy, nudging her brother.

Hercules shrugged. “Good for you. Don’t eat it, then”

“No, I’m telling you so you don’t serve me that on Christmas’ Eve”

“Excuse me?”

“Didn’t John tell you he invited me over???”

Hercules looked daggers at his flatmate, who only smiled sheepishly.

“Johnny, I’ve told you tell us sooner. It’s alright’ said Lafayette.

“The fuck it is…” complained Hercules.

“Why do you care?” asked Laurens, upset.

“Because you’ve fucked our whole dinner up!”

“But if we never eat that because Alexander made us used to that!”

Angelica laughed. “Hahahaha, that time Dad almost killed him”

“Angelica” admonished Eliza.

“Also known as last summer” recalled the immigrant, bitterly.

“What a family” commented Theodosia.
Aaron rolled his eyes. “Like ours is any better”

“Well, can we let the drama for another time?” asked Dolley, bluntly. Madison nudged her. “What? I came here to laugh”

“True, true” agreed Martha, giving Alfred a mobile.

“Did you get a new phone?” asked her husband.

“No, I’ve got this one so people don’t know it’s me calling”

“… Why would you want that?”

“Let me live, George”

“If one day the police come, I’ll tell them you kept me captive against my will”

Washington insisted on calling the man around five. And so it was done. The phone rang a few times until someone picked it up at the third try.

“Yes?” said the clear voice of Seabury on the other side, in a whisper.

“Hello?” asked Alfred, a bit taken aback.

“Yes, who is it, please?”

“Hi, good afternoon. Listen, I’m calling you from the phone company…”

Seabury sighed with relief. “Oh, thank God…”

“I’m your personal assistant and…”

Alfred stopped in his tracks when the people around him shook their heads. He looked at Angelica, who mouthed ‘that’s the partner’.

“Yes?” said Seabury, worried at the sudden silence.

“Excuse me, am I talking with Mr George King?” asked Alfred, going back to his role in record time.

“Um, no, I’m… I’m the partner, he’s… indisposed right now”

“Pass me to him, please”
“Em…”

“I need to talk it out with him” he insisted.

“… ... Okay…” was the unsure response he was given.

There were a series of steps, a door opening and a few whispers, answered by a sleepy growl. Martha arched one eyebrow at her husband.

“You knew he’d be napping, right?”

“I was his roommate back in college” said George, with a smirk.

“I swear, I never love as much as when you take your dark side out”

They waited for a bit, hearing a quiet quarrel which words they couldn’t distinguish and then, finally, King took the phone and talked himself, clearing his throat.

“Yes?”

“Mr King?”

“Yes, who is it?”

“Good afternoon. I’m calling from the phone company…”

“About damned time”

Alfred was taken aback by the blunt interruption. “Yeah, sorry about that. We’ve been having a few problems lately and couldn’t reach out to you sooner”

“That’s why I’ve been calling you” King threw in his face, resentfully.

“And that’s why we couldn’t reach out to you, sir” repeated Alfred, arching one eyebrow and casting a glare to the group. Some of them shrugged, as perplexed, while others waved a hand.

“Yeah. So, what happens?” asked King, sounding more awake.

“Well, sir, I’m your personal assistant” he introduced himself again, receiving a hum. “And I was told to call you to inform you that your portability has been rejected”

“… Rejected?” echoed King, in disbelief.

“Yeah, we’re sorry, Mr King”

“But why rejected?”

“I don’t know. I’ve just read the notes my agents have written that say your petition has been rejected” explained Alfred, naturally, as he moved a few sheets he found on the table to make the
“But they didn’t write a reason why?” asked King, the squint of his eyes clear in his voice.

“No, sir. For knowing the reason I have to go deeper into the system” excused Alfred, sounding apologetic.

“Well, do that, then” decided King, resolutely.

“Do you want me to go deeper into the system?”

“Yes, do whatever you have to do”

“Alright, then. Give me a sec”

“Okay”

Alfred heard King dropping the phone and distant steps, along with some muffling sounds, as he looked for something. He simply waited, turned up the volume as much as he could so the rest could clearly hear King groaning from frustration. He called his partner in the distance, and they supposed he had left the room to look for Seabury. His quiet voice showed up, then, both voices talking over the other and making it difficult for them to understand what they were fighting about.

A moment later, King picked up the phone again, with a sigh of resignation.

“Sir?” called Alfred, after a moment of silence to pretend he was working on what he’d been asked to.

“Yes, I’m...”

Seabury’s voice was heard again, this time clearly angrier but quiet enough so they couldn’t understand him yet.

“Man, go over there, I’ve got this!” complained King.

Alfred bent over himself for the sudden change of demeanour, as the rest of the people who weren’t used to the British man’s behaviour.

“Hello?” said King, unaware of it all. “Hi? You still there?”

“Yes, yes” said Alfred, when he’d calmed down enough. “I...”

“Do you know what went wrong?”
“Yes, em…” Alfred drowned another fit of laughter.

The action made Peggy and Hercules bit their bottom lips to prevent themselves to ruin the joke. The man decided to face the wall while the girl buried her face in the crook of Alexander’s neck, who was not having an easier time being quiet.

“Well, we’ve got a system in here which, for a series of reasons, decides to not accept certain people in here, Mr King” explained Alfred.

“Alright”

“And, well, it does it automatically if some of those reasons are detected”

“And what reasons do I have” asked King, growing impatient.

“Well, to sum it up…”

“Yes, please…”

“We found out you called certain numbers this company wants nothing to do with them”

“… What numbers?”

“For example… Hm… Let me read…”

“I don’t get it, what numbers I would’ve…” muttered King, under his breath.

“Here, I…”

“I just call my family and friends” interrupted King, quite indignant.

“A ‘S’ just slipped in there” huffed Thomas, under his breath.

“Alright, Mr King” soothed Alfred. “According to this, you’ve called a 503”

“503? What the hell’s that?”

Alfred bit his bottom lip. “Well, let me see a moment”

“You don’t know what that means?”

“Well, no, I…”

“You work there” said King, almost accusatory.

“Yes, but I don’t know all the codes number by heart, Mr King”

“If you don’t know them, how do you expect me to?”

“I did not, Mr King, that’s why I’m looking for more info, alright?”

“Alright…”
Alfred cleared his throat and let a couple of seconds passed by, hearing King’s exhausted sigh. “Ah, alright, I get it now, Mr King” nodded Alfred.

“What was it”

“These numbers belong to…” He bit his bottom lip. “To the hot lines of Mary Diamond”

The group of people bent over themselves and contained their laughter as well as they could. Washington buried his eyes in the palm of his hand while his wife shook in spot, a smile on her face.

“Mary Dia…” repeated King, puzzled. “Who the fuck is that now?”

“You should know, you called there” dismissed Alfred.

“No, I did not!” exclaimed King, offended. “I’ve never heard of that shit in my entire life!”

“Here it says you called there around the end of December of last year” explained Alfred, pretending to read something.

“But if last year…”

“What’s wrong, Mr King? Christmas is hard?” he asked, faking pity.

“Nooo, nooooo, I haven’t called there! I don’t call those numbers!”

“Sir…”

“The system’s wrong”

“The system’s never wrong, sir. Here we’ve got date, time…”

“The hell is not!” exclaimed King. “Solve that immediately!”

“Do you want me to go deeper into the system?”

“Absolutely!”

“Do you give me permission, sir?”

“Yes, do whatever you have to!”

“Alright… Do you want me to play some music while you wait?”

“No, I want this solved!”

“Playing music” informed Alfred.

“No, no, I don’t want to listen to music now!”

Alfred ignored him right away and took the phone Laurens handed him. Alfred shared his friend’s mischievous smile when he read the title of the song he’d chosen. He pressed play and ‘All
by myself’ started to sound in the living room, allowing them to giggle almost freely.

“Oh, son of a bitch…” complained King, when he recognised the lyrics.

“Good one” said Angelica, in a whisper, looking at Laurens, who was laughing cruelly.

Alfred waited a moment, crying from contained laughter, especially when King didn’t stop sighing enraged at the musical election. Alfred paused the song and returned the phone to its owner.

“Mr King?”

“You’ve got a very modern playlist” he mocked.

“They’re all hits, Mr King” he played along.

“Sure... Well, did you solve it?”

“No, I found another problem”

“But weren’t you going to solve...?”

“No, no, the hotline was a call you made and you can’t erase that”

“I did not” repeated King, through clenched teeth.

“Don’t come to me now with ‘my grandma smokes*’, because it doesn’t…” scolded Alfred.

“But what grandma, man? I haven’t called…”

“Listen, the other problem I found…”

“I haven’t called there!” insisted King.

“Mr King, the other problem I found is that you called another number that we’ve got forbidden in here” explained Alfred, ignoring the man’s complaints.

“I haven’t called anywhere!”

“I haven’t told you the place yet”

“I don’t care, I haven’t called anywhere!”

“According to this, you’ve called…”

“No”

“… … … … The Asso…” tried to repeat King. “What the hell is that shit now?”

“It’s a sect” replied Alfred, normally.

That made Dolley and Maria to squeak in an attempt to stop their laughter. The older woman coughed as silently as she could, Madison tapping her back, wanting to help.

“A se…? Yes, what else!” laughed King. “Is this a fucking joke?”

“We don’t want sectarian in our company, Mr King, they’re nothing but trouble” explained Alfred, calmly.

“Good for you then, I’m not!”

“I’d recommend you to look for another company that’s more forgiving about…”

“Forgetting about what?!” hollered the man, startling them. “I haven’t called any of those sites, I’m not from any sect!”

Alfred didn’t hesitate in harshening the tone. “Listen, Mr King, if you want to spend your free time sacrificing goats, that’s your life”

“But what goat??”

“But we don’t want your kind in here, got it??”

“Lower your tone, young man!” warned King.

“No, you’ve made me lose my time, you haven’t accepted…”

“I have nothing to accept because I’ve called none of those places!” repeated King, raising his voice.

“There he goes” laughed George, enjoying the scene.

“ Took him long enough” added Thomas, almost surprise for his self-control.

Alfred interrupted King brusquely. “You’ve called both places because we’ve got it here. Don’t be a seaweed-face”

“If he doesn’t nickname you, he’s not satisfied” commented Alexander, shaking his head, while his wife shook from laughter against his shoulder.

“But who are you calling seaweed-face, you fucking asshole?!” screamed King, losing his cool.

“Don’t disrespect me, because…!”

“You have called two lines we’ve got forbidden…!”

“NO, I HAVE NOT!” exploded King.
“Sir, don’t scream at me!” demanded Alfred, ironically shouting.

“Don’t accuse of things that are not true, then!”

“They’re true, we’ve got the evidence…”

“Your system’s wrong!”

“No, it can’t be” denied Alfred, stubbornly. “And calm down”

“This is fucking amazing…” laughed King, uncomically.

“Calm down, because, with these things I’m reading, I don’t think you’re in any position to…”

Alfred shut his mouth when he heard the man exhaling something.

“Mr King…”

“What”

“Are you smoking?”

“Yeah”

“Are you smoking drugs as we talk?” he asked, smirking.

There was a pause before King admitted: “There’s a bit of narcotic in here, yeah”

Alfred bent over himself, not having expected an affirmative answer. Dolley laughed mutely, making Madison and Thomas to follow suit in a more discreet way. Alexander and his friends, on the other hand, had decided to look down to control their fits better.

“You’re making me a bit dizzy, Mr King” kept saying Alfred.

“Am I?” asked the man, a smile clear in his voice. “Hold on, now you’re gonna be dizzier” he assured, before exhaling the smoke right in the mic of his phone.

The whole living room had it rougher to contain themselves then. Hercules was on his knees, red face; Angelica had to put a hand on the wall to keep herself steady; Thomas had turned around to calm himself, George and Martha did as much, while Isa buried her face against the secretary’s arm; Hamilton had to get up and exit the room when Eliza whispered something in his ear that made him almost lose it; Maria was crying from laughter.

“I’m gonna add that to the quotes list” she swore.
“Pass me that when you’re finished” begged Dolley.

“What’re you smoking, sir?” queried Alfred.

“A bit of this, a bit of that…” answered King, ambiguously.

“I’m gonna ask you to not smoke while you’re talking to me. Less those things”

“Well, that’s none of your business, now, is it?”

“It is when you’re trying to be part of our company, smoking what you smoke, and calling where you call”

“I haven’t called those places” repeated King, now calmer.

“Mmmh, Mr King…” he called, sternly.

“Annoying with my fucking name…” groaned the man.

Alfred swallowed a giggle. “Mr King, stop denying the evident”

“What evident?” spat the man. “I haven’t called those places and that’s final!”

“Mr King…”

“Don’t ‘Mr King’ me and fix that crap” he ordered.

“We can’t fix that. The calls you’ve made are the calls you’ve made”

“But I haven’t called…”

“We can’t delete this”

“No, no, try and see if you can”

“I already know it’s not possible, sir”

“I don’t want to be seen as a perv sectarian” King kept talking, ignoring his words.

“No, no, don’t worry” hurried to say Alfred. “This stays between you, me and my friends from the pub. Don’t sweat it”

“The pub fri…” repeated King, flipping out. “Mmh, look…” He clicked his tongue in annoyance. “Look, you pulled on my dick already”

“That was actually whoever you talked to in Mary Diamond’s hotline” retorted Alfred, laughing a bit at end.

Alexander had chosen that moment to come back, hearing the exchange. He bent over himself and turned on his heels, leaving the room once more. That only made everyone to lose their cool and struggled under their breaths, coughing a bit. Angelica shook her head while she passed the phone to Eliza, mouthing she had to step out, and followed her brother-in-law to laugh in piece.
“Listen, you son of a fucking bitch…” had begun to say King, after a series of whispered curses.

“Mr King, thank you very much for…” started to say Alfred, wanting to hang up on him.

“Pin your location” demanded King, out of the blue. Everyone looked in his direction, in shock. “PIN ME YOUR FUCKING LOCATION” he ordered again, screaming before the lack of response.

“I won’t, sir”

“Pin me your fucking location, so I can go there and break your ribs with my baseball bat!”

George seemed to have had a flashback of his college years and decided to go find Alexander and Angelica to not spoil the joke with the deep laugh he was holding in. Martha was left to her own devices, burying her face in their cushions.

“Sir, I can’t be all day with you only” complained Alfred.

“The fuck you can’t. Until you fix this problem and fucking apologise, you’re going to be with me on the phone!” swore King, losing his composure.

“Nope”

“Fix this…”

“Do you want to write a claim?” suggested Alfred, faking an over-exaggerated polite tone.

“I want you to solve this fucking crap”

“I can’t do that, Mr King, I’ve told you”

“Fix this” insisted the man. “Fix this or I swear to the God above I’ll find you and-and-and…”

“Mr King, stop being a nuisance or I’ll remove your line” he threatened.

“Excuse me?” laughed King, as if excited for the challenge. “Do it, do it!”

“Even if you’re from another company, I’m friends with everybody, I can do it!”

“Do it, do it” encouraged King, vigorously. “Do it if you want to die young”

“It’s only a click, Mr King” taunted Alfred, pressing his mouth to the mic. “I’m not afraid”

“You’re gonna be afraid when I show up in your workplace, searching for your head”

“Listen to me, I’m sick of you already”

“You? Sick of me?” laughed the man.

“Go call Mary Diamond!”

“I can’t, I don’t know her!” insisted King, furious. “But you’re gonna know me very soon!”

“We don’t want sectarians, drug-addicts…” kept insulting Alfred, in the meantime.
“You’re gonna end up like the goat”
Alfred’s eyes widened: “Aha! You admit…!”

“No, no, I’m admitting that you’re gonna be my first”

“Yes? Buy me dinner first” mocked Alfred.

“What a crazy shit…” sobbed Peggy, face buried while Eliza couldn’t hear anything anymore by her side on the couch, laughing against a cushion, just as Martha was doing.

“Keep pushing me…” advised King, with a malicious giggle at the end.

“No, no, you keep going like this” retorted Alfred, containing his own laughter as much as he could.
“I know where you live. I’ll show up uninvited…”

“Come, come, I’ll be waiting” welcomed King, eagerly.

“I’ll break down the door”

“No, it won’t be necessary. I’ll open it for you, darling”

“You’re so kind, sir”

“Could it be possible, this jackass?” complained King.

“Stop insulting me, because I can assure you this won’t end well” advised Alfred, with a threatening tone. “Especially for you”

“Yeah, sure, sure” nodded King, sarcastically.

“You don’t know me, sir, once I start kicking left and right I can’t stop. I’m a hurricane”

“Sure, sure, sure… On the phone…”

“My friends call me Mr Katrina” he revealed, interrupting the man.

“Sure, sure…” repeated King, not minding his words in the slightest.

“Whenver they see me, they say: ‘Here comes Mr Katrina with the mail’. And I deliver punches until I’m left alone”

“Yes, tell me the same when I’m in front of you”

“I’ll do”

“If I give you the chance to speak”

“I’m very strong, huh?” warned Alfred, in an even tone.

“With you or with your pub pals?” he deadpanned.

“No, no, alone, on my own. I’m more independent than America” A smirk crossed his lips. “In fact, I’m so strong that if I just now punch the floor I can separate the States from Canada and Latin America and leave it floating alone in the ocean, like an island”

“Yeah? Well, I’ll put all back together with another punch, and kill you. What do you think?” he
threatened.

“With a single punch I break the Earth’s axis” continued Alfred, his voice shaking a bit at the end from laughter.

“Well, and I, with one single punch, will declare your own independence”

“What’s that?”

“I’ll separate your head from your body. What do you think?”

“I…” Alfred couldn’t answer properly as he had to swallow a fit of laughter right then.

“There’ll be no need of wars. Just a single punch and the problem is solved” continued King, tone harsh.

“Mr King, this is getting out of hand”

“I don’t care” he replied, childish.

“I want you to apologise” demanded Alfred.

“Yes, keep dreaming” he huffed.

“Apologise for making me lose my time”

“Never. Name a place and time”

Alfred swallowed another giggle. “Uh, Mr King”

“No, name a place and time. I’m sick of you and your games”

“Apologise” insisted Alfred. “That way we end this on a good note and you won’t have to lose your head”

“He lost his mind a long time ago, actually” commented Madison, making his girlfriend to knelt on the floor, in a shaking fit.

“The one who’s gonna lose the head…” started King, darkly.

“What do you think this is now? The Walking Dead or what?” asked Alfred.

“Yes, that’s how you’re gonna end up like: like a zombie”

“Tell him it’s a joke” advised Thomas, as Isa hugged him, suffering from a fit of laughter. “Alfred, tell him…”

King interrupted the secretary without knowing: “Look, I’m gonna go there and you’re gonna eat the router, the phone and-and-and… And all I can take there. That’s it!” he decided.

“Mr King…” tried Alfred, receiving a series of beep as a response.

The whole living room erupted into laughter. Angelica, Washington and Alexander took that as a sign that they could come back.
“Call him” insisted Thomas, the most serious in the group. “Call him, because that man is unpredictable”

“Yes, I don’t want a death on my conscience” agreed Washington, hugging his laughing wife.

Alfred waited until everyone had calmed down and dialled the number once more. It ringed a few times until finally someone picked up. Seabury’s voice answering again.

“Yes?”

“Excuse me? Can I talk to Mr King…?”

“Who the fuck is it!” screamed King from someplace.

“Calm down…” tried to say Samuel, exhaustedly.

“Hang up! Hang the hell up!” ordered King.

“It’s a joke, it’s a joke!” hurried to say Thomas, before the man had the chance.

“A joke of what? Wait, wait a…” tried to talk Seabury, the screams of King in the distance. “Calm down!” he begged again, before slamming some door shut. “What’s going on?”

George took the phone. “Samuel?”

“Yes?”

“I’m Washington”

It seemed to click in the younger man’s mind. “Oh, for Christ’s sake…”

“Sorry we bother you, we…”

“No, no, it’s alright” assured the guy. “Better to be this way”

“Yes, that’s why we called again. Tell him” insisted Thomas.

“Yeah, don’t worry. Once he wakes up, I’ll tell him”

“He went to sleep?” asked Theodosia.

“Yeah, said his head hurt”

Thomas huffed with irony, Washington simply rolled his eyes.

“Sorry for the inconvenience” added Isa, at last second.
“Nothing, don’t worry” he laughed it off. “Happy holidays” he said, as a goodbye.

“Happy holidays” repeated George, before they hung up.

“Thank goodness the partner is nice” sighed Alfred. “One of these days you’re gonna get me killed”

“It’s worthy if it’s for a good cause” shrugged Laurens.

Chapter End Notes

"Don't come to me with that your grandma smokes" [No me vengas con que si la abuela fuma]: An expression when someone's giving you a very unbelievable excuse.
I kick left and right and I'm left alone [Empiezo a repartir, y me quedo solo]: I always understand this as either everyone ends up running away from you to avoid being hit, or you hit them all and you're left alone, with no one else to hit.

I've been quite busy this month, so the Christmas special might take longer than usual and maybe it would not be around the 25th, but if I have the first part of it, I'll upload that alone when I planned it, to give you something.

I'll surely upload one more time before the year end, on the 31st, because that was already written for a long time :) 

Sursum corda!
A pre-Christmas for Eliza

Chapter Summary

Just a little short

Chapter Notes

This is not the next episode, neither the actual Christmas special. This last month has been very busy, in the good way, but busy nonetheless. So, I only have six pages of the actual next episode, so, yeah XD Still, it felt weird not having a Christmas special for this, so I decided to write this at last hour.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eliza undid her ponytail and put the tie on the nightstand. She made sure she had alarm set on for tomorrow and then lied down on the bed with a yawn. She opened her eyes immediately when she felt something – rather, someone – lying next to her.

“Alexander?” she said, turning around to face her husband. “What’re you doing? It’s not even midnight”

“Tomorrow the kids start they holidays. I need to wake up to watch them” he excused himself, barely casting her a glare.

Eliza cocked one eyebrow, not believing him for one minute. “Alright…” she conceded, though. “Night, then” she said, lowering her head to press a kiss to Alex’s cheek.

“Night, hun” he replied, closing his eyes and trying to sleep like a normal person for once.

Eliza yawned again and turned around to her original position. The silence hung above the couple for a moment, until the woman talked again.

“Alex?”

“Hm?”

“Are you going to abandon us?”

That provoked the other half of the mattress to shake for how fast the man sat up: “FOR FUCK’S SAKE, ELIZA!” he shouted, not minding about the hour at all. “All our fucking marriage pestering
me about going to sleep early and now you go and say that bullshit?!”

Eliza blinked a couple of times, just looking at him over her shoulder. “Man, that’s exactly why I’m worried. You never do it”

“Well, now I want to! Can’t you be happy instead of coming up with those fucking theories, you sick-minded!”

“Jesus, alright, alright, sorry!” she ended up matching his voice volume. “Mother of God!”

“My own wife, shooting where it hurts the most. Shameless…”

“I said sorry!”

“You can throw a match into the forest, make a big fire and then fix it with a sorry!”

“SHUT UP, I WANNA SLEEP!” complained Peggy from her room.

“Then, close your eyes and go to fucking sleep!” ordered Alexander, starting to be red in the face.

“Alexander, stop the swearing!” condemned Eliza.

“Bah” The Caribbean turned to his side of the bed, wrapped himself till the chin with the blanket and then started to mutter under his breath another round of insults. “I can’t even complain in my own fucking house though they throw strong accusations to me. Fuck it”

Eliza sighed with tedium. “I’m the one who can’t even talk in here” she complained through greeted teeth and went to sleep, the whispers of her husband lulling her somehow.

Alexander knew Eliza loved Christmastime, it made her inner child to be born stronger than ever. Which always did their children good, because Alexander lacked it. The holidays, in juxtaposition of his joyful wife, gave him a sense of sadness and melancholy he never understood, even he was very young. He had learnt to roll with it, as he grew up with almost nobody by his side to spend the holidays with and by the time he had, he was too used to feel like this without explanation.

He was used to be Eliza the one doing the Christmas shopping, prepare the tree and decorations, plan the dinner, the games, wrap the majority of the presents and a long etcetera. He helped her with what he could, but Eliza did it better and more naturally, so she ended up doing most of the job without they realising.

That year, though, things had to be different. Now that his wife had a job, the Christmas spirit had struck her without any chance to be let out. It was clear Eliza was happy with her new job, but missed doing the task and, knowing the way Alexander was, decided not to push it and go along with whatever may be.
But Alexander was a self-starter. And a planner. Things that had cost him several critics he always ignored, because he knew it could be a flaw as well as a virtue. And that last month of the year, he was resolute to make it the second. Without Eliza knowing, he’d made a list of presents people around him had commented on wanting, he had all the decorations and the tree located inside their attic and had put his own alarm for a bit after Eliza would be gone to work to be able to wake up early and rested enough to go to the shop to buy a good dinner to have that night to celebrate the upcoming Christmas – and practice when the actual day arrived.

It was all sorted out and it was going to go perfectly according to plan.

Or so he thought.

Alexander didn’t have notion of the world until he was shaken by tiny and insisting hands.

“Dad, Daddy, Dad!” called a childish and frustrated voice.

He opened his eyes, his glare slowly coming to focus. He was met with the sight of his three children. Angie was looking directly at him, a frown on her face, while Philip cocked an eyebrow as he held their baby brother, who had a curious expression.

“Dad, we’re hungry” complained the little girl.

Alexander rubbed one eye. “Wait until it’s breakfast time. The sun’s not even up yet…”

“But if it’s two in the afternoon already” whined Angie.

To prove his sister’s point, Philip opened the curtains and let the sun in. Alexander blinked and narrowed his eyes at first, then took his phone and saw that it was the hour his daughter had said. It cost him a moment to accept it. And when he did, he had no other thing than say than:

“Oh, for fuck’s sake!”
He decided to make them a few sandwiches, because John’s milk was going to take him long enough. Alexander tapped his foot impatiently until the milk was heated, not stopping to look at his watch.

“Mum never gives us sandwiches for lunch” condemned Philip, though eating with gusto.

“If you want your mother to be happy tonight, you’re gonna eat that and stop complaining” retorted his father, grabbing the cup instead of the handle and so burning his hand. “Fucking hell!”

The cup and bottle in it fell to the floor, staining it with hot milk. Baby John looked at it and started laughing.

“That’s your lunch, you idiot” said Philip, unmoved.

The baby seemed to understand his brother, for he looked at the mess his father started to clean while complaining in a grumble and then began to cry louder than he’d laughed.

“Philip, don’t make your brother cry!” condemned Alexander, throwing the wet cloth to the trash.

“Motherfucker” insulted Angie, whacking him in the back of the head.

“Angie, where did you…?!” began to reprimand Alexander, until he stopped in his tracks. “Oh, right… Don’t tell your mother I said that”

Peggy chose that moment to come in, stretching out.

“Morning, family” she drawled, sleepily.

“Afternoon, at much…” said Philip, finishing his sandwich.

“Why isn’t the kitchen smelling like food?” she complained, eyes narrowed.

“Because the fucking phone didn’t ring when it should’ve and now I’m late to everything” explained Alexander, grumpily.

“Ah, yes, I turned that off” she revealed.

“… Excuse me?”

“You forgot to do it yourself”

“Why would I do that?!”
“Because we’re on vacation already. We don’t need to wake up early”

“I did! I wanted to have all prepared for before Betsey arrived!”

“Ah… Well, you still have time until the 24th”

“No! I wanted to surprise her tonight! You know she loves to have a pre-Christmas to have it all settled!” He buried his face in his hands, groaning.

“But you still have time until the…” tried to repeat Peggy, not seeing where the drama was.

“Don’t come to me with that! You just fucked my whole planned day up, you motherfucker!” He looked at his children, a bit guiltily. “Your aunt makes me say nasty things”

“So, we can say them if she makes us? Nice” said Philip, with a naughty smile.

Peggy rolled her eyes. “The last time I’ve got a detail with anyone in here”

“Let’s see if that’s fucking true!” Alexander grimaced when the baby started sobbing again, hitting his chair. “Coming, John!”

The doorbell rang just when Alexander was about to make another bottle. He groaned loudly as he made his way to the front door.

“We don’t want anything, now leave the way you came if you don’t want to appear in the next obituary” he said as he swung the front door open.

“Good afternoon to you too” replied Philip Sr from the doorway.

Alexander made a face. “I won’t change the sentence”

“Really, this is why I didn’t want to come in the first place” groaned the older man, a hand on his forehead.

“Why did you even come, then?”

“You asked it” said his father-in-law, arching one eyebrow.

“Me? When?” asked Alexander, in surprise and disbelief.

“Just yesterday” said Peggy, walking to be by his side. “When I asked you if you wanted help with the tree, and you said: ‘Yes, and your father’s help too’”

“That was sarcasm!” Alexander put his hands at both sides of his face. “For Christ’s sake, you don’t even know what sarcasm is either?!”

“How am I going to know if you don’t change your tone!” she complained back.

“Well, let me in, it’s cold…” said Philip Sr, about to step in.

“Yeah, right now” said Alexander, closing the front door in his noses. “That’s me being sarcastic. Seems I have to say now” he explained, begrudgingly. He walked in the living room. “Make John
his bottle, I’m gonna get ready to buy dinner!”

The doorbell began to ring and the door was knocked at the same time, insistently.

“Don’t open!” shouted Alexander from his bedroom.

“He’s not gonna stop!” warned Peggy.

“He will tire out eventually!”

Philip Sr didn’t tire out until the door was again opened half an hour later, when everybody was ready to leave. He smirked down at his son-in-law.

“Knew you’d gave in”

“In your dreams. We’re just leaving to grocery shopping” retorted Alexander, passing him by and walking directly to the car.

“To which store?” he asked, following the group.

“To the one we liked the most” replied Alexander, ambiguously.

Philip Sr took the car keys from him. “Let me drive you”

“Sir…”

“I was called to help, now don’t let me here standing like an idiot”

“Fix that with your daughter…”

“Let him come, Dad” chimed in Philip.

“Thank you, kid. You were my favourite grandchild for a reason” nodded the old man, gaining a dirty look from the boy’s siblings.

“He’s a sad man that’s alone in Christmastime” continued the kid, making the adults and other kids to contain their laughter. Philip Sr simply sat at the driver’s seat, a grumpy expression on his face.
“You’re not gonna find a parking spot” repeated Peggy for the zillionth time.

“Yes, I will” responded Philip Sr, stubbornly.

“That man over there greeted us” pointed out Angie.

“It’s the fifth time already” added Philip.

“It’s the valet” explained Alexander, boringly. “He works parking cars”

“I don’t need them to park my car” said Philip Sr, noticing the hint.

“It’s mine, actually”

“Whatsoever. I know how to park a car”

“There’s no place to park!” insisted Peggy.

“I’m bored” whined Angie.

“Turn the fucking radio on” spat the grandparent.

“I can’t, Dad threw it out of the window the other day” accused the girl.

“Oh, yes, tell that part of the story, not all the pestering you and your brother made because you couldn’t stop pushing the fucking buttons in the middle of that jam” recalled Alexander.

“You have anger issues, admit it” chimed in Peggy.

“I don’t have anger issues, you seem to love to see me angry”

“You can’t accept…”

“I need to go to the loo”

“All the fucking times, Angelica!”

“Why do you complain? You’re just the same!”

“Even the kid knows”

“Everyone is against me in this family!”

“Go to your own fucking house already!”

“You invited her over”

“Which side are you on?!”

“To the one I think to be right in the moment!”

“I need to go to the loo!”

“If you don’t stop with the whining, I’ll buy you diapers like your brother!”

“Dad, your baby is pulling on my hair!”
“My baby is your brother!”

“I never asked for one, I wanted a little sister! And I even regret that!”

“Hey!”

“Well, I didn’t want any of you and I’m putting up with it!”

“Alexander, you’re not supposed to say that!”

“Do you know that for experience?”

“You’re so cruel! I’m gonna tattle to Eliza!”

“I need the loo!”

“Angie, wait until we’re parked!”

“The man is still waving at us…”

“I need to go too now…”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, Peggy!”

“Dad, let the valet park the car, it’s an emergency!”

“We still have to put that tree and the lights”

“Fucking family always making me run to do things at last hour”

“Why can’t we dine pizza? We lunched sandwiches!”

“No! I want a proper dinner for when your mother comes back!”

“I don’t know why she’s still coming back”

“Philip, if you keep going on with that attitude, Santa will give you no presents!”

“Eacker says Santa is the parents”

“I’m gonna tell that son of a bitch’s parents a few things in the next reunion, I swear to God…”

“What’s this smell?”

“Daddy, John pooped”

“And he laughs and all…”

“Someone roll down the fucking window”

“If you don’t stop right now, I’m gonna do the same!”

“Angelica, you won’t have any presents either!”

“You’ll have my own, don’t worry”

“Peggy, don’t discredit me in front of my children”
“We should’ve stayed home”

“I totally agree. It’s a fucking pain only to stand you back at home everyday”

“Didn’t Washington give you the keys to the office? Go live there, we’ll thank you”

Philip Sr’s grip in the wheel became stronger and stronger until his knuckles were ghostly white. All of a sudden, something snapped inside his head and he simply turned around, the tires screeching.

“To the hell!” he shouted, as he parked right beside the entrance of the mall. “To the freaking hell already!”

“Dad, we can’t park here. It’s for the handicap” pointed out Peggy.

“Keep pushing me and one of you it’s gonna use that for the rest of their lives” threatened the man.

The sun was about to go down by the time the family stepped out the building, a cart filled with several things.

“Coming in for five things and walking out with half the mall bought” complained Alexander, looking at his watch. “You’ll have to keep your mother busy until the dinner’s finished”

“And the tree?” asked Angie.

“Leave that to me” said Philip Sr, smugly. “I used to do that all the holidays when your mother and aunts were younger”

“True, and you were bitching about your marriage five minutes later” recalled Peggy, with a sidesmile.

Philip Sr’s retort was interrupted when his namesake said: “Oh-oh”

The family stopped a few feet away from where they’d parked the car. A police officer was giving them a ticket while a man on crutches, that was red in the face, screamed obscenities against the owner of the car. They all stepped backwards when the man hit the car with one of the crunches.

“There’s not right that a son of a bitch uses this and leaves me with nothing, officer!”

“Alright, calm down, let’s wait until they show up and we can solve this on good manners” soothed
the office, also taken aback by the violent demeanour.

“If I grab them, I’ll give them a beating they’ll never forget!” swore the man.

“Told you we couldn’t park there” muttered Peggy.

“Shut up” said Philip Sr, paling considerably.

“Why don’t you apologise?” proposed Angie.

“Kid, that is not an adorable crippled you watch on TV. If that man grabs you, he leaves worse than he is” explained Philip Sr.

“I’ve got an idea” said Philip, looking at the adults innocently.

“If it’s admitting our mistake and take the ticket…” began Philip Sr.

“No, no”

“Go ahead, then”

“Sure?”

“Kid, we’ve got no more time to lose” hurried his father.

“Alright” he shrugged. “Are you seeing that exit?” he asked, pointing at their backs.

“Yes” they all said.

“Good, go over there”

“And the car?” asked Angie.

“Go over there” he insisted. When he saw his family walking to the pedestrian exit, he turned to the officer and cupped both hands around his mouth. “Hey, I saw this stranger parking there before, officer!” he accused, pointing at his grandparent.

“Son of a bitch!” cursed Philip Sr, stopping in his tracks in shock.

“Now, run!” hissed the kid, running to the rest of the family.

They all ran to the exit, casting nervous glares at Philip Sr, who shrunk on spot and the officer and the man walked over him.

Philip Sr didn’t arrive at the house until dinner was almost ready. He walked into the kitchen, sending daggers towards Alexander’s direction. The Caribbean barely looked at him as he kept cooking.
“Was waiting for a phone call made from some cell” admitted Alexander.

Philip Sr didn’t talk, just let the ticket on the table.

“You’ll pay that” said Alexander, sternly.

The man casted him another hateful glare. “Betsey should’ve married Elijah, the architect”

Alexander hit the counter with the spoon. “What the hell does that have to do with this?! I didn’t park the car or accuse you!”

“But I haven’t told you today!” was the man’s excuse, as he walked into the living room.

“Dad, come, we were about to light up the tree!” welcomed Peggy.

Philip Sr looked disgustedly at how well-decorated the whole place was. His nose was scrunched up as his eyes landed on the tree, which lights were put on by his daughter and grandchildren.

“Thank you for waiting for me…” he said, sarcastically.

“Betsey’s about to come, so we needed to hurry” excused Peggy.

“Whatever… Let me do that…” he said, taking the lights away from his daughter’s grip.

“It’s almost done”

“You made me lose my time here, let me light the tree!”

“Alright, alright…”

Philip Sr put the last couple of lights on, turned to the outlet and plugged it. Nothing happened.

“We have to turn them on with the button” explained Angie.

“What button?” asked Philip Sr, rubbing his temples in annoyance.

“The one that’s on the wire” said Philip.

“You mean the wire that’s behind the tree and the TV table?”

“Yep”
“Why it doesn’t surprise me…”

The door was heard being opened, and the kids immediately ran to it, wanting to keep their mother out of the living room until everything were in order. Eliza cocked an eyebrow at them talking at the same time.

“Alright, alright, kids, please” she said, almost beggingly. “I’ve been hearing children all day, give me a moment and I’ll pay attention to you” she said, walking to the kitchen direction as they were blocking the other door. She stopped abruptly when she saw her husband putting dinner on the table. “What’s this?” she asked, with a tiny smile.

Alexander smiled and went to her. “Happy pre-Christmas week” he said, peeking her cheek.

“Alex, you didn’t have to…”

“Yes, we did”

“Did it!” celebrated Philip Sr from the living room.

“Is that my father?” she asked, beyond shocked, trotting to the living room.

They were greeted by Peggy holding baby John, who applauded his grandfather. Philip Sr took a few steps back from the shining tree. He looked at the doorframe, smugly. He was about to hug his middle daughter when he felt the wire tangled around his ankle, which made him fall on his noses, the tree falling on his back and the lights flickering a few times until they turned off.

There was a heavy silence in the living room until Eliza started laughing cheerfully. She went to her father’s aid, who was also giggling. The whole living room joined the two of them.

The kids were already on their bedrooms, Peggy had gone to sleep right after having dinner and Philip Sr had collapsed on the couch. Eliza put a blanket over him and went to sit back beside her husband, both with half full glasses of wine.

“I wasn’t expecting any of this” she whispered.

“That was why it was a surprise” shrugged Alexander. He frowned at the still fallen tree. “I’ll fix that tomorrow…”

“And where’s the car?”
“… I’ll fix that tomorrow”

Eliza giggled and held his hand in hers, just enjoying the company. She started to tell him about her day and he did just as much, causing her to contain her laughter, not wanting to wake her exhausted father up. And, in that moment, there was no other place she’d rather be.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you had a nice Christmas!
The quotes II

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

I was supposed to post this on the 31st but I forgot XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes


He [Jay]'s always been like that, but right now he turned stupider — Thomas Jefferson, good person, better friend, 2018.

I wanna keep living well — Prince John Adams, allergic to commonness, 2018.

I was up late reading fanfics and now I don’t remember how to be a functional person — Peggy Schuyler, she represents me, 2018.

You’re the Ringo Starr of life: we all now you exist and that you do things, but nobody cares enough to remember — Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Burr, 2018.

Love is my drug
Don’t take drugs, it’s bad for the health
And the pots have damaged your brain enough — John Laurens, Hercules Mulligan and Alexander Hamilton, 2018.


M [While criticising Lee]: Idiot
You were the one with the intention, I didn’t want to know anything about it — Hercules Mulligan, the supportive boyfriend, to Lafayette, 2018.

Uh, Mr Offended. Now we can’t say anything to him or what? — Angelica Schuyler about her brother-in-law, 2018.

Make me that like this

A damn is what I’m gonna make for you — Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, the rebel, 2018.

Wanna go to McDonald’s?


Who does he think he is? The Secretary of State, the VP, the own President or what? — James Madison about Thomas Jefferson in a bad day, 2018.

When I say I’m very tired, it means I’m very tired. Not tired, very tired — George Washington, I think he’s tired, 2018.

This guy’s attitude is a bad joke and an absolute lack of respect, damn single-neuronal man — James Madison about John Adams, still in his bad day, 2018.

You’re the Thanos of ridiculousness, with the Gauntlet of idiocy — Alexander Hamilton, Eliza has taught him well, to John Adams, 2018.

I’m gonna buy him a little photo with a sentence that’d read: ‘Those who kiss your ass the most are the same ones who would kick it the hardest in this life’ — Lafayette to Hercules Mulligan during a marital argument, 2018.

Look, my picture of the Virgin fell. That must be a sign — Libby Morales, the believer, 2018.

She (Polly) hasn’t even asked her father for what she needs for that stupid project… What is that girl
waiting for? For me to go and tell him? So I’m the one standing his bad mood because she waited till last hour again? No. She better doesn’t hold her breath, because I won’t. She can go to the forest, cut down a tree and get the paper and the cardboard she needs from there — James Madison, reaching the limit of second-hand parenthood, to Libby Morales, 2018.

I work with the Devil — Eliza Schuyler Hamilton about a workmate, 2018.

I know, I know I’m a fucking horrid woman, I know I’m a miserable when it comes to myself — Marisa Hadfield making self-criticism, 2018.


Where did you go to do the photocopies? To the Olympus? — Angelica Schuyler, desperate, to Thomas Jefferson, 2018.

There was a bald man in front of me, saying he’s in a hurry and complaining about he’s gonna be late to I-don’t-know-what… Be late, bowling ball, I don’t care! — Hercules Mulligan, the empathetic, 2018.

Alex, do you work in the radio? You don’t, right? Then stop the commentaries — Aaron Burr, surpassing the master, 2018.

Everybody has free days and relaxing time but me. What am I? The last piece of shit of that house? — James Madison, about to lose it before the year ends, 2018.


Couple I like, couple that ends up becoming true. I’m like the matchmaker of Mulan, but without being a bitch — Libby Cupid Morales, 2018.

When the music is cheery, it cheers you up — Peggy Schuyler, melomaniac, 2018.

From now on, things will be done the way I say or not at all. And that’s fucking it, god damnit! —
Thomas ‘Do as I say or else’ Jefferson, 2018.

For her friends, she shows no restraint. All day pam, pam, pam, taking the wallet out like a gunwoman and making the billets fly — Aaron ‘Love is in the air’ Burr about his wife, 2018.

I don’t wish harm on anybody, I just wish they don’t do better than I do — Alexander Hamilton, he wishes you good, but not much, 2018.

You can’t live without living — James Madison, the logical, part II, 2018.

What would you a want a pet for? If you’ve already got me — John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 2018.

When I’m done with him, they’re gonna call him Martin McFly, because I’m gonna hit him so hard I’ll send him back to the future — Marisa Hadfield about her ex-husband, 2018.

I’m not racist, I hate all humanity just the same — George King, the fair hater, 2018.

I don’t wanna fight with anybody. Is he stupid? Yes. Will I tell him if he pushes me too far? Absolutely — Hercules Mulligan, he’s learnt from Hamilton, about Laurens, 2018.

I refuse to be the maid in this house any longer — James Madison’s ultimatum, 2018.

Do I have the word ‘Idiot’ pressed on the forehead or what? —Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, she also has limits, 2018.

His voice sounds like his voice — Libby Morales VS English, 2018.

You’ve always been an inept at driving, now you’re even more inept — Angelica Schuyler to Peggy, best of sisters, 2018.

I’m seeing you with the face
What face?

The Face. With capital F.

What face is that?

The one in which you’re with the balls inflated. I wanna have a peaceful day, okay? — Lafayette and Hercules Mulligan, best of couples, 2018.

Sometimes I need a break to rest from so much intellectuality — Aaron Burr, an example to follow, 2018.

In what kind of world do you live in? Under the sea, with the Little Mermaid; with the Smurfs or a mix of the two? — Alexander Hamilton to Peggy Schuyler, closest of siblings, 2018.

I like to have dinner while eating — Thomas Jefferson, a simple man, 2018.

This water’s wet — Libby Morales VS English II, 2018.

I don’t pay taxis for drunkards — Hercules Mulligan about John Laurens, 2018.

This is a cloth, you filthy heathens — George Washington loving his staff, 2018.

I think I was a pig in another life

And in this one as well — John Adams and Marisa Hadfield, bonding, 2018.

Do you practice any sports?

No, I’ve already suffered a lot in my life and I don’t want to suffer anymore — Libby Morales and Alexander Hamilton, 2018.


The little ones’ve spent three fucking years doing nothing but being more useless than a red light in the GTA, but nooow they are trying to come with a solution! I can’t be mad, then! — Alexander Hamilton, as resentful as honest, 2018.
I won’t make that man [Adams] any breakfast tomorrow. Damned unthankful brat… Tomorrow I’m gonna make him a shit! — Thomas Jefferson, 2018 [He ended up making him breakfast].

Smoke began to come out from there… I don’t know. Smoke. Smoke — Libby Morales explaining the death of the microwave, 2018.

Write this with a font that’s big so it fills a lot of space, but not too much so the boss doesn’t notice, and you finish earlier by doing less — Marisa Hadfield, the woman we all needed in here, 2018.

I’ll announce the news when I announce them — George Washington, he is where he is thanks to his organisation, 2018.

I’m kind, not stupid — Libby Morales, 2018.

I’m not xenophobic, I’m organised. If God in his infinite wisdom decided to separate us by continents, he must have had his reasons — George King, the frustrated humanitarian, 2018.

Even if I’ve gotta go by crawling, I’ll still go there to insult him — Angelica Schuyler about a teacher that bullied her son back at school. Good person, better mother, 2018.

You’ve got less skills than a deaf in the middle of a dictation — James Madison to Aaron Burr, 2018.

I wouldn’t have had me — John Laurens criticising his parents’ decisions, 2018.

I’m gonna pretend I’ve gotta go to the bathroom, so I can’t hear them — Libby Morales, absolutely fitting in, they grow up so fast, 2018.

A: Crafty, with that silent behaviour fooling everyone into thinking you’re an innocent and pure soul, but you’re just a piñata.

Mads: Yes, well, you… Wait, what did you call me?

A: Piñata.
Mads: What?

A: Those fishes that bite!

Jeff: Piranha.


I like to go to those parties and gatherings because it’s my perfect opportunity to drink without looking like a drunkard — John Laurens, smarter than he seems, 2018.

Are you smoking drugs as we talk?

… There’s a bit of narcotic in here, yeah

You’re making me a bit dizzy, Mr King

Am I? Hold on, now you’re gonna be dizzier. [Exhales smoke in the mic of his phone] — Alfred and George King in the middle of a prank call, 2018.

I don’t criticise. I comment reality with friends — Aaron Burr, lawyer in the day; commentator in his free time, 2018.

Not even Dalí, in his most surrealist dreams, would have imagined a place like this — Thomas Jefferson, lover of art, 2018.

Why do you put pens that don’t write within people’s reach — John Laurens, the frustrated, 2018.

I don’t think to be more than everyone else; I am more than everyone else — Alexander Hamilton, the personification of ego, 2018.

I’m not going to apologise because you don’t have enough balls to put up with my fiery personality — Dolley Payne, my new role model, 2018.

My best dreams come from the naps I took because I was too angry to be awake — Libby Morales, 2018.

I’m wearing shades because last night I was more thirsty than shameful — Hercules the Honest Mulligan, 2018.
If when I started, I hated them all and I was young and unexperienced… Imagine now. I’d kill somebody — James Madison talking about his school days, 2018.

When I say ‘no’, that ‘no’ is bigger than the doors of an ancient castle — Alexander Hard-Headedilton, 2018.

If someone sends me a voice message that’s eight minutes long, it better be Stairway to Heaven. Otherwise, I’m not fucking listening to it — Angelica Schuyler and her priorities, 2018.

I don’t trust people that wake up early. If they can do such a thing, imagine what they’re capable of — John Adams, the cautious, 2018.

I’m such a good person that I’m a complete asshole to the ones that hate me so they can hate me with evidence and reason, and that way they don’t look as stupid as they truly are when they explain their hatred towards me — Alexander Hamilton, good friend; better foe, 2018.

Listen, smile, agree and then do whatever the heck you were going to do. That way, life is easier and you didn’t lose time in idiocies — Eliza Schuyler Hamilton and her useful advices, 2018.

There’s nothing better than seeing someone you hate falling on their noses right in front of you. You feel such a peace — James Madison, the passive resentful, 2018.

Adams, there’s a letter for you in the mail. It says you won the Triangle Bermuda Awards for most things going missing — Alexander Hamilton, the savage, 2018.

For my birthday I was given a valid coupon to send someone to hell, and I’m gonna use it with you. Congratulations! — Angelica Venom Schuyler, 2018.

When you were little, you were a complete jackass. Now, things have changed and you’re no longer little — Hercules Mulligan to John Laurens about the cruelty of Time, 2018.

I know I’m a very interesting subject, but, please, next time have balls and talk about me in front of me — Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, she was more perfect for Hamilton than anyone would’ve suspected, 2018.
Talking about my flaws doesn’t mean yours are gonna disappear — Dolley Payne to John Adams, 2018.

I’m not rude, I’m intolerant to assholes like you — Marisa Hadfield to Charles Lee, 2018.

In which one of your two faces do you want me to tell you how fake you are? — James Madison, polite even to tell you off, 2018.


James is the only one in here who’s normal. The rest are just a bunch of Muppets — Thomas Jefferson, 2018.

Mosquitoes are like family: annoying but they carry your blood — Peggy Schuyler, a family girl, 2018.

Sometimes, I feel jealous of my parents because I’ll never have such an amazing child as the one they had — John Laurens, model child despite he hasn’t talked to his parents since college, 2018.

The only time *success* comes before *work* is in the dictionary — Alexander Hamilton educating the staff, 2018.


A lion shall not turn around when a dog barks at them — Marisa Hadfield, classy even to insult, to Charles Lee, 2018.

For talking bad about me, you’ve gotta lie; I, to talk good about you, must lie as well — Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 2018.

The world is full of people who want to pick the fruits of trees they never sowed — George Washington, the wise, 2018.
I’m not resentful; I’ve got a pretty good memory — Aaron Burr, the disk, 2018.

You’re faker than the ‘Tomorrow, I’ll start the diet’ quote — Angelica Schuyler, 2018.

There’s nothing like pretending you know nothing to see how far someone can go with their lying — Lafayette, the strategist, 2018.

It’s for people like you that shampoo comes with instructions — Hercules Mulligan to John Laurens, 2018.

Now I understand why people talk so badly about you when you’re not present — Libby Morales to Charles Lee, 2018.

Sometimes, I look at you and think: Really? That was the spermatozoon that won the race? — Angelica Schuyler to John Adams, 2018.

You’re more useless than a keyboard without enter — Alexander Hamilton to his workmates, 2018.

No, it’s alright. If their talent is to lie to me, mine will be to pretend I believe them — Eliza Schuyler Hamilton accepting the falseness of the world we live in, 2018.

I’m like in a maxi pad commercial but without being happy — Marisa Hadfield, 2018.


I fail to see which good traits you have that compensate that horrendous personality of yours — Alexander Hamilton to John Adams, 2018.

I don’t have enemies. I’ve got confused fans — Dolley Payne, a true star, 2018.

Karma has no menu card. It’ll serve you what you deserve! — John Laurens in the middle of a
Yesterday, I jumped oceans for people. Nowadays, I wouldn’t even jump a little pond — Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, the disappointed humanitarian, 2018.

They say good things take time to come. Mine must be fucking fantastic, after almost forty years of waiting — James Madison, the patient, 2018.

I don’t like to fight with you. It’s unfair, as you’re less armed, intelligently talking — Thomas Jefferson, best of enemies, to John Adams, 2018.

Have a rest of your day as nice as you — Angelica Schuyler to Charles Lee, 2018.

Your lack of inner beauty couldn’t be fixed even if you ate make-up — Lafayette, more sharp-tongued than he seems, 2018.

I’ll put your opinion in the bank; maybe one day it’ll give me some kind of interest — Aaron Burr, loosing himself, 2018.

True love is when you send someone to hell and still call them to make sure they arrived well — Libby Morales, the caring hater, 2018.

It’s incredible how he criticises everybody’s lives as if his was an example to follow — Hercules Mulligan about Charles Lee, 2018.

My back’s not a voicemail, if you’ve got something to tell me, tell me in the face — Alexander Hamilton, 2018.

I’d rather put on my earbuds with the volume all the way up and become deaf, than hear all the bullshit people talk — Peggy Schuyler, the eternal teenager, 2018.

Don’t drag me into your messes and salvation army — Thomas Jefferson, the selfish friend, to James Madison, 2018.
I remember I guy that wanted to date me in high school. He got close to me and told me: “Would you like there to be something between us?”


She’s more optimistic than the musicians of the Titanic — Thomas Jefferson about Libby, 2018.

I don’t like to be angry with you. Say you’re sorry — John Laurens, the peacemaker, to Hercules Mulligan, 2018.

I don’t hide the last time I was on line, because that way it’s not funny to ignore people — Angelica Schuyler, the cruel, 2018.

I’m sick of you taking five hours to answer me, but whenever I see you you’re always checking your phone each 3 seconds — Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, 2018.

I really hate when people tell me: ‘Wake up, the sun’s up’. So? Do I have to photosynthesise or something? — Peggy Flora Schuyler, 2018.

I don’t hate him. It’s just that sometimes it bothers me that he breathes. Just that… — Thomas Jefferson about his frenemy Alexander Hamilton, 2018.

I care a lot about people’s opinions. Very much. I even have a finger, right in the middle of my hand, to gift them with as a thank you — Aaron Burr, the passive-aggressive, 2018.

Why are you going hazy? Only because all your employees are incompetent toddlers? — Martha Washington, supportive wife, 2018.

Oh, sorry, I didn’t realise you were an expert in my life and how I should live it. Please, continue while I take notes — Marisa Hadfield to Charles Lee, 2018.

I’m so quiet because, when I was little, my mother used to tell me that if I had nothing nice to say, I should keep my silence — James Madison throwing digs to the staff during a meeting, 2018.
Sometimes, I laugh so much at you that I think I should thank you for the great time you give me — Angelica Schuyler, mocking but with manners, 2018.

I’m starting to appreciate this bond we created so much, that I promise you that if one day you make me too mad, I won’t hit you. Too hard, that is — Alexander Hamilton consolidating the relationship with Thomas Jefferson, 2018.

I’ve got the superpower of collecting arguments for months and then use them against people when I feel I’m losing in a present fight — Libby Morales, secret supervillain, 2018.

I still can’t understand. If you’re such a little thing, how can you bother this much? — Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 2018.

I like you so much that if one day I run over you, I’d reverse to see if you got too hurt — George King to George Washington, best of friends, 2018.

Winning doesn’t matter. What’s truly important is to make the other lose — John Laurens, the secret competitive, 2018.

She’s so fake that she should bring a tag with the words ‘Made in China’ attached to her — Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, 2018.

He was not that handsome to compensate being such a jackass — Dolley Payne about her ex-husband, 2018.

It’s useless to send people like that guy to Hell, because even the Devil gives him back — James Madison about a teacher he used to have in Elementary School, 2018.

I truly deserve a Nobel Peace Prize just for all the times I controlled myself and didn’t run over some people with a tractor — Peggy Mandela Schuyler, 2018.

My sister has the Bee Syndrome: she thinks to be a Queen when she’s nothing more than a bug — Thomas Jefferson, the brother we all long for, 2018.
I’m the most powerful person after a party; because while everybody’s getting drunk, I am taking pictures — Lafayette, the man we all want as a friend, 2018.


I don’t even know why you’re making a fuss now — James Madison summing up my working experience in this law firm, 2018.

Nobody knows all I’ve been through. Nobody. Sons of bitches, the bunch of you — Aaron Burr during a nervous breakdown, 2018.

I want to make use of this moment to congratulate all the crafty asses who talk about me at my backs. They truly have an interesting topic to talk about — Alexander Hamilton in the last day before the Christmas break, 2018.

I don’t know anymore. I feel like, each passing year, this becomes more delirious — George Washington, regretting every decision he’s made in life to finish the year in a good note, 2018.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks all who read, comment, support and keep being part of this crazy series. It means a lot. Wish you all a wonderful 2019!

Sursum corda!
A tale of three Christmases: sneak-peek

Chapter Summary

Here’s a sneak-peek of the special. More explained in the ending notes. Enjoy! ^^

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Her husband had insisted on cooking dinner for that Christmas’ Eve. Against her best judgment, she acceded, feeling exhausted after a tiring year of work. With a heavy sigh, Lu sat on the armchair next to their Christmas tree, which lights turned off and on smoothly, just to sparkle quickly for then alternate from one couple of colours (red and yellow) to the other (blue and green). Lu barely noticed, used to the performance as her husband had decided to put the tree earlier that year, with an enthusiasm more proper of a child than of a man that was 55 years old.

She smiled despite herself, fond at the memories of her marriage and as she heard her husband messing with things in the kitchen. A few curses reached her ears, and Lu could do no more than kept the smile on place and shake her head, with affection. She was about to go there and offer a helping hand, but knew Henry could match her in stubbornness when he wanted to, and she really needed a time to relax. Especially if she’d have to clean the kitchen later, because Henry would fall asleep right after eating and wouldn’t wake up until 2 pm at much of the following day.

Instead, Lu got up and went to choose a book from the shelve Henry had on the living room. One of three their new house had. Lu was surprised when they moved and saw he still had a few books with no place to rest. Really, that man was born to open a bookshop, if not to be a writer. Her eyes landed on one book that had clearly been passed from hands to hands, open and re-open time and time again, emanating the clear scent of union and sweet past memories. Lu knew what it was and took it without hesitation.

Despite the hard and cold thinking her job required, Lu never stopped being a sentimental woman. It was a part of herself that she embraced, proud of it, though it sometimes turned her into an overdramatic person.

She took a seat back on the armchair, the photographic album resting on her lap. She opened
it as she reclined against the cushions, another warm smile appearing on her face. The first photo was one of their wedding day, more specifically, the one they two had posed for after several ones making faces and simply enjoying their day. They’d come to the conclusion that they needed a ‘serious one’, even if just one, and so they pretended to be the earnest couple her parents had wanted her and Henry to be. She giggled at the funny gleam that shone in both pairs of eyes of their younger versions, even in the old but well-kept photo.

She passed a few pages, landing on one of Henry in the inauguration of his bookshop, which still stood there with pride, on the same street, with the same intelligent and cultured man in the head, receiving clients and making friends with each new face who stepped in his shop, thirty years later. Lu still remembered how excited and happy her husband had looked, how thankful he showed himself to be for her constant support.

She passed another few pages, starting to get emotional. Feelings hit her in the guts when she found the photo of that Christmas, which happened a long time ago but that she remembered so clearly it was as if it’d happened just yesterday. Her house had been full of college students, the friends Alexander had managed to make in his first year in Columbia (in the span of three months). But Lu wasn’t surprised in her day, neither was she nowadays. The kid had no filter. Even when just came and showed himself more reticent to talk, it was evident. But Lu never saw any wick nature within the child, and thought he acted so defensive for being wronged in the past for another amount of people who’d judged him unfairly.

Lu had always felt the lack of shine in Alexander’s eyes, how he seemed to avoid both she and Henry during the first weeks of coexistence, and how afraid he looked each time they asked him something, past trauma of unjustified punishments coming through his mind like a flash that obligated him to curl on himself and turn his answers in nothing more than nods or shakes of head. It hurt Lu and Henry deeply. It was something they always knew would most likely happen once the child lived in another household (which ended up being theirs); they were aware that they could take the Fulton away from Alexander, they could erase those bastards’ presence from his life for good, but not the memories or the scars they’d gifted his mind and soul with.

They knew all that, but it was a very different thing to live it and feel powerless by how little they could do than simply give Alexander all the time he needed, leave all their doors open for when the kid was in need of help, and be there came what may. Alexander shared their same stubbornness, but also lacked their maturity to comprehend asking for help was not a weakness. Or maybe, more than a childish behaviour that time would eradicate at some point, it was a rooted fear, it was a poisoned, ugly plant that had grown enough until tangling its stalks around Alexander’s heart, refusing to let go despite being in a safe place.

What that kid must’ve lived to be so insecure around people, so afraid of interacting with others, to open up and express something more profound than his beliefs and thoughts… Neither she or Henry wanted to know, it terrified them to just imagine, and made their blood to boil at thinking a kid who had done no wrong had to suffer due to the sick and wicked minds of some…
“Lu, nothing to do with my cooking task, I’m just curious… Did you replace the extinguisher since last time, right?” asked Henry, walking in the room. He stopped abruptly when he saw the thin yet noticeable tear rolling down his wife’s cheek. “What’s wrong, honey?” he asked, sprinting to her and kneeling right beside her.

Lu gave a shy chuckle. “Nothing, just remembering things” she admitted, wiping away the tears and showing him the album.

Henry relaxed at the explanation. “Ah… You do those things in New Year’s Eve, after a few drinks” he laughed, taking the album in his hands and seeing the photo to blame for his wife’s sentimental moment. “Oh, I remember this!” he said, nostalgia hanging in his cheerful tone. “That year you went crazy because you wanted ‘the perfect Christmas’”

Lu rolled her eyes, though offering her husband a smile. “Oh, come on…”

“Remember the turkey?”

“That entire mess was all you”

“And when you matched Alexander with the wrong person?”

“Excuse me, but they ended up marrying!”

“And the tree! That was awesome!”

“Oh, come on, for one time I…”

“We need a real one” mimicked Henry, even imitating his wife’s hand gestures while talking. “We need a real tree if we want a real Christmas!”

“I’ve never killed another tree in my entire life” defended Lu, raising her chin, solemnly. “It is wise to rectify”

“Sure…” Henry laughed whole-heartedly as he glared at the photo. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget that Christmas in my entire life” he finally admitted, the same amount of nostalgia his wife was feeling.

“Neither will I” she agreed, nodding. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget anything we lived with Alex. He really was a turning point in my life”

“Thank you, love of my life” said Henry, though there was no bite in his voice whatsoever.

“Come on, you think the same”

“True, I do… Well, but in the end, the day had a happy ending”

“Of course it did! I was in charge of it” boasted Lu, smiling smugly.

“Oh, please…”

“It’s true. Now” she said, taking the album again in her hands. “Go try not to set the kitchen on fire. I don’t want a sequel to the memory, as fond as it is”

Henry faked a hurt expression. “Ouch, my dear, ouch”
“Go!” laughed Lu, pushing him in the right direction.

“Try not to flood the house getting too emotional” he teased back.

Lu rolled her eyes, taking another look at the photo. This time, the memories passed in her head clear as water.

Thomas had been receiving a basket or a box full of things from his sister since that day, always with a note attached. He didn’t waste a second of his time reading it or looking what she’d tossed in.

James watched him as he grabbed the basket and walked out the front door, as if in autopilot, and then threw the basket to the trash can across their house. James frowned at his action, another thing Thomas was more than willing to ignore.

“Thomas…” he began.

“I don’t want to hear it” he interrupted, going back to his cooking task.

“You’d have to talk to her at some point” said James, nonetheless.

“No”

“Thomas—”

“She’s spent all her fucking life ignoring me and my daughters” he reminded, bitterly. “Now, I don’t want to know anything about her”

“Well, she thinks you do”

“Good. Maybe she goes crazy with paranoia”

“Thomas!”

“I don’t want to talk about it” he decided, stubbornly.

“Well, what’re you planning to do, then?” inquired James, resting against the doorframe. “Throwing baskets and boxes for the rest of your life?”

“Yes. And I hope to see her one day looking inside the trash, damning her life when she sees that shit in there”

James sighed and rolled his eyes. “I’m gonna go shopping what I need for dinner”

“If the smell of that spicy shit isn’t gone by the end of the night, you leave with her to never return”
he warned.

“Sure…” replied James, not believing him.

Adams emerged from his corner, a frown on his face. “Why does your girlfriend get to eat what she wants but I don’t?”

“Because she’s not a squatter backstabber” answered James right away, without looking at him as he made his way to the front door.

“You’re so cocky since you got a girlfriend… Let’s see how long she lasts”

“You’re the one who’s acting cocky despite his wife kicked him out and being unemployed” Thomas told him off from the kitchen.

“Everybody’s against me in this house…” muttered the man, saddened.

“Guess why” retorted James.

Washington reclined on his armchair, breathing in the relaxing atmosphere his house was sunken into. Martha had gone to buy the ingredients she needed to prepare the dessert she prepared all Christmases. He took one gulp of his whiskey – fuck it, he was on vacation and he was going to enjoy it, because he deserved it – and looked out the window, seeing the clouds rolling by against a clear sky. The night would fall eventually, maybe too soon for his likings – he really liked summer better for how long the days were – but he’d enjoy the peaceful image nature was presenting him with as long as it lasted.

This was what he waited for all year. Just a relaxing end of the year. Without people wandering around his house, without pretending he liked the intrusion, without faked smiles, without the annoying hurry of preparing more dishes than what’s truly necessary. No. Just he and his wife, enjoying their time together and talking peacefully. Maybe he should look for those vinyl’s and invite his wife to dance, remember old times. George smiled and sighed happily. Yes, he should really do that. He was a nostalgic and a romantic, what was he going to do about it? He knew Martha liked it deep down, despite her petty protests.

He heard the front door opening and was about to get up to kiss his wife hello, help her with whatever she’d bought, and simply enjoy the day by her side.

God, how much he loved her.

“George, look who I bumped into!” called Martha, as she made her way into the living room,
grocery bags in both hands.

Washington’s smile fell when he saw the tall and thin man behind his wife, waving at him as if they were still good and close friends. “Merry Christmas, George!” greeted King, with a wide smile.

“I invited him to have dinner with us” explained Martha, cheerfully.

George eyed them both, his wife especially.

…… … … …

Daughter of a fucking and filthy bitch…

“What the fuck is Maleficent doing in my house?” spat the oldest.

“George!” gasped Martha.

“Can’t you let me have a peaceful and happy Christmas, Martha? What’s wrong with you?” he complained.

“With me?” gaped Martha. “It was you the one insulting a guest!”

“I told you I don’t want any more guests! Did you learn nothing from last year?”

“Hey, if I’m bothering you, I can leave” proposed King, holding one hand up in innocence.

“No, no…” hurried to say Martha.

“Yes, thank you”

“George!”

“Let the man do his good deed of the year so he can still think he’s nice”

“George, he’s alone at Christmas’ Eve” revealed Martha, sternly.

“And what about his boyfriend?”

“He’s with the family” explained King. “He doesn’t want to introduce me yet”

“The only intelligent thing he’s done with you” nodded Washington, in agreement. “Let’s see if the blindfold falls completely when he’s back”

Martha scrunched up her nose in disgust. “Really, you’re so bitter lately. Then, you don’t understand why I insist on bringing guests!”

“I was happy and on good vibe, woman! It was you two the ones fucking my whole day up!”

“I won’t let anyone spend Christmas alone!” she proclaimed, stubbornly.
“Oh, for God’s sake, Martha, everybody wants to spend fucking Christmas alone! Only kids and who suffer from monophobia don’t! And I’m neither!”

“No, you’ve just turned into a grumpy old man!” she shouted, tears prickling in her eyes. She turned around, sobbing loudly as she ran into the kitchen.

“You made your wife cry in Christmas Eve” scolded King.

“The last thing I needed from you!” Washington jumped from his seat at his reprimand. “Get the hell out of here, you’ve done enough” he instructed, shoving him to the front door.

King fought back. “C’mon, man, it’s been ages since we had a peaceful dinner to chat”

“Because we’ve never had one, with you that’s impossible!”

“I can help! Just tell me what you need me to do!”

“To leave!”

The phone rang. King took it as a chance to free himself from the pushes and ran to the table the item was on. George watched in impotence, passing a hand through his face, in annoyance.

“Hell of a life…”

“Georgie, it’s your mother” said King, coming back, handing him the loudly phone.

“Fucking hell of a life…”

Washington took the phone with vehemence, marched in the room again and threw it against the cushions to let some rage out.

“Aren’t you going to pick it up?” asked King, surprised.

“No”

“Pick it up, man, you must always pick it up when it’s your mum!” he scolded again, a frown on his face.

“No, not to this one mum, you must not” he contradicted, shaking his head.

Washington wasn’t surprised when King didn’t listen to him, but he surely was shocked when he saw the man answering the phone on his behalf.
I swear, at this rate, I'll upload the Christmas special on December of this year. Sweet Jesus... It's not that I'm not interested on it, it's just that there's one plot in there that never leaves me happy. I've started it a million times already... Apart from that, life has been busy right now and I had one of my 'down-periods' in which I simply don't feel up to anything unless it's obligatory. So, I simply got away with some Netflix and chill, as they say. And I also fell ill twice, so, yeah. Busy life indeed XD.

So, don't think this was abandoned if I take longer than usual. I simply don't want to throw any episode in here for the sake of it, I want to enjoy writing and you to enjoy reading it.

BTW, I like to think about this story as an actual series. We have the first 5 episodes of silliness before the shit hit the fan. Then, 9 episodes with angst and actual plots and pasts for the characters, and I think the next 9 episodes, right after the never-coming special, are going to be the final round/season.

Be aware for: failed romantic attempts, Philip Sr trying to be a better man, Eliza growing, Madison and Alexander finally finding something that brings them together again, a lot of craziness (but that's not new), resolution of problems. And a whole chapter that'd be just about family angst, this time, on Alexander's part. Embrace yourselves for that one, I'll make sure to warn you, I'm not that mean.

And also, for the fic that's more Jefferson (and, therefore, their daughters)-centric fic. I'll be working on that take too and hopefully upload it more oftenly.

And if there are people in here who also read the Avengers Family series, I'll be uploading those too, although they're shorter than this one.

Thank you for dedicating some of your time reading this little silly thing. I hope it entertains you as much as it can help you when serious matters come.

Sursum corda!
Her husband had insisted on cooking dinner for that Christmas’ Eve. Against her best judgment, she acceded, feeling exhausted after a tiring year of work. With a heavy sigh, Lu sat on the armchair next to their Christmas tree, which lights turned off and on smoothly, just to sparkle quickly for then alternate from one couple of colours (red and yellow) to the other (blue and green). Lu barely noticed, used to the performance as her husband had decided to put the tree earlier that year, with an enthusiasm more proper of a child than of a man that was 55 years old.

She smiled despite herself, fond at the memories of her marriage and as she heard her husband messing with things in the kitchen. A few curses reached her ears, and Lu could do no more than kept the smile on place and shake her head, with affection. She was about to go there and offer a helping hand, but knew Henry could match her in stubbornness when he wanted to, and she really needed a time to relax. Especially if she’d have to clean the kitchen later, because Henry would fall asleep right after eating and wouldn’t wake up until 2 pm at much of the following day.

Instead, Lu got up and went to choose a book from the shelve Henry had on the living room. One of three their new house had. Lu was surprised when they moved and saw he still had a few books with no place to rest. Really, that man was born to open a bookshop, if not to be a writer. Her eyes landed on one book that had clearly been passed from hands to hands, open and re-open time and time again, emanating the clear scent of union and sweet past memories. Lu knew what it was and took it without hesitation.

Despite the hard and cold thinking her job required, Lu never stopped being a sentimental woman. It was a part of herself that she embraced, proud of it, though it sometimes turned her into an overdramatic person.
She took a seat back on the armchair, the photographic album resting on her lap. She opened it as she reclined against the cushions, another warm smile appearing on her face. The first photo was one of their wedding day, more specifically, the one they two had posed for after several ones making faces and simply enjoying their day. They’d come to the conclusion that they needed a ‘serious one’, even if just one, and so they pretended to be the earnest couple her parents had wanted her and Henry to be. She giggled at the funny gleam that shone in both pairs of eyes of their younger versions, even in the old but well-kept photo.

She passed a few pages, landing on one of Henry in the inauguration of his bookshop, which still stood there with pride, on the same street, with the same intelligent and cultured man in the head, receiving clients and making friends with each new face who stepped in his shop, thirty years later. Lu still remembered how excited and happy her husband had looked, how thankful he showed himself to be for her constant support.

She passed another few pages, starting to get emotional. Feelings hit her in the guts when she found the photo of that Christmas, which happened a long time ago but that she remembered so clearly it was as if it’d happened just yesterday. Her house had been full of college students, the friends Alexander had managed to make in his first year in Columbia (in the span of three months). But Lu wasn’t surprised in her day, neither was she nowadays. The kid had no filter. Even when just came and showed himself more reticent to talk, it was evident. But Lu never saw any wick nature within the child, and thought he acted so defensive for being wronged in the past for another amount of people who’d judged him unfairly.

Lu had always felt the lack of shine in Alexander’s eyes, how he seemed to avoid both she and Henry during the first weeks of coexistence, and how afraid he looked each time they asked him something, past trauma of unjustified punishments coming through his mind like a flash that obligated him to curl on himself and turn his answers in nothing more than nods or shakes of head. It hurt Lu and Henry deeply. It was something they always knew would most likely happen once the child lived in another household (which ended up being theirs); they were aware that they could take the Fulton away from Alexander, they could erase those bastards’ presence from his life for good, but not the memories or the scars they’d gifted his mind and soul with.

They knew all that, but it was a very different thing to live it and feel powerless by how little they could do than simply give Alexander all the time he needed, leave all their doors open for when the kid was in need of help, and be there came what may. Alexander shared their same stubbornness, but also lacked their maturity to comprehend asking for help was not a weakness. Or maybe, more than a childish behaviour that time would eradicate at some point, it was a rooted fear, it was a poisoned, ugly plant that had grown enough until tangling its stalks around Alexander’s heart, refusing to let go despite being in a safe place.

What that kid must’ve lived to be so insecure around people, so afraid of interacting with others, to open up and express something more profound than his beliefs and thoughts… Neither she or Henry wanted to know, it terrified them to just imagine, and made their blood to boil at thinking a kid who had done no wrong had to suffer due to the sick and wicked minds of some…
“Lu, nothing to do with my cooking task, I’m just curious… Did you replace the extinguisher since last time, right?” asked Henry, walking in the room. He stopped abruptly when he saw the thin yet noticeable tear rolling down his wife’s cheek. “What’s wrong, honey?” he asked, sprinting to her and kneeling right beside her.

Lu gave a shy chuckle. “Nothing, just remembering things” she admitted, wiping away the tears and showing him the album.

Henry relaxed at the explanation. “Ah… You do those things in New Year’s Eve, after a few drinks” he laughed, taking the album in his hands and seeing the photo to blame for his wife’s sentimental moment. “Oh, I remember this!” he said, nostalgia hanging in his cheerful tone. “That year you went crazy because you wanted ‘the perfect Christmas’”

Lu rolled her eyes, though offering her husband a smile. “Oh, come on…”

“Remember the turkey?”

“That entire mess was all you”

“And when you matched Alexander with the wrong person?”

“Excuse me, but they ended up marrying!”

“And the tree! That was awesome!”

“Oh, come on, for one time I…”

“We need a real one” mimicked Henry, even imitating his wife’s hand gestures while talking. “We need a real tree if we want a real Christmas!”

“I’ve never killed another tree in my entire life” defended Lu, raising her chin, solemnly. “It is wise to rectify”

“Sure…” Henry laughed wholeheartedly as he glared at the photo. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget that Christmas in my entire life” he finally admitted, the same amount of nostalgia his wife was feeling.

“Neither will I” she agreed, nodding. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget anything we lived with Alex. He really was a turning point in my life”

“Thank you, love of my life” said Henry, though there was no bite in his voice whatsoever.

“Come on, you think the same”

“True, I do… Well, but in the end, the day had a happy ending”

“Of course it did! I was in charge of it” boasted Lu, smiling smugly.

“Oh, please…”

“It’s true. Now” she said, taking the album again in her hands. “Go try not to set the kitchen on fire. I don’t want a sequel to the memory, as fond as it is”

Henry faked a hurt expression. “Ouch, my dear, ouch”
“Go!” laughed Lu, pushing him in the right direction.

“Try not to flood the house getting too emotional” he teased back.

Lu rolled her eyes, taking another look at the photo. This time, the memories passed in her head clear as water.

“Everything fine, sweetie?”

“Yeah, don’t worry”

“Sure?”

The eye-roll of the kid was audible. “Sure, Lu…”

“You know you can tell us if it’s not”

“It is, I swear”

There was a slight tremble at the end of the word, but nothing that made Lu’s worry to grow. It sounded innocent, like when she laughed at a secret joke during class. A tender smile crept onto her face at the thought of her kid being happy.

“So, have you packed your bags for tomorrow?” she asked, changing the subject to a more casual one.

Alexander took his time to answer, before he cleared his throat. “Uh, yeah, yeah… You’ll come tomorrow morning, right?”

“Yeah…” she drawled, squinting her eyes in suspicion. “Remember to sleep properly”

“Uh, y-yeah…” he answered, clearly absent-mindedly.

“I hope you’ve been doing so…” she added, harshening her tone a bit.

Most of children needed their parents to remind them to do their homework, study or take the opportunity of college seriously. Alexander was the exact opposite. Lu didn’t like to remember that last week of high school, when finals pressured all teenagers and put their nerves at risk, when Alexander literally fainted in the middle of the hallway for ignoring food and sleeping hours. Thank goodness Hercules had been there and was still by her kid’s side to keep him in check. Along with other people.
After the incident with those kids who bullied Alexander, Lu met the group of friends her kid hung around with, approving them at how protective they’d been towards the Caribbean all along. She still wanted to meet them properly, as she’d only had time to meet the two Schuyler sisters, a French boy with maternal instincts (bless his soul, Alexander really needed one of those by his side) and a southerner boy whose last name she recalled poorly. Learning the names of the kids who’d helped Alexander fit in and feel like an ordinary boy for once would be very nice.

She’d realised it’d been a while since she’d heard Alexander’s voice and she furrowed her brows at the sound of muffled whispers.

“Alexander?” she called.

“Yes?” he asked, voice slightly pitched.

“Everything alright?” she asked again, it never seemed to be enough to leave her satisfied when it was about her kid.

“Yes, Lu, don’t worry” he answered, almost fondly.

She smiled a little. “I only want to make sure”

“I know…”

“Hey, are some of your friends still there?” she asked, suddenly. “I’d want to meet them properly when I come pick you up”

“Uh, they’re all in here” he said, thoughtful. “Angelica and Eliza’s sister is coming to visit today and all”

Ah, yes, the third Schuyler sister. It’d be nice to know the three daughters of her ex-classmate from college. It was still weird that Philip didn’t spend Christmas with them, though.

“Aren’t they going with their families for the holidays?” she asked.

“The Schuylers’ parents are on a business trip, so they’ll have to spend the Christmas alone. That’s why their sister’s coming here” he explained.

“I see… So a bit like Hercules’ parents?”

“Stop texting my friend…”

“I texted his mother, but alright” she laughed.

“And I guess” responded Alexander. “Though I don’t picture Angelica and Eliza’s parents spending Christmas on the fashion field”
Lu laughed, agreeing. In the meantime, she made sure to write the names Angelica and Eliza in her mind.

“And, well, Laf decided to spend Christmas here, because his family is also busy”

“Laf is…?”

“The one from France”

“Ah, right, the one you defended with teeth and nail when someone made fun of his pronunciation”

“Again: stop texting Hercules”

“Got me” she laughed.

“And John also decided to spend Christmas here” he added, a bit more forcibly this time.

“That’s your roommate, right?”

“Yes”

“He’s earned Heaven for putting up with your night schedule” she concluded, rolling her eyes affectionately.

“Ha, very funny”

“Really, though, are you taking it easy?”

“Yes, Lu”

“Have you eaten?”

“About to. We’re waiting for Eliza and then we’ll go eat at the cafeteria”

Lu’s chest felt warm at his words. It was a simple plan, a normal thing to do among friends. And that was why she felt at the verge of happy tears. Her Alexander, the same quiet kid that had built walls around him, whose only companions seemed to be his pen and bitter memories, was hanging out with friends, having fun. She couldn’t feel prouder.

“Have fun, sweetheart” she said, containing her shaking voice.

“Will do…” Again, a swallowed sound that Alexander drowned by clearing his throat. “Well, um… Is Henry behaving?” he asked, with a giggle.

Lu laughed. “He’s doing well. Santa won’t have to bring him coal this year”

“Good” he also laughed.

“Well, honey, I won’t entertain you any longer” she said, sniffing slightly.
“You’re not…” muttered the kid.

“See you tomorrow, okay, sweetie?”

“See you, Lu… Say ‘hi’ to Henry on my part”

“Will do” she nodded.

“Bye, Lu”

“Bye, sweetie”

The front door was opened, then, and a few moments later, Henry appeared at the doorframe of the dining room. He arched an eyebrow at the sight of his wife, crying slightly on the couch.

“What happened?” he asked, sprinting to her.

“Alexander’s gonna have lunch with his friends today” she explained, taking a deep breath.

“… And that’s why you’re crying like a Magdalene*?”

“You don’t understand… Leave me, I’m having an emotional-mummy moment”

“Well, sorry, but it just shocked me. Remember you once told me you had to be one of the few children who laughed when Mufasa died” he defended himself.

“That’s because I hated that fat-ass” she explained, crying harder.

“Gee… The day he leaves home, what will you do?”

“The house next door’s been vacant for years”

“Don’t you dare”

“I can’t anymore” she declared, getting up. “I’m going there today”

“I thought you have to go tomorrow?”

“Had”

“Lu…”

“It’s 23rd already! One day more, one day less, who cares?!”

“He does when you agreed on a day”

“I’ll make him a surprise visit” she planned out loud, wiping her tears and walking to the hallway. “Who doesn’t want a surprise visit of their mother?”

“In college? Everybody”

“Decorate the house!” she ordered, before slamming the front door shut.
Henry sighed in defeat. “This woman…”

A series of scratches were heard from the hallway. Making a face, Henry went directly to where the noises were coming from and opened the little door that was by the staircase. He sighed once more, passing a hand through his hair, in distress.

“I can only hope Lu and Alex’s bad tempers don’t collide today, I still have to tell her this… Damn luck of mine…”

Alexander hadn’t had a Christmas since… Well, since he was in Nevis. And he hadn’t had a proper one (you know, the ones in which the kids run downstairs and see plenty of presents wrapped under the tree? The ones from the commercials?) since his father was still part of his life. On a daily basis, those memories seemed so far away, but when he finally stopped and remembered them, they still burnt on his skin and hurt as it’d happened yesterday. Just that now Alexander was a kid who had the next chapter spoilt and knew his father would eventually leave.

But sometimes he liked to get lost in there. He was human after all, and he had emotions, despite what some people thought…

Though it was true they were never rich, things seemed a bit better when James Sr. was around. Stupidly, Alexander still thought his parents were meant for each other and that there could be no couple as close and perfect as them. Because though James Hamilton had abandoned Rachel and his children, Alexander was there to see them in action as a team, had witnessed the way Rachel’s eyes shone when she looked at her partner or remembered him.

He still cherished and clung to their last Christmas, maybe because he now knew it had been their last Christmas together as a proper family. He automatically felt at peace when he remembered, clear as day, the melody Rachel used to hum when she was doing something. He couldn’t help the wee smile that crept onto his face each time he remembered those quiet moments by his father’s side, glass of whiskey in hand, as he told his sons stories about his family. Alexander still remembered each thing he talked about, each name he said.

He still laughed at the memory of his brother trying a sip of their father’s whiskey when he’d gone to help Rachel with something in the kitchen. James Jr. had dropped the glass, claiming it tasted horrible and coughing like crazy. The sound of glass breaking made their parents run to the living room, in worry, and when Rachel saw the mess, she started screaming profanities, as she helped her
oldest son. Alexander and his father had shared a glare then, amused by Rachel’s famous temper.

He still cherished that look. It meant it’d been real, his father and he got along, so, maybe, it hadn’t been his fault he’d left…

After that year, James left, and the family started to have plenty of economical problems. Rachel worked so hard and it cost her health so much that they barely had time to spend together, no matter how hard she’d tried. And after Alexander was sent to the States, his foster homes didn’t mind him much – or he lasted long enough – to celebrate the holiday with him, as if he were part of the household.

He knew that year things were going to change. Lu had been asking him what he liked to do, what food he liked the most, what he’d want as a present… When Alexander wasn’t working to exhaustion, he feared the 24 that was printed in red on his calendar. Thank goodness, he spent most of his time working and studying, or he’d have a crisis and that was the last thing he needed right now, in a new place, with new faces, and when finally that stupid problem with Monroe and company was solved. The kid had tried to come closer to him, but Eliza always stood protectively by his side, and Monroe would simply turn around and leave him be.

And in the rare occasions Alexander was seen alone through campus, he had declined a conversation with him. He knew Monroe maybe only wanted to apologise, but Alexander wasn’t really in the mood to talk it out. It wasn’t like he was an important person in his life, someone he depended on.

In short, when his phone rang that day and saw it was Lucy, Alexander knew what was about to come. It wasn’t as if he hated the idea of spending time with them. Oddly enough, he adored the marriage. And not only because they had saved his life. They were wonderful people; they debated about everything and every opinion was respected; they were very patient with him in his first week of coexistence; they always made sure he was taking care of himself and there hadn’t been a day where they hadn’t called him to make sure everything was going fine. Especially after the incident. He was still bothered that Eliza told them everything, but deep down he liked to be looked after. He thought he missed feeling like that from time to time.

So, the problem wasn’t spending time with the Knox at Christmas. The problem was that he feared that foreign sensation of dependence, he was afraid he was not fulfilling his promise of fending for himself… He’d tried to drown his worries with homework and projects and exams… Just so his friends would drag him to someplace to have fun. In between laughs and good times, Alexander’s mind drifted to his most buried and unspoken fears. He was developing dependence of the Knox back at home and of his friends in college.

And Alexander found himself not minding at all when he imagined a future surrounded by
these people.

A little giggle escaped from his mouth when some lips kissed the crook of his neck.

“What’re you thinking about?” asked Laurens, hot breath against his neck.

Ah, there was also another little problem that made dread spread across his stomach when Alexander thought about it.

“About that if you do that again while I’m talking to Lu, I’ll kill you” replied Alexander, pointing at the spot Laurens had just kissed.

The southerner chuckled. “You can’t be a lawyer with a criminal record”

“I can only be caught if they found your body”

“That escalated quickly” laughed Laurens.

They had been dating since Laurens punched Monroe for spreading Alexander’s roots throughout the college. He hadn’t told Lu when he came to comfort him after the principal called her. Only their friends there knew, and after seeing the huge fight Laurens had with his father after breaking up with Martha and outing himself, they didn’t pressure him or comment about it.

Alexander knew he had to come clean sooner or later. And, for once, he chose later. He hadn’t heard anything bad about gay people in the Knox’s house – in contrast to the last foster family he had before them; Alexander forbid himself to speak their name ever again – but he still was terrified. Just because the Knox didn’t hate on people that had nothing to do with them meant they were going to accept him after he told them he was dating a boy. He’d seen that behaviour before, and though it didn’t match neither Lu or Henry, he couldn’t help but worry.

Because everything was going fine, perfectly fine, and he was going to ruin it for not being true to his word and be independent and he still had a few years of college left and he’d have to find a job and, okay, maybe that wouldn’t be too hard, he was used to work non-stop, but what if his marks stumble a little for the sudden change, and what if…?

“Hey, do you have a ciggie?”

Alexander blinked down at his boyfriend, looking up at him in expectation. “What?”

“Do you have a ciggie?” he repeated, normally.
“A…? No, no, I don’t, why would I?”

“Relax, you sound like I asked for drugs…”

“Nicotine can be considered a drug”

“That’s beyond the point”

“I didn’t know you were a smoker?”

“I’m not, but I always saw some part of the couple smoking after a quickie in movies, and I thought it looked cool, so I wanted to give it a shot”

“… Are you serious right now, John?”

“I never joke about childhood dreams, that’s not funny”

“Well, no, I don’t have a cigarette. And I don’t want you to smoke either”

Laurens huffed. “What’re you now? My father?”

“I don’t want you to become a smoker because of me”

“Who said it’d be because of you?” asked Laurens, half-closing his eyes and getting up from bed, body covered by the blanket. “I’m gonna look if somebody in here has one” he explained, heading to the door.

“John, don’t you think you’re forgetting about something?”

“Um?” he gave himself an up and down look. “Oh, yes! The dorm keys!”

“Get dressed!” ordered Alexander, blushing in second-hand embarrassment.

Laurens found a cigarette in no time. And once he was back, he sat on the desk facing the opened window, with a stern look on his face as he smoke the cigarette slowly. Alexander started to pack his things for when Lu came pick him up the following day, deciding to not give that scene too much thought.

“Aaah, yes, this is life” he said in a sigh, exhaling the smoke and coughing at the lack of practice.

“John, stop it. You’re stinking this place” reprimanded Alexander, weakly.

“Shut up, you egocentric, can’t you see I’m thinking about me?” said Laurens, repeating the action and coughing louder than before.

Alexander shook his head in defeat as a series of loud knocks were heard from the door. He
sprinted to open up, worrying when Hercules stood at the other side, a frown of his face.

“Let me see your phone, please!” he said, grabbing the Caribbean by the arms.

“Uh, okay… On the desk…” acceded Alex, pointing at the place.

“Thank you, than… What the hell is wrong with that guy?” asked Hercules, stopping in his tracks when he saw Laurens.

“Lack of oxygen at birth” answered Alexander, closing the door as he rolled his eyes.

“The doctor was a novice. Thank goodness, I clung to life” told Laurens, solemnly.

“And that was the first of a long list of mistakes made by you, right?” asked Hercules, grabbing Alex’s phone with urgency.

“Stop it, you two…” said Alexander, going back to his packing task.

“Fucking hell!” cursed Hercules, throwing the phone on the mattress.

Alexander frowned at his action. “Careful! It’s the only one I’ve got!”

“Shit, shit, shit, shit” muttered Hercules, hands covering his face.

“What’s your problem now, you walking agony?” asked Laurens, exhaling smoke and coughing once again.

“John, stop it” insisted Alexander, between gritted teeth this time.

“I think I declared to Laf through text” explained Hercules, face red.

“Lame”

“John!”

“It wasn’t supposed to be for him!” Hercules defended himself, looking enragedly at the teenager. Softening his features, he addressed Alexander: “I was talking with a cousin and I accidentally sent the text to him. I was hoping it’d been you, but…” He punched the mattress.

“Stop mistreating my things” admonished Alex, frowning in empathy toward his friend.

“Maybe it’s for the better, man” Laurens tried to cheer him up. “You’ve been pining on him since he arrived. The universe is sick of waiting for you to come clean”

“Says the guy who pinned on Alexander for months”

“And I remember you pestering me about telling him” recalled Alex, crossing both arms and fixing his friend with a glare.

“I don’t even know why I came here in the first place. You’re the worst love advisers ever” complained Hercules, rubbing his temples.

“Look, if you insist on being a coward piece of shit, I’d suggest you take his phone when he’s not looking and delete the text” advised Laurens, shrugging one shoulder.
“What if he’s already read it? He’s a maniacal who doesn’t tolerate seeing unread messages on his phone”

“He’s helping Eliza with the theatre. He won’t look at his phone until they’re finished” He looked at his watch. “According to my calculations… you’ve got around twenty minutes”

“I thought you sucked at Maths?” asked Alex, raising one eyebrow.

“This is not Maths, Alexander, this is life”

“More of stalking, if you ask me…”

Hercules jumped up from bed. “Thanks, John!”

“Nothing, you just owe me”

“A fuck is what I owe you” replied Hercules, sprinting out of the room.

“That’s the price of being a good friend” lamented John, exhaling another cloud of smoke and coughing.

Alexander knitted his brows, trotted to where his boyfriend was, ripped the cigarette from his grip, pot it out on the windowsill and then threw it out. Laurens saw all this with a frown on his face.

“There, enough with the smoking” declared the Caribbean, sternly.

“This relationship will go nowhere if you don’t let me be me” warned Laurens.

By the time the couple arrived to the workshop, they found Hercules in the clothes section, organising and adjusting sizes. His look was everything but friendly.

“Thought you were going to try and take Laf’s phone?” asked Alexander, confused.

“I was. But Eliza asked me to help her with the costumes. Fucking sweetness of a girl…”

And just as he said that, Eliza’s voice was heard from the other side of the room. The middle Schuyler sister came their way, hoofing her shoes on the wooden floorboard, red face from ire and gesticulating, while her older sister nodded along her complaints.

“That’s not the proper way of doing things, dang it!” she cursed, kicking one board before keep
going. “Now, I’m gonna take the blame for the stupid irresponsibility of… Oh, hi, Alex!” she greeted, changing her wrath for a genuine happiness that surprised everybody but Angelica, who rolled her eyes.

“What’s wrong, Betsey?” asked the immigrant.

She waved one hand, nonchalantly. “Ah, nothing, it was just a little confusion”

“Well, thank goodness. Had it been big, you’d have killed somebody…” commented Laurens.

“The principal cut the money back because the one making the math got confused, and now Eliza has to re-do some scenes” explained Angelica.

“I’m sorry, Betsey…”

“Don’t be, it’s not your fault” she dismissed, forcing a smile to conceal her bother.

“If some of us had accepted the task as another of us begged him to do…” drawled Angelica, landing her eyes slowly on Alexander.

The Caribbean half-closed his. “I’ve already told you I’m not interested…”

“Leave it, Angelica” chimed in Hercules, though more comprehensive toward the girl. “I’ve been trying to convince him to be part of the debate club and look at him”

Alexander sighed exhaustedly. “I have nothing to do in the debate club”

“Um… Is this boy the same one who drives us crazy all lunchbreaks about politics, laws or even what food the schools serve?”

“We spend most of our youth in schools, more couples are formed by two people who work and don’t have time to drive their children back home and then to school again…”

“Why did you work him up?” lamented Hercules, though with a slight smile on his lips.

“Man, you really should try it out” joined Laurens, slightly concerned at the evasive glare of his boyfriend.

“I’ll think about it”

It wasn’t the first time he’d made that promise he wasn’t planning on fulfilling. The group exchanged a glare, but decided to let it go. By today. Lafayette joined them, frowning at some script he was holding.

“Eliza, chérie, you can’t delete the scene of the bridge!” he complained, indignantly.

“Yes, I can, because that rusty platform isn’t reliable” she explained, calmly.

“But that scene shows the growth of the couple!” insisted the Frenchman.

“We can make them talk in a café” dismissed Angelica.
“A café?” asked Lafayette. He moved his tongue inside his mouth, and then clicked it. “Of course, and then what? Are they gonna declare their love through texts?”

“You could be surprise” chuckled Laurens, throwing a knowing glare to Hercules, who threw daggers at him as he blushed. Alexander nudged him.

Lafayette shook his head. “Where did you American leave your romantic side? In Britain?!”

“Dating a British guy here” said Angelica, raising her hand. “So, I can say your statement could be accurate”

“Mon Dieu, I can’t work like this”

“Don’t work, then. Let’s go grab lunch, I’m starving”

“True! Peggy must be waiting for us in the bus stop” nodded Eliza, turning around. She froze in place. “Uh, Alex, isn’t that your… Mh, Mrs Knox?” she corrected herself on time.

Alexander turned his head so fast he almost made himself dizzy. Lu was actually standing there at the doorframe, looking around in awe. Once their eyes met, she greeted him with a wave of hand. Alexander returned it awkwardly.

“Thought she was supposed to come tomorrow?” asked Laurens, in a whisper.

“She was”

Lu came to them in the meantime, and before Alexander could ask anything, she gave him a hug.

“I missed you so much!” she said when the hug ended.

“We talk everyday” said Alexander, raising one eyebrow.

“That’s not the same” Looking over his shoulder, she gifted the rest of the group with a bright smile. “We see each other again”

“Hi, Mrs Knox” they all said, almost at the same time.

“You can call me Lu, please!” she said, waving one hand. “So, the Schuyler sisters” she said, looking at the two girls with amusement. “Where’s the third one? Alexander told me she was visiting today”

“We were about to pick her up and go grab lunch” explained Angelica.

“Just as I told you over the phone” said Alexander, fixing the woman with a pointed glare.

“Why don’t I drive you there?” she proposed, ignoring her kid’s words. “That way we can meet properly. Last time was… a bit rush” she said, not wanting to remember the whole scene.
“True” nodded Eliza, in empathy.

“And when we’re finished, you’re allowed to come home with us and have a sleepover or whatever teenagers do these days”

“Oh, we wouldn’t want to be a bother” hurried to say Hercules.

“Nonsense! Alex’s friends could never be a bother. And I think a good shared Christmas could be a perfect thank you for what you did for him” she added, smiling at Alexander, who avoided her glare.

“It was nothing, really” assured Eliza.

“For me, it was everything. And although this hard-headed won’t tell you himself, he thinks the same” she said, pointing at the Caribbean, who frowned up at her.

Angelica cackled. “Brutal honesty. I like you already”

“Really, Mr… Um, Lu, we don’t want to bother you. We’re quite a big group” said Lafayette, putting in the woman’s shoes.

“Our house is more than big for the whole of you” she replied, stubbornly.

“Let the poor woman if she wants to thank us” interceded Laurens. “Besides, we were all going to get bored to death these holidays…”

“All settled then!” decided Lu, clapping both hands before anyone else could try to dissuade her.

“Get in the car, we pick your sister up and go home. I left Henry putting the decorations, so we better hurry”

“You’re a kamikaze, Lu, really” said Alex, laughing slightly.

“You have no idea” she nodded, glad to see him smiling.

“Alright, if you’re ready to go pack your things, so I can lock this” said Eliza, showing a key to the group.

“Wait, I have to pick my phone…” began to say Lafayette.

“I can go look fo…” tried to propose Hercules.

“Ah, nothing, I’ve got in my back pocket” laughed the Frenchman.

Hercules’ sour expression was enough to make Laurens cackle loudly, though nobody understood him.

“..."You always have to make a scene, right?” complained Angelica, as the whole group made their way to the front door of the Knox’s residence.
Peggy rolled her eyes. “Uh, sorry, I thought you were very persistent about me not getting close to sketchy cars before leaving me alone with Mum and Dad”

“I told you to be careful. Not to run away while screaming ‘Kidnappers, kidnappers’ in the middle of the street”

Alexander watched with amusement the argument between sisters, while Eliza simply discussed with Laf a few things of the script. She seemed to be pretty used to this. The Caribbean took the opportunity to scrutinize the new addition to the group. She was smaller than Angelica and Eliza, her hair was curlier and tied in a high and messy ponytail (he guessed she couldn’t tame it) and she seemed pretty fond of the colour yellow, if her dress, nail polish and backpack were any indication. She was the one who laughed the most at the incident when they went to pick her up, so Alexander supposed she was a very joyful girl with a great sense of humour.

He liked her. Now, she only had to like him back, which was always the most difficult part.

“I hope the house is not very messy” apologised Lu, while unlocking the front door. “I wasn’t expecting guests and I left my husband in charge of putting on the decorations, so, we can expect anything”

“He wouldn’t dare to get the house dirty if he saw you leaving” said Alexander.

“One can never be sure with this man. Henry, we’re here!” she called, stepping to the side to let the group enter.

The living room was... Well, a mess. Boxes were scattered through it and there were, literally, four decorations on. A Santa Claus that had seen better years hanging from the lamp; a crystal ball with a house inside that looked made of ginger by the side of a Santa’s sled, with no Santa Claus and a Rudolph that was missing his famous nose. There was also one socket hung on the wall. The rest consisted on tinsels, ribbons, balls and the tangled Christmas lights all scattered through the floor.

Alexander casted a cautious glare to Lu, seeing the woman still had her smile on place but now seemed faker, more forced. The group gnawed at their bottom lips, smiling slightly.

“What did I tell you...” she whispered, a tic in her right eyebrow. Then, without warning, she hollered: “HENRY!”

A series of things falling and curses under a man’s breath was heard from upstairs.
“Come down here!” ordered Lu, tapping her foot furiously. “I told you I was coming back with Alex and you make this mess?! Not even the tree is out!”

“Coming!” said the man, not minding her reprimand.

“I’ll go get him” suggested Alexander, wanting to keep things calmed.

“Yes, sweetheart, you do that. I’ll try to fix this” she nodded.

“Let us help” proposed Lafayette.

“No, no, guests don’t do work”

“I like this woman more than ever” commented Laurens, under his breath. Herc nudged him while Angelica sent one of her warning looks.

Alexander did as much before turning around and going upstairs. It wasn’t difficult to find his foster father, as the ladder that led to the attic was down, and the access door was wide opened. Alexander didn’t think it twice before taking the liberty to go fetch the man, who seemed to be talking in whispers.

It was in that moment when Alex made a mental note about whacking Laurens in the back of his head for eating his ear off by telling him ghost stories when he also couldn’t sleep.

“Henry?” called Alex, looking around the dusty and unorganised attic. “Henry, I’d go down if I were you. Lu is doing that thing with the eyebrow while she smiles demonically”

The man in question appeared at some corner behind a pile of old boxes, prepared to give him a proper answer. The words died in his throat when a little short-legged quadruped came his way running like crazy. Alexander almost lost his balance for the impact, but was able to grab the floor on time, allowing the dog to cuddle against his right arm and lick his face, happy to see him as if they were old friends.

“What… Henry!” he said, petting the dog’s head to calm it down.

“Do you like her?” he asked, giggling sheepishly.

“What are you doing hidden in the attic with a dog?” asked the kid, bluntly.

“I was trying to find the right moment to tell Lu” he admitted.

“Well, you haven’t done a very good job at it…”

Henry swallowed, guiltily. “Is Lu too mad?”

“Well, you shouldn’t have left the living room in such a state”
“Wait, she was screaming like that without seeing the kitchen?”

And, just as he said that, they heard Lu’s scream from downstairs. “HENRY KNOX, COME DOWN HERE IMMEDIATELY!”

“I think she just did” said Alexander, still caressing the dog, that had sat close to him. “Since when is she here?”

“Since this morning, uh, before she went to look for you. As she was vulnerable because she missed you, I thought it would be a good day”

“Try to not explain it like that to her…”

“Got it”

“Wait, you’ve got her for how long?”

“Well, I mean, I went to the shelter once a week… Then, twice, thrice… And before I knew I was signing the papers and bringing little Fifi home”

“Fifi?” he repeated, making a face.

“She looks like a Fifi”

Alexander and the dog shared a glare, tilted their heads to the side at the same time and then, the student declared.

“I think she looks more like a Dawn”

The dog barked, as in reaffirmation. The two men shushed her rapidly. Alexander smiled cockily up at the man.

“I think I won”

“Kid, you’re busy with college and stuff, you won’t be here taking care of her” pouted Henry.

“I don’t think any of us would” shrugged Alexander.

“Yeah, we will. I made a list of pros and cons, and the pros always win!” declared Henry, smiling. “For example, pro: she’s around three years old, so she won’t pee around the house”

“And that puddle over there?” asked Alexander, pointing at one corner of the attic.

“… … … Pro: she’s not trained. We can teach her all we want. I hear this breed is very smart!”

“You really are something” said Alexander, shaking his head. “You know Lu is against animals in this house. And whatever you did to the kitchen corroborates her posture”

“Shit, you’re right”
He looked at Alexander with pleading eyes, and the kid already knew what Henry was going to ask him.

“No” he said, sternly.

“Alex, please”

“No, I won’t keep her busy. She’s acting very weird and it cost me almost one year to make a group of friends”

“Just make her go shopping, you know it always works!” He took the dog in his arms and showed her to him. “Do it for her. Look at this face”

It wasn’t a puppy, but was very little and her fur was a mix of white and light brown. And bright eyes that stared straight at him in admiration. Alexander sighed in resignation.

“Alright, I’ll try to convince her”

“Thanks, boy. I owe you big time”

Alexander thinned his lips at the phrasing. “Just… Get down already before she loses the little patience she has left”

“True, true”

“The tree, Henry”

“True, true”

After making sure Fifi/Dawn was left comfortable, they made their way to the dining room, where Alexander’s friends were chatting. He nodded his head and then headed to the kitchen, while Henry put on the tree in the living room.

Well, Lu wasn’t exaggerating her anger. The kitchen looked like a crime scene, if you watched it from the food’s point of view. She turned around when she felt someone behind her – Alexander never knew how she could do that – and her features softened when she saw it was him.

“Ah, Alex. Did you find him?”
“He’s setting up the Christmas tree” he explained. “Um, Lu…”

“Huh, let’s do the countdown of how long he’ll be without cursing”

Alex let out a little giggle. “Um, Lu, I was thinking”

“Done!” declared Henry, surprising both the woman and the kid.

Squinting her eyes, Lu sprinted out of the kitchen. Alexander followed her, and he found his friends at the doorframe of the living room, admiring the bright and colourful tree that was standing in the corner of the room.

“What in the world is **that**?” asked Lu, blinking perplexed.

“It’s a fibre-optic tree. A friend of mine talked me about them and I spent months to get one. Isn’t it the best thing your eyes have ever seen?” he introduced, gesticulating dramatically.

“It’s beautiful!” praised Peggy, mouth wide open in awe.

“Are you kidding me, Henry?” asked Lu, in a groan.

“What now?” asked the man, getting angry. “No cursing for the Christmas lights, no broken things, no leaves on the floor… It’s perfect for our marriage!”

“But did you have to bring it on our first Christmas with Alexander and his friends?!” asked the woman. “I don’t want to show that fake shit to them”

“We already saw it” said Laurens.

“Hush, John, have self-preservation…” muttered Hercules.

“Oh, come on! They were turned on and all with the fucking tree!”

“Don’t use that vocabulary in front of the kids!” gasped Lu.

“Oh, the Queen of refinement just talked!”

“Actually” interjected Alexander, just in time to stop Lu’s rebuttal. “I think I preferred a real tree. Just for this year”

“Ha!” laughed Lu, crossing both arms with superiority.

Henry looked angrily at the kid. “C’mon, Alexander, don’t…” He stopped mid-sentence when the Caribbean threw a couple of glares to the ceiling. Henry understood him immediately and in a still bothered mutter, gave in. “Well, okay, if it’s just for this year. But next year I’ll have my way!”

“Whatever, whatever” dismissed Lu, waving one hand.
“I left dinner ready. You’ll just have to put it in the oven two hours prior and take a look at it each half an hour or so”

“I can cook, Lu”

“You say that because you didn’t have to clean all that filth. How you managed to stain the ceiling is beyond my reasoning”

“Leeeeave already, the kids must be waiting!”

“Okay! … One more thing!”

The group laughed at Henry’s loud groan of exasperation. Alexander simply smiled fondly, a sudden sensation of anxiety turning his stomach into a knot. He gnawed at his bottom lip with force when he remembered the reason why he was doing this. He’d always refused to have pets because he could get too attached, and he’d lost plenty of furry friends when his previous families decided to kick him out.

He knew it was irrational that the Knox would get rid of him, they always showed themselves very caring and always asked for his opinion. Yet, there was a little voice in the back of his head that tormented him and made him doubt about everything. And he hated to not be certain about a situation, to have complete control over it.

“Alexander?” Eliza’s voice took him out of his blurry thoughts. She frowned slightly at him. “Are you okay? Your hands are shaking” she pointed out.

Alexander looked down at them and they were, indeed. He crossed both arms to hide them both. “Um, nothing, I don’t like cold very much”

“Do you want my scarf?” she proposed, already taking it off.

“No, no, it’s…” His lips were sealed when he felt the fabric around his neck.

“There” she nodded, in satisfaction.

“Betsey, you could get cold yourself” he tried to argue.

“Nah, I’ll zip my jacket all the way” she smiled, doing so. “See? I’m used to this weather, anyways”

“But…”

“Your cheeks are even blushing from the cold” she pointed out again.

That just made him blush harder, as he cursed himself in his mind. Angelica’s attentive look in their direction didn’t help to the cause. Gosh, that girl was really scary.
“It was really cool how you ended the fight back there” she commented, casually.

“I’ve got practice” he shrugged.

She giggled. “I could tell. You know? You could really use that in the debate club” she suggested, shyly.

“Maybe” he dismissed. Rapidly, he added. “But I’ve got a very bad temper”

Eliza blinked perplexedly at that. “Huh, if you call that a temper…”

“Really, Betsey, I know it’s not my thing”

“Said the student lawyer”

“I don’t think any judge would listen to an ill-tempered lawyer”

“Listen, you’re fine” assured Eliza, rolling her eyes tenderly. “I’ve seen worse. I know because I’m usually surrounded by strong-tempered people. I like them”

“You know what I like?” chimed in Angelica, leaning closer to her sister. “How cute your relationship with Laurens is” she answered herself, with a taint of second-meaning Alexander didn’t catch. Eliza gifted her sister with an elbow on the chest, making her bent over herself and hiss in pain. “Ow, my boob!”

“We’re looking for that” muttered the middle Schuyler sister.

Lu had come out of the house in that moment. She threw a rapid curious glare to Angelica, but nothing comparable with the one she sent in Alex and Eliza’s direction. A little huff escaped from her lips.

“Alright, we’re ready to go”

“Have you told him where the extinguisher is?”

“… Well, now that you say it…” she said, running back in again.

Laurens pulled on his sleeve to whisper in his ear. “I love your family, can I live in here?”

“Don’t push it” said Alexander, his heart rate increasing at the thought of coming out for that to happen.

They spent around an hour inside the car, going in circles in some forest Lu claimed to know at the palm of her hand. Alexander was starting to suspect that was very far from the truth when he saw Lu
looking around frantically, muttering things she saw to remember where they were. He sighed and thought that maybe Henry did owe him something for this trip.

“What’s wrong with your sister?” asked Lafayette in concern.

Peggy fell asleep as soon as she was against the cushions of the backseat, snoring slightly. Angelica looked at her, gave her an up and down look, shrugged and then was back to look at the nothingness.

“She was born that way”

That didn’t make Lafayette’s worry to subdue…

Without he realising, Hercules didn’t stop throwing glares to his jeans. He could see the form of the mobile in there. Surely with the notification of his text message right in front of the screen. He swallowed a few times, scheming plan after plan. None satisfied him enough, he always found a flaw.

“I think so much staring is illegal” said Laurens, casually, making him jump in his seat. “Though, you’ll have to ask Alexander. He’s the one studying Laws”

“I’ll made a mental note for later” he replied, rolling his eyes.

“Have you fixed your mess already?”

“Trying to”

“Want help?”

Hercules seized him with a glare.

“To be honest I’m not sure” he admitted. “But I’m more desperate than anything, so…”

“I appreciate our friendship very much” drawled Laurens, leaning on his seat to look at Lafayette properly. “Hey, Laf” he called, interrupting the conversation the Frenchman was having with Eliza. “Can I borrow your phone, please? Mine’s about to die”

Lafayette sighed. “Johnny, I’ve told you to always make sure your phone is charged before leaving home”
“I was gonna come with y’all” shrugged the boy.

“Alright, wait a moment” said Laf, rummaging through his pockets. Hercules’ eyes shone in delight when he finally had the item in front of him. “Oh, wait! Now that I’ve got it, let me see if I’ve got any texts…”

Hercules’ expression fell. Out of frustration, he whacked Laurens in the head, making the boy to moan.

“Aw, man!”

“Oh, my God, here it is!” celebrated Lu, eyes sparkling as she stepped forcefully on the brakes.

The suddenness of the situation made everyone to go forward in their seats. Laurens was the only one who fell and bumped into the passenger seat in front of him. He moaned louder that time, rubbing his aching nose.

“Aw, man, this is abuse!”

“Buckle up, John…” reprimanded Alexander, in a sigh.

Peggy woke up then, yawning. “Is dinnertime already?” she asked, scratching the back of her head.

“Really, what’s wrong with her?” asked Lafayette again.

“Ignore her, it’s alright” insisted Angelica, waving one hand.

Lu jumped out from the car first, squeaking from happiness.

“See this beauty over here?” she asked, pointing at one tree she looked at with admiration. “I know we’ve been going in circles for an hour, but when you finally meet the one you know it’s worth the wait and not simply pick the first tree you see” she lectured, leaning on the tree with a kind of cockiness.

“Literally, that’s the first tree we saw” pointed out Angelica.

Lu gave her a small laugh. “Nah, it is not”

“It is. Look” she insisted, turning around to point at something in the distance. “That over there? It’s the 99 cents shop that’s at the other side of the road. We saw it when we came”

“… … … … Just for that, you’ll look for the axe on your own”

“Alright, duh”
“You haven’t seen our truck, right?” said Alexander, as he helped Laurens to get to his feet and get out of the car.

“Why?” she asked, squinting her eyes.

She trotted to the back of the car, Lu opening the truck in the distance. She pulled the tap up and saw a museum of old junk, all piled.

“It’s at the bottom!” said Lu.

“… Fuck me…”

Henry had fallen asleep at some point, a game show lulled him somehow. He didn’t wake up until Fifi/Dawn started to bark loudly. Henry jumped in his seat, the remote that had been resting on his chest falling loudly to the floor as he looked at his surroundings. The dog wagged her tail at the sight of him waking up and barked another couple of times. Henry petted her head as he yawned.

“What is it, little one?” he asked, still a bit sleepily. He looked at his watch and his eyes went wide when he saw the hour. “Already?! I have to take the dinner out the oven. Thanks, Fifi”

The dog barked again, as if saying ‘you’re welcome’. She was about to follow the man until something caught her eye. Curious, she walked closer to the power strip, where plenty of things were plug in. She jumped backward when a little spark occurred. She growled under her breath and then ran away, deciding to accompany the human.

Meanwhile, Henry had entered the kitchen, inspecting the place with eyes squinted, slumber still blinding him a little.

“Huh, where are the mitts? … … Meh, it can’t be that hot” he decided, with a shrug.

Yawning once again, he opened the door and took the tray out. The hot touch of it really woke him completely, then.
“Shit!” he cursed, jumping on spot, hands turning red. “Shit, it’s hot, hot, hot!”

Henry looked around desperately. By that time, the dog was already at the door, looking him up and down in astonishment. The man couldn’t take it any longer and, by instincts more than by logic, threw the tray and all the steaming food on it, to the other side, which happened to be the dining room.

Fifi/Dawn followed the tray with the sight, seeing it fly and fall right against a glass half full of water. This fell right on the top of the several wires, plugged in the power strip. That made the item to throw more sparks than before to the air, and one of them landed on the curtains, dancing by the slight breeze that entered through the opened glass sliding door.

The dog started to bark loudly when the spark turned into a flame, and soon enough the white curtain was on flames.

Henry was still oblivious to it all, washing his burning hands and hissing from pain.

“Dang it, how will I be able to read now?” he lamented. Groaning, he turned around, frowning down at the dog. “Fifi, stop it already! I know it fell, I was there and saw…!”

His words were muted by the chaotic scene in the dining room. The dog stopped barking, but looked frantically between the fire and her owner.

“But, when the heck did that happen?!”

Henry hurried to open one of the lower cupboards, where two extinguishers were. He took one of them blindly and ran to the doorframe that separated the kitchen from the dining room and pulled on the levers and pointing at the fire with the nozzle.

Instead of the foam he was expecting, the extinguisher spat several confetti that landed on the dining room, helping the fire to expand faster and to more places. Henry blinked perplexed at that, the dog barking by his side. He read the label, seeing it was a joke-extinguisher. He frowned enragedly.

“Well, we can say my sense of humour backfired” he told the dog, laughing slightly. He slapped himself across the face. “Focus, man!”
He turned around, dropping the useless extinguisher to the floor and took the real one. This time, the levels were hard as a rock, and Henry had to fight an arduous battle to make it work.

“What kind of childproof shit is this?!” he grunted.

The levels finally gave in, and Henry planted his feet firmly on the ground, to not fall and make a bigger mess. When the fire had finally died down, he was left at the doorframe, panting heavily. He took in the incinerated objects, swallowing in fear.

“W-Well… It could’ve been worse, right?” he asked, looking at the dog for reassurance.

In that small amount of time, the rail of the curtains fell from its place, falling on the top of the TV, making it fall and break against the floor.

“… …”

Henry dropped the extinguisher to the floor, the dog watching it with caution. He, then, followed suit, completely defeated. Fifi/Dawn also sat beside him, licking at her paws, calmed down now that the chaos had ended.

Chapter End Notes

*Crying like a Magdalene (Llorar como una Magdalena): That's our version of saying 'crying one's eyes out'. It makes a reference to Mary Magdalene's crying when she saw Jesus' death. It's said she was the one who cried the most.*
Angelica had taken out half of the junk from the trunk, while the rest of the group waited patiently. Lafayette and Eliza were still discussing the changes they wanted on the script, trying to reach an agreement; Hercules was throwing scared glares to the Frenchman, following every move and looking to the side when Lafayette felt the glares on the top of him. Laurens and Peggy were talking about something that seemed to have them very entertained and happy, if their smiles were any indication. Lu and Alex were the only ones in silence, seeing the task Angelica was performing, cursing her luck.

“So, Alex…” began Lu, conversationally.

“Yes?”

“How’s college going?”

“Fine” he replied, automatically.

“Are you passing everything?”

“Yes”

“Are the teachers good?”

“You know they are, I told you this morning” answered the kid, throwing her a suspicious glare.

“Just curious”

“Alright…”

“Is anything else you want to tell me?”

Alexander thought for a moment, feeling a strange feeling in his gut. He didn’t think
Hercules had told her about the debate club, she’d have said something by now… And by the look Hercules had on his face right now, reconsidering his life choices, Alexander supposed he had bigger things on his mind right now that what he decided to do in his free time.

“No, I don’t think so…” he answered, unsurely.

“Anybody on the side I should know about?” she asked, going more to the point.

Then, Alexander did feel the world spinning. How had she known? Did she know at all? He’d tried to be careful, he kept the conversations with Laurens at minimum and thank goodness the freckled guy had played along, with full experience on the matter to not question his actions.

He supposed if Lu knew was because he did something wrong. He was annoyingly transparent, and that was a freaking curse most of the times. Especially in moments like this. A series of images flashed through his mind, things he thought to have overcome now that they’d ended. A sense of déjà vu bathed him, and he could feel himself shaking under the layers of clothes he had on.

He had messed it up again. Lu knew. Somehow, she knew, and she was interrogating him while everybody had their minds busy with something else than them. If she didn’t get the answer she wanted now, she’d get it when his friends were gone. Because he was so stupid he allowed her to see when the Christmas break was around the corner…

Gosh, he would be left alone, under the spotlight of unceasing questions, for two days in a row before he could go back to college… If they let him go back to college… He didn’t know how much power Lu could have on her field, but he didn’t want to learn if she had enough to take his scholarship away from him if he didn’t convince her on time that he was interested on nobody. Or at least, somebody of his same sex.

“Alexander” called Eliza, again taking him out of his thoughts.

With her voice, the air seemed to be back in his throat. His heart rate that had been drumming loudly in his ears, slowed down at the sight of her shy smile and those eyes that, though dark in colour, were always bright. Once she caught a glimpse of his features, her expression changed drastically.

Really, fuck his transparency…

“Alex, are you…”
“Did you need anything, Betsey?” he asked, after a clear of throat.

“Um…” she blinked, a bit taken aback. “Laf wanted to know if you could lend us a hand in the Spanish translations”

“Sure” he nodded, numbly, the world coming back to focus slowly. He dared to look up at Lu, who was looking back at him with an expression he didn’t want to read, in fear of what he could see there. “Um, do you mind?”

“Not at all, sweetheart” she replied, still with that tender tone.

Alexander had enough experience to not lower his guard for a simple tone of voice. “T-Thanks”

“Is everything alright, sweetie?” she asked, now sounding concerned.

“Yes” he replied, maybe too fast.

“Are you still cold?” asked Eliza, in a whisper.

“I’m fine” he insisted, looping his arm with hers to get grounded.

“Found it!” declared Angelica, turning the attention of the group back to her. She was raising the axe above her head.

“T-took you long enough” complained Laurens.

“Shut up, can’t you see she’s armed now?” warned Peggy.

“Good job, sweetheart” nodded Lu, taking the axe and patting the girl on the arm. “Now, let’s get the job done”

“Are you sure you’ll be able to do it?” asked Hercules, frowning.

“Will I be able to? Will I be able to?” asked Lu, with a sly smile. “Watch”

She hit the tree once, burying the axe in the trunk. She couldn’t take it out, later.

“I think you were not” answered Laurens.

“Do you want me to help?” asked Lafayette, walking by her side.

“No, no, it’s alright. I’m just rusty” assured Lu.

“Like the junk in your trunk…” muttered Angelica, resentfully.

“She’s the only one that can take us back home, you know that, right?” asked Hercules.

“Let me” insisted Laf, taking off his jacket and throwing it in the backseats.

Laurens nudged Hercules. “Yo, the phone’s in there” said Laurens, pointing at the jacket.

Hercules’ eyes shone in delight. “I just turned into a believer” he said, under his breath, sprinting toward the car.
Lafayette’s action didn’t go unnoticed by Lu either, who took out her remote and locked the car from the distance.

“There, so it doesn’t get cold” she said to herself.

Hercules stopped midway, a tic in his left eyebrow. “And I’m an atheist again…”

Laurens rolled his eyes. “You’re jinxed, man…”

Lafayette, oblivious to it all, bent down to grab the handle of the axe. “Trees are like a good lady, the better they are, the harder you must work” he lectured.

He fought a bit, groaning under his breath at the force used. His face turned red by the time he felt the axe giving in.

“I think I’ve got it!” he proclaimed, happily.

He pulled harder, making just the handle to get separated from the tree. It took Lafayette by surprise, as his grip on it lessened and they all saw the wooden handle flying far away, falling in the distance.

“Ops” he said, feeling bad for the oldest woman of the group.

“I think she’s not into you, Laf’ commented Alexander, putting one lock behind his ear as Eliza giggled by his side.

“I’m sorry, Lu” said the Frenchman.

“It’s alright, sweetheart”

“Talk for you. It cost me hell to find it” complained Angelica.

“If you don’t want to repeat the experience, I’d recommend you to keep your silence” snapped Lafayette.

“Actually, I must have a saw there” said Lu, thoughtful, as she looked at all the junk Angelica had scattered.

“Yeah, I saw it… No pun intended” said the oldest Schuyler sister.

“Be a darling and look it for me, would you?”

“…”
Angelica made her way back to the piled trash with a grim face.

“I need to go to the loo” declared Peggy, after a moment of watching Angelica cursing under her breath once again.

“Peggy, you always need to go to the loo” complained Angelica.

“Uh, well, sorry. It’s cold and I drank a huge soda while I waited for you to pick me up” she defended her need.

“You can always go to the store. Maybe they let you go there” proposed Eliza.

“All alone?”

“Peggy, you’re not five”

“I don’t want to go all alone in there so somebody kidnaps me”

“Damned the hour…” complained Angelica.

“I’ll go with you” proposed Alexander, walking to the girl.

“Thanks, I like you” proclaimed Peggy. Looking at her sisters, she added. “See? This is the sibling I wish I had”

“Not on my watch” groaned Angelica, throwing a warning glare to Eliza, who avoided it.

Alexander thanked the little escape, it helped to clear his thoughts and calm his nerves. He was less grateful on the way back, when a heavy silence fell on the two teenagers. A voice that sickened him taunted him in his head, mocking how the motormouth was so good-for-nothing he couldn’t even make use of his words. He grimaced and try to not put a face to the phantasmagorical voice.

“So” said Peggy, doing his job. Alexander liked her a bit more for it. “What’s your deal?”

Now, he liked her a bit less again…

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean, you look like your puppy just died”

He blinked at the bluntness of the girl. “Um, thanks…” he replied, sarcastically.
“Are those guys bothering you again?” she asked, going straight to the point again.

“Do you know about that?” he asked, feeling slightly upset.

“My sisters and I tell each other everything” she excused her knowledge. “Don’t be mad at them; they were worried and we’re very used to do it”

“It’s alright… Your sisters helped me a lot, so I think I can overlook it” he thought out loud.

“And, um, I’m a good listener… Or so I’ve been told” she added, awkwardly. “So, if… Um. If you want, you can vent if something’s wrong. Maybe talk it out with somebody external helps you see a wider perspective” she suggested.

Alexander found himself smiling at the girl. “I guess…” he ceded. Then, without thinking, admitted: “It’s more of a memories thing. Not something that keeps happening”

“Ah. That’s actually normal” she nodded, in understanding. “It can be very exhausting, though”

“You can tell…”

“You shouldn’t let it get to you, though”

Alex huffed before he could stop himself. “Thanks, I didn’t think of that…”

“I mean…” She sighed, and Alexander was about to apologise, but she talked again. “It’s just that Betsey and Angelica have been talking wonders about you, and…” She shrugged, looking to the side, clearly thinking she had shot her mouth off. “If I were half as smart as they say about you, I would kick my shyness to the farthest galaxy and allow nobody to belittle me” she stated.

Alex raised an eyebrow at that. “And who says you aren’t smart?”

“My last Maths test”

“There are different types of intelligence” he insisted.

“And I suck at all of them. I don’t even know what career to choose next year when I’ll be in college” she revealed, glare fixated on the snowed ground.

“There’s something called emotional intelligence” he remembered all of a sudden. He’d read that in one of Eliza’s textbooks. “I think you ace that one”

“Uh, and what do I do with that?”

“Help people?” he guessed. “Don’t know. That’s not my thing. See? Each one suck at one kind of intelligence”

She smiled slightly at his words. “Well, if it involves cheering people up, I think you ace it too”

“No, I wouldn’t be a mess if it were true” he shook his head.

“We’re all messes” she shrugged again. “The difference is that there are people who fight to become better and others that simply try to project it on others”

“Well, don’t let the second ones get to you” advised Alexander, with a frown of sympathy.

“Same” she replied right away. “You’re too nice to mind those assholes”
“If you say so…”

“I’m seeing so” she assured. “It’s settled: our New Year’s resolution should be ignore people that judge us”

Alexander frowned his lips. “And if they’re close to you?” he asked, trying to be ambiguous.

“Well, if they judge you, they shouldn’t be close” she advised. “Look, you and I are nice people…”

“High self-esteem for someone who calls herself stupid” pointed out Alexander.

“Hush and listen” she ordered. “We are nice people. Next time we have any doubt if somebody is good or bad for us, we’ll simply think: ‘Would I do that to them?’ If you wouldn’t, then they might not love you as much as they claim”

Alexander tilted his head to the side. “You’d be a great therapist too”

“You think?” she asked, considering it.

“I mean, making me to open up in the slightest is difficult” he admitted, laughing a bit at the end. “So, I think you’d nail it with average people”

“Mh, maybe I’ll give it a shot” she half-promised. She nudged him slightly on the side. “See? You’re too nice to let others get to you for the bad”

“Thanks, Peggy” he said, smiling slightly at her.

“You’re more than welcome” she said, winking at him. “And Alexander?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t bottle everything up” she advised lastly, with the same tenderness Eliza always reserved for him. “Really, it’ll just blow up at some point”

“I’ll remember”

By the time they were back, Angelica had found the saw and given it to Lu. With Lafayette’s help, the pair tried to cut down the tree, grunting when it didn’t budge.

“What’s that thing made of?” asked Peggy, standing by Eliza’s side.

“They could made axes out of that wood” joked Alexander, making the girl to laugh.

Eliza smiled at his happy mood. “I see you’re feeling better”

“Yeah, I guess”

“I’m glad”
“I think I deserve a present for it” boasted Peggy.

Alexander rolled his eyes, landing them on Hercules, who was chatting in hurried whispers with Lauren, both looking inside the locked car.

“I’ll be right back, girls” he informed, waving them goodbye and walking directly to his foster mother. “Hey, Lu”

“Wait, sweetie, this bitch thinks to be better than me” said Lu, red face. If it was for force or rage, Alexander didn’t know.

“Don’t worry, I just wanted to ask you for the car keys. I need to get something out from there”

“Sure thing” she said, taking the keys blindly out from her jacket pocket and throwing them to the kid.

“Thanks”

In the meantime, Hercules had been banging his head against the window car. The jacket lying on the other side, almost as if mocking him. Lauren sighed tiredly at the sight.

“Here, let me…” he said, taking one hairpin out his back pocket.

“Didn’t know you use those?” asked Hercules, knowing his friend’s intentions.

“I don’t unless this kind of things happens” he explained, looking around to see if somebody was paying attention to them. Everyone was too busy looking at Lafayette and Lu fighting with the saw.

Hercules frowned in his direction, doing as much. “John, what the hell?”

“Listen, do you want the stupid phone or not?”

“I don’t want you to break into your mother-in-law’s car!” he hissed.

“Mhh, Hercules, either you choose your happiness or you have morals. You can’t have the two”

Hercules sighed, looking at the group again. Now the other half was also busy greeting Peggy and Alexander back.

“Alright, alright” he ceded, not very convinced. “But do not scratch it, that’d be the last thing we
“I need!”

“I’m a professional”

“I don’t like the sound of that”

Sure enough, Laurens unlocked the car quite easily.

“This is the only good thing I get for being my father’s son” he told, while opening the door. He crawled back in, with Hercules writhing his hands in a nervous manner. He stopped suddenly to look back at him. “I remember one time, back on September 14th… It was a very hot day for September, now that I think about it…”

“I didn’t ask for your biography! Get in there already!” he urged, kicking him in.

“The price for being a good friend is so low…” lamented Laurens. “Let’s see what we’ve got here… Ooh, chewing gum… What taste??”

“You’re gonna taste my knuckles if you don’t fucking give me phone now!” complained Hercules in a whisper-yell.

“You’re so violent… Oh, here it is!” celebrated Laurens, taking the phone out.

“Good! Give it to me!”

“Now… Oopsie!” he hissed, when the phone dropped from his hands and fell under one of the seats.

“Jooohn…” growled Hercules, as a warning.

“I gooot it, you walking agoonyyyy” drawled Laurens, reaching an arm under the seat, patting the surface until he found it.

“John, hurry the he… Oh, shit!”

Hercules shut the door when he saw Alexander coming in their direction.

“He, here” said the Caribbean, pressing one button in the clicker he had in his hands. “I asked Lu for the car keys”

“Em…”

“You’re trying to get to Laf’s phone, right?”

“Yes, but…”

“Got it!” they heard from inside the car.

“Is that John?” asked Alexander, squinting his eyes to see better.
“… Probably” said Hercules, guiltily.

They pressed their faces to the window when they heard a loud ‘ow’ of pain from the inside.

“John, are you okay?” asked Alexander, frowning in worry.

“Yes, I almost fell on my noses, but I grabbed a level that I don’t know what it does” he explained, shaking the phone on his hand, with a triumphant smile.

The three kids frowned when the vehicle started to go backwards. It clicked in Alexander and Hercules’ mind first.

“John, get out!” urged the immigrant.

“Oh, God!” exclaimed John, looking frantically at both sides. “The car is enchanted!”

“You’re an idiot!” insulted Hercules, rolling his eyes.

“John, you hit the handbrake!” explained Alexander, as he watched his boyfriend trying to get out the car with no avail.

“Alex, unlock it” said Hercules, pointing at his clicker.

“Ah, true” he said, trying to remember which button it was. The clicker fell from his shaking grip. “Oh, fuck!” he complained, about to pick it up, but the front wheel ran over it. “Well, another reason that’d keep me up at night…” he said, under his breath.

“Heeeeelp!” screamed Laurens, banging at the doors.

“What’s all this commotion?” asked Eliza, walking to them with her sisters.

“John got locked up in the car” explained Alexander, anxiously.

“What were you doing, you deadbeats?” asked Angelica, rolling her eyes.

“Luuuuu” hollered Peggy. “Your caaaaar”

Lu looked up from her task. Her and Lafayette’s faces paled at the sight.

“Oh, my God!” screamed the woman, running to the scene. “How did that happen?”

Hercules and Alexander just mumbled in response. The car was already out of the forest area and was about to sink in a nearby pond. Laurens screamed in the distance.
“I played to be God and now God’s taking revenge on me!” sobbed Laurens, in despair.

“Oh, no! That’s the pond where ducks live!” realised Peggy.

“John’s there, Pegs” reprimanded Eliza.

“Meh, I don’t know him that well to care…”

“Help me and stop staring, sons of bitches!” ordered Laurens, enraged.

“I can’t, these jeans are new” Angelica excused herself.

“The same with my boots” nodded Lu.

“Somebody please do something” begged Alexander.

“I’ll die with no regreets!” swore Laurens, solemnly. Then, in a hurry, added. “Except not going to those swimming classes my parents bothered me about. That was a very stupid move…”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake!” complained Hercules.

He pushed the people that surrounded him. One of them was Eliza, who stumbled to the side, not having expected the action, and fell against one of the thick branches of the tree by her right. She yelped a bit and then grabbed her left eye, falling to the floor.

Nobody noticed her, as they were watching in awe how Hercules jumped into the cold water. They waited there, nerves eating them alive. They couldn’t breathe properly again until Hercules emerged from the water, a lump in his arms. They ran to him, Alexander being the first one to kneel by his side.

“I’ve got it, finally” breathed out Hercules, in satisfaction.

Alexander blinked surprised when he saw his friend lying Lafayette’s jacket on the ground and taking the phone in his hands. “Where’s John???”

“Who?”

The freckled boy came out from the water a second later, breathing heavily and swimming poorly to the shore. He coughed a couple of times, dropping himself on the ground. Alexander ran to be by his side.

“Jesus, Jackie, are you alright?” he asked, squeezing his boyfriend’s shoulder to make sure he was there for real.
Laurens’ glare hardened as he looked at Hercules. “No. That fucking asshole chose a jacket over me!”

“You jumped in cold water for saving my phone?” asked Laf, getting emotional. “That’s the most beautiful thing anyone has ever done for me!” he declared, hugging Hercules tightly.

“What kind of people do you befriend, man?” asked Peggy.

Hercules blushed in the embrace and coughed awkwardly when it ended. “Uh, y-yeah… But it got wet, maybe it’s broken” he said, concealing his hopefulness.

“Ah, don’t worry, it’s waterproof” dismissed Lafayette, helping him to get to his feet.

“… Good for you the— Oops!” said Hercules, falsely, as he pretended the phone had escaped his grip. “Oh, I’m so clumsy! Sorry, Laf!”

“No worries”

“Well, I’m sure now…”

The phone beeped.

“Ah, a text. I’ll read it on our way back” decided Laf, about to go fetch it.

Hercules looked at the mobile with hatred. He stepped on it.

“Oh, no, I wasn’t looking!” he lied. “Sorry!”

“Eeh, don’t worry…” said Laf, now frowning slightly.

Hercules, just in case, stepped on the mobile again. “Oh, now the other foot! What’s wrong with me today?” he wondered out loud, stepping on the phone a couple of times more.

“Herc, even clumsiness has a limit” hissed Alexander, while supporting Laurens just in case he could fall.

The phone beeped again. It fucking beeped again.

“Your mobile is awesome” said Peggy, in awe.

Laf smiled. “Yeah, it’s my little treasure”

“Um… Pardon?”
Eliza’s voice made them all turn in her direction. The middle Schuyler sister was covering her left eye with one hand that was slowly tainting of red.

“Um… I think I got hurt when Herc pushed me…” she explained, taking her hand off and showing a bloody eye.

The whole group gasped at the sight. Angelica and Peggy were by her side in no time.

“Oh, my God, Betsey!” said Alexander, running to her aid too and so, letting go of Laurens, who fell back on the water when losing balance. “Are you okay?!” he asked, trying to get a glimpse.

“Does it hurt too much?” asked Angelica, wincing in empathy.

“I called a cab, they must be here in no time, sweetheart. Hold on” said Lu, waiting on her phone for someone to pick it up.

“It’s alright, I swear” she said, blushing at the attention. “It just hurts when I see”

Angelica threw a glare of pure hatred towards Hercules. “You’re a dead man!”

“Yes, please” he begged.

The cab arrived in no time. On their way, Lu also made sure to call a tow truck for her sunk car. On the rear-view mirror, she saw the tree they’d been trying to cut down falling slowly to the ground. She frowned darkly at the sight.

“Oh, fuck me…” she cursed. She felt the driver’s sight on her. “Drive and don’t be so full of yourself…”

They barged into the hospital. Eliza holding her eye, hissing in pain, while Angelica and Alexander had a tight grip on her right and left arm respectively, to help her walk.

“Please, we need a doctor!” exclaimed Lu.

The nurse that was at reception gave them an up and down look. “Go sit and wait until the doctor is free” she dismissed.

“Um, excuse me, but…” tried to talk Alexander.
“Fill this out” interrupted the woman, giving Lu a clipboard and a pen.

“I’ll fill nothing out!” she declared, indignantly. “Can’t you see we’ve got an emergency in here?!”

The doors of the hospital opened again. Peggy entered with Laurens, shaking like a leaf and soaking wet.

“I hate you all in here…” he swore, teeth chattering.

“Oh, gosh, does that boy have hypothermia?!” exclaimed a mother that was waiting in there, a hand over her mouth.

Angelica rolled her eyes. “He’s just a cry baby, he’ll be fine. Here” She took her coat and threw it over Laurens. “Cover up with this”

“Listen, you’re very worked up. Fill this out and wait. We’ll try to help you as soon as we can” insisted the receptionist.

Alexander frowned, annoyed by her attitude. “But, ma’am, can’t you see my friend is bleeding out?” he asked, raising his voice slightly.

The nurse frowned down at him. Then, addressing Lu, she threatened: “I’ll make sure to kick you out if you don’t put your emotions under control”

Lu gritted her teeth, Angelica’s fists clenched, and Peggy’s glare darkened considerably. But it was Alexander’s brain the one that snapped first after hearing the woman’s words.

“What do we have to put under control, lady?” he asked, letting go of Eliza’s arm. Angelica held her completely, arching one eyebrow at his reaction. “Our worry for a friend?”

“Listen, boy, lower your tone or…”

“No! You listen to me, you goddamned son of a bitch!” he shouted, slamming one hand on the counter.

Lu and Hercules exchanged a glare at the behaviour, and a little smile crept onto their faces.

“I didn’t survive against all odds so now a fucking asshole with a rock in place of a heart tells me I have to calm down and keep my silence while one of my best friends is fucking bleeding out and could lose a fucking eye! You think you can talk down to people because you’re at the other side of the counter, lady? To send us to the fucking end of the line? Well, not on my fucking watch!
“If you don’t fucking get my friend a doctor right now and let us come in before all these soulless conformists motherfuckers, may God have mercy on you, because I’ll fucking grab you by that hump of ancient camel you have over there and PUT YOU THROUGH THAT FUCKING WALL!”

Everybody watched the kid wide-eyed, but not as much as his group. Lu and Hercules were smiling proudly at the boy – that was now breathing heavily after such an outburst – while Lafayette and Laurens were frozen in place, looking the nurse paling considerably. The Schuyler sisters simply stood there, glaring straight at the immigrant, speechless.

The nurse swallowed afraid before nodding: “Al-Alright, I’ll-I’ll get the doctor” she informed, and then sprinted out of sight.

“Now, that’s a temper” commented Eliza, impressed. In a whisper, she added in her sister’s ear: “Is it bad I like him more now?”

“Told him to not bottle everything up…” muttered Peggy, impressed.

They all gasped again when Alexander paled and fell to the floor, fainting. Lu grabbed him on time before he could hit the floor.

“They better don’t put him in the same room as me” whispered Eliza, blushing slightly. “I can’t be trusted right now”

“Eliza, relax…” reprehended Angelica.

Alexander woke up a few moments later, feeling a bit light-headed. Laurens was sat by his side and welcomed him with a smile.

“Hey, there”

“What happened?” he rasped out.

“You fainted. It wasn’t very surprising after snapping the way you did” he explained, arching one eyebrow at him.

Alexander blushed at the memory. “Oh, God… I’m sorry you had to see me like that”

“Nah, don’t be. From what I heard that woman deserved it” he said, tapping him on the arm.
“Stop snooping around…” he reprimanded. After a thought, he dared to say. “I think… I think I might join the debate club”

Laurens’ eyes shone with delight at the news. “Seriously??”

“I mean…” he laughed a bit. “I’d need a place to let all that air out”

“Let me know where that’d be, I wanna see” said Laurens, now sitting on the mattress. “As long as you don’t do it to me, I like it”

They laughed and Laurens took the liberty to plant a rapid kiss on his boyfriend’s lips. The door swung opened in that moment.

“Has he woken… Oh” Lu was frozen in place, seeing the scene.

Her cheeks turned slightly red while Alexander pushed Laurens and made him fall to the floor, out of reflex. The Caribbean’s face also turned red and his heart rate increased when he saw his foster mother exchanging glares between him and Laurens. Realisation crossed her eyes.

“Ooooh” she said, blushing harder. “Um, sorry, boys, I’ll come back later” she said, closing the door quietly.

Laurens got on his feet slowly, casting a concerned glare to his boyfriend. “Well, could’ve been worse, right?” he tried to be positive.

Alexander simply buried his face in his hands, groaning loudly.

The cab ride was silent. For two people in there, it was insufferable. Lu didn’t stop glaring at Alexander, and the kid simply curled on himself. Once they were out the vehicle, the kid sprinted to the front door, impatiently, Laurens following him closely to make sure he was doing fine. Lu sighed as he paid and thanked the driver.

The rest of the group barely noticed the strange behaviour, more focused on Eliza, who was given a patch to cover her injured eye.
“Does it hurt too much?” asked Angelica, using her motherly tone she only used with her sisters.

“I’m fine, really. The painkillers are helping” she assured, smiling.

“And what about the other pain?” she asked, knowingly.

Eliza sighed. “I know I shouldn’t get excited” she admitted. “But a girl can dream, right?”

Angelica tilted her head to the side. “Betsey, he’s got a boyfriend. You need to move on”

“I know…” she sighed louder. “You’re right, I know” she nodded, more sternly. “I must start loving me a lot more and stop depending on…”

“Oh, hey Betsey!” Alexander chose that moment to call her. “Can you come over, please?”

Eliza pushed her sister aside and ran to meet him. “Coming!”

Angelica sighed in defeat. “She’s helpless…” she decided, seeing how Alexander gave Eliza her scarf back. “It must suck to fall so over the heels for someone…”

“Hey, Angel” said Peggy, coming closer to her, phone in hand. “Church texted me. He wanted to know if you could call him; you haven’t given signs of being alive for five days and he got worried”

“Jesus, I’ll call him eventually! Some people are so needy, for fuck’s sake!” she snapped.

“…”

The cab drove away and Lu walked to where her kid, Laurens and Eliza were chatting. The conversation died down once she was closer. Eliza looked at her, not understanding the drastic change of mood.

“Can I take him for a moment?” she asked, smiling to keep things lightened.

“Sure” said Eliza, while Laurens just looked to the side.

“Alex?” she called, and her heart hurt when the kid flinched. “Sweetheart? Come with me, please, we need to talk”

Lu gave Eliza the keys of the house so they wouldn’t wait out there in the cold, and once they were left alone, Alexander hurried to talk.

“I’m sorry”

Lu blinked, perplexed. “What for, honey?”

“I…”
The kid flinched again, squeezing his eyes shut. Lu didn’t think it once before hugging him with all her might. She knew what Alexander went through, she had to in order to take care of his case when they met. She hated to think he still had flashbacks, fears that followed him as his own shadow. She despised realising Alexander thought they were his shadow.

“You did nothing wrong” she assured. “I’m sorry I assumed, but you just looked so close to Eliza that…”

“Sh-She’s a good friend” mumbled the kid, rigid within the embrace.

Lu nodded. “A very good one” She ended the hug but kept an arm around the kid’s shoulders, just wanting to have him close and be able to look at him at the same time. “Alexander, I don’t want you to feel like you can’t talk to us”

“I know…”

“Then, why didn’t you tell us? We made a few jokes about if you liked anybody!”

Alexander again drifted his glare to the floor. “I-I like college”

Lu blinked perplexedly again. “Alright…?”

“I like college, and the-the friend I made there” he blurted out, breathing hitching. “And I didn’t want to lose it. I…”

“Sweetheart…”

“I don’t want to leave you or Henry. I liked you two as well” he finally admitted, and by doing so, he felt a huge weight lifting up from his chest.

Lu felt tears prickling at her eyes. “Oh, sweetheart. Nothing of that would’ve happened!” she assured, tightening the grip around his shoulders. “Alexander, you don’t live with… With those people anymore, alright?”

“Som-Sometimes I feel like I still do” he admitted, starting to gasp for air. “And I still hear them and…”

“Breathe, honey…” she instructed, sweetly. He nodded and did the breathing exercises they’d taught him when he started living with them. “Alexander, I don’t mind whom you date as long as they treat you as you deserve. And you deserve the best”

He looked down again, in disbelief. She made him look up back at her, gently.

“Really, Alex. Does John treat you right?” she asked.

“Yes”

“Then, I approve him” she nodded, giving him a sincere smile. “I want you to be happy, no matter whom you choose; I’m nobody to get in between unless you’re being hurt… Damn, you could even date one of the twins Jane had, that are about your age, and I’d support it if they’re good to you!”
Alexander allowed himself to huff out a laugh. “What do you have against Mrs Jefferson?”

“I hope you’ll never have to know, sweetie” she said, patting his head.

He huffed. “I think I need help” admitted the kid, in an almost inaudible whisper.

“We’ll get you all the help you need, then” nodded Lu, reassuringly. “We can look for therapists around your college area and…”

“W-Well, I wouldn’t mind it if it’s near here…” he interrupted. He took in a deep breath, trying to calm his shaking.

Lu smiled fondly. “Wherever, honey. Just tell us what you’re comfortable with, okay?”

“Ohay…”

Lu pushed him into another embrace, hugging him with all her might.

“You mean the whole world to both Henry and me, okay?” she whispered in his ear. “Don’t forget that”

“Okay…” nodded Alexander, finally relaxing under the touch. “Th-Thanks” he added, after he could breathe properly again.

“It’s nothing, sweetheart, I swear. Now” she said, ending the hug and wiping one tear before it fell. “Let’s get in, alright? We’ll talk about that tonight with Henry. Right now, we need to smile and have fun, or Krampus will come get us” she joked, making the kid laugh.

They didn’t realise how silent everything was until they entered the house and saw the group of teenagers standing at the dining room doorframe. Once they heard they were back, everybody turned their heads to the owner of the house, faces paled.

Before Lu or Alex could ask what happened, Fifi/Dawn ran out of the group, startling the woman but not the kid, who knelt and picked her up, wanting to calm her down.

“What in the world…” asked Lu, blinking in surprise at the animal, who looked back at her, wagging her tail. “Henry?” she asked, trotting to the dining room.

“Um, you should take a deep breath before getting in there” advised Hercules.

“What? Why? What is…” she asked, as she made her way through the group. She gasped when she saw the state the room was in. Her husband was sat under the kitchen door lintel. “Henry!!” she said, running to him. “What the hell just happened in here?”

Henry looked slowly at her, then pointed at the food scattered on the floor. “I couldn’t find the mitts…” was his excuse.
Lu took her time to process it. And when she did, she snapped.

“Are you kidding me right now?! You couldn’t take a moment to look for them!? You had to spoil the whole dinner! Do you know what time is it?! And with guests! And what the heck happened to our furniture!”

“I don’t know, the dining room was in flames, I don’t know how it happened” he said, genuinely confused.

“You don’t know?” asked Lu, gritting her teeth. She pointed at the power strip. “How many times, Henry, how many times have I told you to not plug in so many things at the same time?! And why is there confetti on the freaking floor?!?”

“Um, I got confused and grabbed the joking-extinguisher I bought…”

“The jok… And why the hell did you buy that crap! What kind of man buys a fucking joking-extinguisher full of confetti?!!!”

“I’ll tell you who!” Henry jumped from spot, already as angry as his wife. “A man that appreciates his humour so much that he’s capable of endangering the lives of those he loves the most just to have a few laughs in the hospital! That’s the man I am!” he declared, solemnly.

“Your stupid humour has ruined the dinner!”

“Oh, yeah? Well, your stupid perfectionism fucked the whole day up and Christmas!”

“Excuse me?!”

“Where’s the famous tree?!”

“Someone got hurt and we had to forget about it!” she explained, pointing at Eliza.

“You turn a young girl into a one-eyed, and you have the guts to tell me off?!!”

“Yes, because…!”

Lu went silent immediately when he heard a series of laughs from the doorframe. Looking in that direction, they saw Alexander bent over himself, actually crying from his fit of laughter. The couple’s anger died down at the sight.

“I-I’m sorry” managed to say the teenager, in between laughs. “I know I shouldn’t laugh, but…”

He couldn’t end the sentence, as he started cackling again. Soon, his friends were contaminated by the sound and joined him, finding the scene hilarious too.
The Knox marriage shared a glare, smiled and then laughed as well. Both thinking they had never heard such a beautiful sound as Alexander laughing so sincerely.

They ended up dining pizza. Henry helped Lu clean the dishes and cutlery while the kids chatted and laughed in the distance.

“You’re lucky it wasn’t the actual 24th” muttered Lu, with a sided smile.

“I know… Lucky enough for a little addition to the family?” he asked, hopeful.

Lu sighed. “Henry…”

“Come on, look at this face!” he whined. Henry turned around, seeing the dog had still the nose glued to the ground, in search of some crumb she could devour, walking throughout the kitchen. “Fifi! Show her the face! Come on, girl! Fifi, look at Lu!”

“Fifi?”

“It’s her name”

“Doesn’t seem like it”

“That’s because she’s entertained… Fifi! Fifi!”

“Dawn, come here!” called Alexander, from the dining room.

The dog forgot about her task and sprinted out of the room, barking happily.

“… …”

Lu laughed. “I think she chose what name she likes the most”

Henry went to the corner of the kitchen, head dropped in sadness.

“Even the dog laughs at me in this house” he mumbled.

Lu rolled her eyes and watched through the window that connected the dining room with the kitchen. She could see Alexander talking peacefully with his friends, sat in a circle on the floor.
Dawn jumped to Lafayette’s lap, making the kid giggle and pet her head.

“She likes you” said Peggy, adoring the animal.

“I’m good with animals” dismissed Laf, taking out his phone. He frowned at the black screen. “Oh, my battery died”

“I’ve got a charger in my office” said Lu. “Use it if you want”

“Thanks! Um… Hey, Herc”

“What?” said the guy, still crest-fallen.

“Do you mind do it on my behalf? I don’t want to bother the little one” said Lafayette, patting the dog on the head.

Hercules looked in awe at the phone handed to him. His eyes shone and tears prickled at the edges. He even let out a sniff.

“Of course” he said, taking the phone as if it were a baby. “It’s a pleasure” he sobbed, moved, as he got up and walked out of the room.

“Gee, man, I only asked you to charge my phone…” said Lafayette, not understanding the reaction.

Lu felt warm inside when the group laughed and Alexander’s smile made his face brighter. She didn’t think she’d ever heard a most beautiful sound and made a promise to do all she could and a lot more to help that kid out.

Lu came back to the present world when Henry handed him a kleenex.

“Good to know I don’t need to wear my wetsuit” he laughed.

“Oh, hush” she said, wiping her tears. She close the album. “I think it’s enough remembering for one day”

“Agreed” laughed Henry, taking the album to put it back in place.

“What about the kitchen? Is still recognisable?”
The doorbell rang as Henry rolled his eyes.

“It’s even more perfect than when we bought the house!” he proclaimed, as he went to open the door.

“Sure…”

“Lu! Come here!” he called, joy clear in his voice.

The woman arched one eyebrow and walked to the front door. She felt at the verge of tears again when she saw Alexander there, with his wife, children, sisters, father-in-law and friends.

“Look who decided to drop by!” said Henry, giving hugs and kisses blindly.

“You called him?” asked Lu.

“No, I did not”

“We just thought it’d be nice to spend the Christmas all together” said Eliza, smiling happily. Nudging her husband, she added. “Someone got nostalgic”

Alexander blushed easily. “It was a common agreement”

His wife rolled her eyes, fondly, and a bigger smile crept onto her face when Lu couldn’t control herself anymore and went to hug Alexander with all her might.

“Merry Christmas, Lu” he said, tapping the woman on the back.

“Come on, don’t stay at the door” urged Henry, stepping aside so they could come in. “I’ve just finished dinner”

“Did the kitchen survive?” asked Philip.

“Even the kid knows” laughed Lu.

“One damn time!” complained Henry.

They all laughed as they made their way to the dining room. They helped the couple set the dishes, chatting friendly. A phone rang, barely audible for the sound of voices talking about different topics at once.
“I think it’s yours” pointed out Peggy, looking at her brother-in-law.

Alexander went to fish the phone out of his pocket, ending the conversation with Lu with a muttered ‘one moment’. He frowned when he read the name on the screen.

“Um, sorry, I need to pick it up” he said, hurriedly. “Do you mind…?”

“Not at all” assured Lu, imitating his worry. “Is everything alright?”

“Yes, it’s… A client. I just have to pick it up, I’ll be right back” he said, not getting into detail.

Lu watched him leave, nodding in understanding. She was glad to hear Alexander was back with taking cases, but there was something off about it. About the Caribbean’s glare. She thought about asking him later, but shrugged it off. She knew if something happened, Alexander would come to her.

They were already passed that.

Chapter End Notes

Uploading a Christmas special at the beginning of February. That's the level in here. Surely you were thinking this was going to be some kind of sentimental, serious and heart-wrenching episode by the beginning of part one, right? Well, no.......... Yet. Funny thing about this part: I didn't make clear when Laurens and Hamilton started dating in this AU on the "The fishing trip" episode, I just let known it was around fall/winter. So, at first I was going to make them still just friends, but decided agaisnt it because it was too angsty and this episode is not...... Not too much. Not this part. *evil grin*

Sursum corda!
“Thomas, there’s another basket from your sister” said James, tone dully. His curiosity intact since the day all this started, though.

Thomas inspired through his nostrils, tapped the pot where dinner was slowly being made, and strode out of the kitchen, barely giving his friend a glare.

He didn’t mean for any of this to happen. Really. If it were up to Thomas, he would’ve avoided the situation in its day. But, the world seemed to hate him and always granted him with the most rotten luck in the universe.

It was funny because he wasn’t supposed to be shopping that day, it’d been a last time decision. He wanted to give Polly something for her good marks and guilt ate him alive when he was reminded he wasn’t able to deluge her with anything she could ask for, as he’d done when his daughters were little. As materialistic as it sounded, he felt like a failure when the holidays fell on the top of him and was reminded that he couldn’t give his daughters a simple whim for Christmas. They had been mature enough about the whole thing; it’d been a few years since their current economical situation. Still, Thomas always made sure to save a little bit for the end of the year for them. Not such luck for this December.

So, he decided to make a quick trip to the mall. Maybe something caught his girls’ attention and he could afford it by juggling with the numbers, it wouldn’t be the first time. The only good thing about this new life of his was finding out these talents he didn’t know to possess.

Patsy had fallen for a few clothes, her dark eyes shining with delight as she put the fabric against her body and looked at her reflection in the mirror the little store had. She didn’t try anything
on, something that was unusual for her and neither did she show her father anything that she clearly was wishing to have in her closet before the year ended. Thomas watched her shy demeanour with an arched eyebrow. Since very little, Patsy had always been very open about what she wanted or expected for Christmas or her birthdays.

Something heavy and cold set in Thomas’ stomach, the cruel hypercritical voice of his mother resounding in his mind. He took a deep breath and entertained himself by looking at the littlest of the two; Thomas already knew it was his fault his daughters couldn’t have all they wanted. They really deserved everything by not throwing his ineptitude as a father in his face. Thomas was always grateful for that; he had enough with his own mind, mimicking the voice of his mother at each little mistake he made.

Polly was less enthusiastic with the store. She looked uninterestedly at some clothes that seemed to catch her attention but didn’t keep it for long. In the end, she simply followed her older sister around, making commentaries of the clothes Patsy had in her hands.

Thomas made sure to remember each thing his eldest had in her hands for more than one minute straight, the ones she put on and looked in the mirror with several times. It was her silent way of saying she wanted that so badly. While the two sisters were busy talking with one another, Thomas made his way to the assistant to reserve those, resolute to come back later and give Patsy a surprise.

They left the store, Patsy’s eyes glued to her phone and Polly simply looking around, as if in search of something. Thomas paid the little more attention, hoping to have a little hint of what she wanted. He felt the body at his right bumping into something and falling on her knees.

Patsy hissed from pain, phone tightly squeezed in her hands and eyes shut, watering slowly. She frowned enragedly at the step in front of her, throwing it a withering look for making her fall. Thomas knelt beside her immediately.

“Are you okay, darling?” he asked, stretching out a hand to help her stand.

Patsy nodded, her face contorted in contained pain, though. She welcomed her father’s help and stood, hissing from pain. “Yeah, yeah… Ugh”

They looked at her knees, red and a little swollen for the hard hit. She moaned as she bent down to touch them, hissing once more.

“Can you walk?” asked Thomas, frowning at the injury.
“I don’t know” she said, raising one leg to try and keep walking forward. She laughed from pain, saying a series of ‘ow, ow, ow’ in a sing-song voice.

Thomas rolled his eyes at the mannerisms. “All for not looking at where you’re supposed to look” he lectured, his tone turning harsher as he helped her standing still with a tight grip on her hand. He looked nastily at her phone. “If you’re walking, you’re walking, Patsy. Focus…”

“Damn, can’t you be nice to me even when I almost broke my legs against the steps?” she interrupted, giving him also an eye-roll.

“I can’t be nice when my seventeen-years-old daughter is still a baby” he retorted.

“Said the man who broke his wrist around my age to impress a girl” she shot back.

Thomas felt his cheeks hot at the reminder. “Don’t get on my bad side or I’ll carry you” he threatened.

“Do that and I’ll start screaming at the top of my lungs” she threatened back.

“Fucking stop. Let’s go to the elevator” he spat, passing her arm around his shoulders. “Polly, help your siste… Polly?”

Thomas felt his heart jumping to his throat when he saw no trace of the little one. He looked around frantically.

“Polly?” he called, voice raised. “Polly!”

“Maybe she was kidnapped by a mafia” joked Patsy, with a nervous laugh under her breath.

“Martha!”

“Relax, Dad, they’ll give her back eventually”

“I’d believe that had it been you”

“I feel so loved, really”

“I can’t get my eyes off of any of you” complained Thomas, turning around, his daughter clinging to him to be able to walk properly.

“My fibula hurts…” whined Patsy, limping by his side despite the help.

“Fucking idiot. Unable to even walk” insulted Thomas, under his breath. “Pray you didn’t actually break something…”

“Dad, I’m hurt and you’re insulting me. Do you think that’s normal?”

“You’re hurt because you walk as if you were running from the police! If you’d been walking normally, maybe you wouldn’t have hit so hard!”

“Buah, I won’t hear the end of this crap…”
“No, you won’t! If I don’t find your sister within five minutes, I’ll leave you here, whining in the dark”

“You don’t have it in you”

“The fuck I don’t…” He sighed in exhaustion after a moment of slow advancing. “Always making a scene in public. Really, gal, you need to…”

“Dad, weren’t you worry for your favourite daughter?” interrupted Patsy, sharply. “Leave me alone and look for her, then”

“Watch your tone. If you could take care of yourself, I wouldn’t have looked away”

“She’s also old enough to know she’s not supposed to leave your side!” argued Patsy.

“I’ll tell her that when I find her”

“Sure, you never tell her anything… You only have it for me”

“I don’t have it for any of the two. I must tell you off when you do something wrong”

“You always do that to me only!”

“Because you’re always the one messing up!”

“Oh, yes, I ran away from you in the mall… Tsk…”

“Actually, you had a phase in which you always ran off at the littlest chance you got” he recalled, his lips almost curling up in a smile for the fond memory. “You drove your mother and I insane”

“… I did not” she muttered, cheeks flustered. She looked away from her father and then saw another curly head in the distance. “There she is” she said, pointing in the direction.

They took a while to reach her. Thomas sighed in relief when he saw it was Polly indeed. They were in the informatic section of the building. The little girl was looking at a series of tablets, eyes glued and shiny. Thomas knew what that look meant in any kid and frowned.

“Stay here” he told the eldest, who held still by putting a hand on a shelf.

“Like I can sprint off like other girl I know” she said, checking her legs more closely.

“Don’t start” he warned. Thomas walked to his other daughter, bent over himself to be almost eye level with her. “Polly…”

The girl looked at him. “Hi, Daddy”

“Polly, don’t do that again” he lectured softly, as he took her arm, wanting to feel her physically to calm his nerves. “You scared us to death, princess”

“Sorry, Daddy” said the girl, sounding genuinely apologetic as she pressed a quick kiss to his cheek. Patsy had rolled her eyes in the meantime. “He uses the plural very lightly”
“For fuck’s sake, Martha, shut the hell up already or I’ll sell you the mafia myself!” exploded Thomas, whipping his head around to look at her.

Patsy narrowed her eyes. “Didn’t you say you didn’t like to make scenes in public?”

“I don’t, but you’re always pushing my buttons!”

“Yeah, what else…” she muttered, turning her attention back to her phone again.

That made Thomas’ blood to boil. In two strides, he was in front of his daughter, ripping the phone out of her hands.

“Hey!” she complained.

“Enough with the phone! You’re outdoors, be aware of your surroundings!” he reprimanded, keeping it in his pocket.

“I don’t wanna, it depresses me” she retorted.

“Your attitude depresses me” he snapped back.

He sighed, turning around. He thinned his lips when he found his daughter looking at the tablets again, eyes bright. Thomas knew how much Polly loved both technology and arts; he’d seen how hard she worked when her school asked for some presentation or a project. He’d even seen her using the laptop just to make those of things she liked. He was also aware of how much she enjoyed drawing. It was a simple two plus two, and that made him feel worse.

“Come on, princess, let’s go back home. Your sister got hurt” he said gently.

Polly nodded silently and helped her sister by grabbing her left arm, as Thomas did the same with the right one. He started to do the maths inside his head. Maybe he could get the tablet Polly wanted if he tried? It’d been one hell of a year, and not only in the economical field, and the debt of his father-in-law seemed to grow, though that might be his impatience and desperation blinding him…

He was able to keep a bit to himself during December because Lucy usually got too caught up with the holidays and the parties she threw, following the stupid tradition of their mother to know if there were new faces to befriend in case of need or status. So, she always asked for her money before Christmas begun and Thomas could play with whatever he’d left. He was so used to it that he almost slapped himself when he realised he’d have to have Hamilton’s money ready for the beginning of January.
He thought about trying to convince the immigrant of spare him this month, make up some excuse or promise him he’d pay him a bit later, but all those possibilities felt stupid in his head. There was no way he would go to Hamilton to beg, especially because he knew the Caribbean wouldn’t give in. He was worse than a bank.

When they arrived at the parking lot, Patsy’s voice took him out of his thoughts.

“Uh, Dad? Isn’t that your sister?”

Thomas contained the urge to groan. Who told him to think about her, anyways… She seemed to have a sixth sense she used to make his life miserable, always showing up when he remembered her.

But, when he looked up to see if she had seen them or not, to know if they could keep walking without having to talk to her in the fakest tone a human was able to perform – and in front of his daughters, to make matters worse, he didn’t want them close to her if he could avoid it – Thomas was shocked.

That woman was her sister, yes, but it wasn’t Lucy. It was Anna, thank goodness. She was always so quiet and standoffish that she talked to him less than when they were younger – which wasn’t much to begin with. Though, Thomas had to blink a few times to make sure that woman was his little and shy sister. It just puzzled him to see her so relaxed and comfortable, loosening up till her voice was heard clearly despite the few feet separating them.

And his surprise only grew when her companion planted an innocent and quick kiss on her lips. Her companion. Who happened to be a woman.

Anna blushed, her whole face as red as a tomato and her mouth curling up in a bright smile, like he’d never seen on her before. It lasted a couple of seconds, until she turned around, looking everywhere to see if they had been seen, giggling nervously as she called her out for the action. Her colour drained from her face when she locked eyes with her brother.

The girls exchanged a look between them and then looked from their father to aunt, like a tennis match. A tension fall on them, sinking the dark and strangely vacant parking lot in a heavy silence. Anna was paling more and more as the seconds passed by, frozen in place, as if she couldn’t believe what had just happened. She babbled a few words, vacillated in her spot, not knowing if going or staying. Her dark big eyes shining with a myriad of emotions.
Eventually, only one stayed and made her to jump into the car, closing the door with a thump. Thomas and the girls could see Anna burying her face in her hands, and could bet she was shaking slightly. Her companion put a hand on her shoulder, clearly worried. Thomas ordered his daughters to keep going, and they remained their walking, ignoring the pointed rapid look the stranger threw him.

He also tried to ignore that the last thing that flashed across his sister’s irises was absolute dread.

That’s how this stupid ‘tradition’ began. Thomas had been receiving a basket or a box full of things from his sister since that day, always with a note attached. He didn’t waste a second of his time reading it or looking what she’d tossed in.

James watched him as he grabbed the basket and walked out the front door, as if in auto-pilot, and then threw the basket to the trash can across their house. James frowned at his action, another thing Thomas was more than willing to ignore.

“Thomas…” he began.

“I don’t want to hear it” he interrupted, going back to his cooking task.

“You’d have to talk to her at some point” said James, nonetheless.

“No”

“Thomas—”

“She’s spent all her fucking life ignoring me and my daughters” he reminded, bitterly. “Now, I don’t want to know anything about her”

“Well, she thinks you do”

“Good. Maybe she goes crazy with paranoia”

“Thomas!”

“I don’t want to talk about it” he decided, stubbornly.

“Well, what’re you planning to do, then?” inquired James, resting against the doorframe. “Throwing baskets and boxes for the rest of your life?”

“Yes. And I hope to see her one day looking inside the trash, damning her life when she sees that shit in there”

James sighed and rolled his eyes. “I’m gonna go shopping what I need for dinner”

“If the smell of that spicy shit isn’t gone by the end of the night, you leave with her to never return” he warned.
“Sure…” replied James, not believing him.

Adams emerged from his corner, a frown on his face. “Why does your girlfriend get to eat what she wants but I don’t?”

“Because she’s not a squatter backstabber” answered James right away, without looking at him as he made his way to the front door.

“You’re so cocky since you got a girlfriend… Let’s see how long she lasts”

“You’re the one who’s acting cocky despite his wife kicked him out and being unemployed” Thomas told him off from the kitchen.

“Everybody’s against me in this house…” muttered the man, saddened.

“Guess why” retorted James, opening the door and about to leave. He stopped when he saw Patsy walking downstairs with his peripheral, her outfit rooting him in spot. “Patsy? Where are you going?” he asked, cautiously.

“Hi there, Jemmy” she replied, ignoring his question blatantly.

“Patsy!” he hissed, fearing for the worst.

He closed the front door quietly and followed the teenager back in the living room, wanting to stop her. Adams raised his head, a wicked smile creeping onto his face, also knowing what was about go on.

“Hey, Dad” called Patsy, stopping at the doorframe. “What’s for dinner?”

“Free food you don’t have to cook. So stop bitching around” replied Thomas, without turning around.

“I ask because I wanna know if I can take a bit in a Tupperware”

“A Tupperware?” repeated Thomas, finally looking at her. He saw her dressed up with a short sleeveless red dress that had laces on the top. “Where the hell do you think you’re going?” he asked, already getting angry.

“Out”

“And dinner?!” he asked again, ignoring the expected response.

“That’s what I was asking about”

“Aren’t you going to dine here?!”

“I don’t know”

“How could you possible don’t know?!”

“Thomas…” tried to interject James.
“For fuck’s sake, Patsy, do you have to annoy me even in the fucking Christmas’ Eve?!”

“C’mon, Dad, you were complaining about having to cook before”

“And you decided to let me cook so not eating it?! Well, you’re very thoughtful!” he snapped, sarcastically.

Patsy narrowed her eyes. “I was asking for a Tupperware”

“That’s not the way it goes!”

“Gosh, Dad, why do you always have to be so overdramatic? I’ll simply skip one meal, I ate here all year, unlike you!”

“Patsy…” warned James.

Thomas gritted his teeth. “I was working my ass off so you could have proper meals, unthankful brat!”

“Thomas…”

“Oh, I’ll call the Pope so you get sanctified…” Patsy rolled her eyes.

Thomas was seething. “Listen to me, brat, you won’t get anywhere”

“Yes, I will” she contradicted, teeth gritted.

“Go to your room and take that dress off!” he commanded.

“I won’t because I’m not going to my room!” insisted Patsy, as stubborn as her father.

“That’s another thing: didn’t you have a shorter dress?” criticised Thomas, nose scrunched up.

“Ugh, Dad, I’m not in the mood to stand your medieval sense of fashion” she grumped.

“It’s not medieval, it’s common sense, gal! One of these days you’ll get out in a bikini! Can’t you see it’s freaking cold outside?!”

“That was why I was gonna wear a jacket!”

“And the bottom half?!” His eyes squinted at the still swollen knees of his daughter, especially when he saw the haematoma on her left leg. “And what about your injury? Haven’t you been doing even less than usual because they were hurting like hell?”

“What does that have to do with any of this!”

“That for getting out with friends you are always fine, but for spending time with the family—”

“Oh, the man who’s been ignoring his sister for a week straight is now a family guy!” she fake-praised, almost cruelly.

“Look…” He clicked his tongue, face turning red. “If you don’t eat here tonight, you won’t have any presents on Christmas, that’s it! If you’re not here for one thing, you won’t be for the other!” he decided.

“Like I was gonna get anything” huffed the girl, venomously.
“What is that supposed to mean?” asked Thomas, taking a step forward, fists clenched.

“You know what I mean. And it’s a miracle you even remember one of us” she spat, before turning on her heels and striding straight to the staircase.

Thomas felt his blood freeze for a moment before something snapped inside his brain, his body shaking. “Go to your fucking room!” he ordered, in a scream.

“Guess where the fuck I’m going!” replied the girl, emphasizing her sentence by slamming the door shut.

“That’s enough with this fucking girl…” complained Thomas, under his breath. “That’s enough with everybody in here! From now on, you’ll do what I say or I’ll kick you out from here, and call the police and the ombudsman for children on me! Just you fucking dare!” he ended up shouting and throwing the spoon he was holding to the floor with all his might. “To the hell, I won’t cook” he said, under his breath and sprinting out of the kitchen.

“Don’t punish the rest” whined Adams, with puppy eyes. “I’m starving”

“Cook yourself, then!” said Thomas, walking upstairs and going to his own bedroom.

“Bf, I’m not hungry anymore…”

A bang made both men to jump in their spots. James sighed exhaustedly to the air. He walked in the kitchen and turned off the fires.

“I should’ve gone to Virginia with my family, as Libby did” he mustered, making his way to the door.

“She was the cleverest in this house in the end…” said Adams, with a bit of envy.

James did nothing but nod.

Thomas found himself making dinner again when he’d calmed down considerably. Adams followed him around, insisting on how hungry he was. At first he was simply going to dig his heels in but when Polly also tried to persuade, he ceded.

He made sure to leave a bit of space for when James came back and started to prepare Dolley’s part. Polly was sat on the table, drawing as she casted indiscreet glares to her father, devouring the food with her eyes and licking her lips. Thomas smiled slightly at her mannerisms and let her try a bit of the dinner, receiving an excited and not-at-all objective review. He allowed himself
to laugh at the list of adjectives his daughter praised his food with.

“Daddy, are you going to cook a dessert too?” she asked, her tongue slipping through her lips at how focused she was on the drawing. Thomas tried not to think of how it reminded him of his wife.

“I won’t have enough time” he answered, frowning at the hour. “But I can make it tomorrow for after lunch”

“Cool!” cheered the girl.

They heard a door swinging open in the distance. Polly raised one eyebrow at the sound of her sister’s footsteps but shrugged it off and went back to draw. Thomas looked over his shoulder, seeing the teenager walking straight to the cupboards. He breathed out calmly when he saw her wearing her robe and her hair tied in a high bun.

“Prisoner 1772, reporting for solitary confinement. Guilty of a crime of wanting to have fun” she proclaimed, clearly angry still.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Don’t be an overdramatic…”

“I thought you wanted to know where I am in every moment” she replied, taking out a bag of chips.

“Like you ever answered… Don’t snack. Dinner’s ready” he lectured softly.

“Are you going to control my hunger too?” she asked, annoyedly, as she turned around and all but sprinted out of the room.

Thomas sighed loudly in defeat. Polly simply looked at her sister until she reached the living doorframe.

“You can’t tell anything to this girl…” complained the youngest.

Thomas huffed. “You say this now until it’s your turn”

“I’ll never be like that” complained Polly, scrunching up her nose in disgust at the thought.

“That’s what all say” replied Thomas, with a wee smile as he prepared one dish of pasta with meatballs. “Put the table, princess, I’ll talk to her now” he said, patting her head gently as he exited the room.

“Alright, Daddy”

Thomas frowned at the lying form on his dining room floor. “Adams, get up, dinner’s ready. As much as I dislike you being here I don’t want to be accused of animal cruelty”
The man in question grumbled in response, offended.

Thomas went upstairs and stood in front of his oldest daughter’s closed door. He sighed and decided to knock on the door.

“Patsy? Dinner’s served” he said, frowning at the lack of any kind of response. “You don’t have to eat with us if you’re still upset. I… I brought you your share” he tried, tone soft. He waited a moment, hoping to hear some shuffle from the other side, to see the door opening. He frowned his lips when he still received no answer. “Come on, darling, hate me all you want, but I still want you to eat” he insisted.

He knocked again when he heard nothing. His hand hesitated above the knob. For a moment, he thought about going back down, but he knew he’d feel a lot worse if he didn’t try one more time. So, he ended up opening the door. He was shocked to see the room completely vacant. A cold breeze coming from the balcony-window the girl had in her room setting red flags off in his head. The robe lying on the bed helping to the cause.

“She did not” he hissed, striding to the balcony. There, he saw his daughter climbing down a rope she’d made with her blankets. “Oh, for fuck’s sake, Martha!” he hollered, kicking the floor with ire. The girl hesitated, almost losing the grip on the blankets for the startle, and that made his heart to jump to his throat in fear. “Get back up here!”

“No!” she replied, shaking her head stubbornly, though frozen in place. Heights had never been her best friend.

“You’re going to hurt yourself!”

“It’ll be worth it!”

“Martha, come back up here, I’m not joking!”

“No!”

She bit her bottom lip, looked down, and then jumped the meter that separated her from the floor, rolling on the lawn and with uneven breathing.

“Are you crazy?!” said her father, heartrate coming back to normal now that he saw her safe.

They looked in the direction where a horn was heard.
“I’ll come back late!” she said over her shoulder, as she ran (limping slightly) to the front part of the house.

“No! You’ll come back now! Martha…!” he tried, seeing her not looking back. “Damn it all!”

He sprinted out of the room, with the now cold dish in his right hand, and ran downstairs, swinging the front door opened. There, she saw his daughter running as well as she could to the vehicle.

“Martha Jefferson, don’t you dare!” he warned, also running to the verge of the pavement.

He wasn’t fast enough to catch Patsy as she’d already jumped into the passenger seat, the car pulling off rapidly.

“Come the fuck back here, disappointment with legs!” he shouted. Without thinking, he took one meatball and threw it at the car. He repeated the action enragedly until there were no more.

“Merry Christmas!” she mocked, waving goodbye from her window.

“You’re a little lying shit!”

“I learnt from the best!”

“Come back here, so I can fucking drag you back in by your fucking extensions!”

Another car pulled in in front of the garage, forcefully. Not one minute later, Madison stood out, a frown on his face. Dolley got out from the passenger door, beyond puzzled but biting down her fit of laughter.

“Thomas! Have you gone completely insane?!”

“Don’t start with me now” grumbled Thomas. “Do you even know what that girl just did?”

“Going out, not minding your words? Like I’m always telling you she’ll do, especially when you go ballistic instead of talking to her properly?” he guessed, sarcastically. He put a hand on his forehead, totally fed up. “Do you still think that’s enough reason to go throwing meatballs in the middle of the fucking neighbourhood?!”

“Okay, she’s the one who goes out on the night of the 24th without telling us where, but I’m the bad guy!”

“The crazy guy, I’d say” retorted James, rolling his eyes.

“She’s at the same pub she goes almost every night” answered Polly.
“What?” asked Thomas, turning around. He found Polly at the doorframe while Adams had been watching through the window, in the same state Dolley was in. “What pub?”

“The one that’s a few blocks away”

“How do you know?” asked Madison.

“I’ve got my ways’

“Stop stalking your sister”

Thomas groaned. “That fucking brat went to a pub to… What? To run over the clown of Burger King now?!!”

“Those don’t have a clown” corrected Adams.

“I couldn’t care less!” He looked at the youngest girl. “Send me the location”

“Thomas…” tried James, exhaustedly.

“I’m gonna go there and yank her off there” he swore, walking back in to grab a jacket.

James sighed, defeated. “Alright, do whatever you want and spoil the dinner. I don’t even care anymore!” he complained, striding in again. He gave his friend one last furious glare as he warned: “But only come back in when you’ve calmed down. I’ve got a guest”

“No, no, don’t stop for me. I find that amusing” said Dolley, pointing at one meatball that had hit the bonnet of the car.

“Dolley!”

It didn’t cost Thomas much to find the place where his daughter allegedly was. It wasn’t as horrible as he’d imagined it, but still not the place he’d like his daughter to be. He parked nearby and entered cautiously, not wanting to call the attention. There were only a few persons, drinking alone or also drinking in the company of friends. In the background, Thomas could distinguish the melody of a Christmas carol, but the volume was so low – just like people’s voices – that Thomas didn’t know which one. Not that he cared.

He frowned at the scenario. It was pretty sad. And absolutely not a place a group of teenagers would go to have fun. Fearing he had gone to the wrong place, he picked up his phone to call home, but then his daughter showed up. Thomas froze when he saw her wearing an apron, that her bun had gone messier and her face was contorted into one of pure boredom.

“I only stopped for two minutes” she complained weakly, addressing someone that was at the other side of a swinging door. Probably connected to the kitchen area.
“I don’t pay you so you spend your work hours sat down” a man’s voice hollered from the inside, calling the attention of the whole place to where the girl was standing.

Patsy blushed from embarrassment. “I haven’t called ill once since…”

“Go serve that to the customers and don’t lose more time!”

The teenager sealed her lips and turned around, inspiring and exhaling slowly to calm her temper. Performing one fake smile that hurt her father to see.

“Here it’s your order” she informed placing the dishes on the table. “If you need anything else…”

Her eyes drifted to the door automatically, as she said the same repertoire she repeated to every customer. Her learnt words died in her throat when she saw her father standing there, looking at her as if he couldn’t comprehend she was indeed his daughter. Patsy’s face burnt for shame and she mumbled a few made up words. Instinctively, she placed the tray in front of her body, as if by that she could erase her uniform from her father’s memory.

“Oh, gosh…” she whispered, squeezing her eyes shut.

Her voice – natural voice – woke Thomas up from his daze. He walked closer to her and once Patsy saw her father approaching, turned around. Luckily, Thomas could grab her by the arm and keep her in place.

“Patsy, what…”

“Hey, leave the girl alone” asked one the clients Patsy had just served.

Thomas let her arm go. “Ah, no, I’m… She’s my daughter…” he excused himself, in a hurry.

“Is this man bothering you?” asked his companion.

“Yes, every day, persistently” answered Patsy, teeth gritted.

“Martha!” exclaimed Thomas, frowning at her.

“Will it kill you to wait until I’m done to talk my ear off?” she asked, more brusquely than usual.

The two clients that had confronted Thomas showed him an apologetic glare. “Ah, sorry, sir, she’s clearly your daughter”

“Unfortunately, yes” he said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Patsy frowned darkly at him. “Go be ashamed out of here. The last thing I needed is you to
embarrass me in my workplace”

“What workplace are you talking about, darling? The one I knew nothing about?” barked Thomas, losing his patience.

“Thought you wanted me to have a job to take life seriously?” she threw his own words in his face.

“I was talking about places like a supermarket, not a seedy restaurant that’s in the bottom of the world!”

“Really, Dad, right now I can’t…” she complained, turning on her heels rapidly. Her abruptness made her collide with a workmate that was taking out a full tray. All food and drinks fell to the floor, glasses breaking. Patsy paled. “Oh, God…”

“Fuck’s sake!” complained the boy she’d bumped into.

“You okay, darling?” asked Thomas, placing a hand on her shoulder.

“What the fuck was that noise?!” asked the same voice Thomas had heard before.

From inside the kitchen a man about Thomas’ age, if not a bit older. He was small but chubby, and his face was so red Thomas didn’t doubt he could sow fear in his employees. His theory was proved right when the boy Martha had bumped into ran far away from the scene, rounding the counter and entering the toilets. He didn’t even bother in picking the broken things up.

Once the man’s landed on the mess and he saw Patsy standing there, face pale, he made assumptions. “You don’t only come here to hang out, but also break all my dishes and glasses?!”

“N-No, I… It was an accident” opted to say Patsy, taking a step back and looking over her shoulder when she bumped into her father, who took her right arm gently.

“Everything is always an accident with you, Martha. Could you try to do something right for starters?” complained the man.

Thomas frowned at him. “And could you try and talk to her with a bit more of respect?”

The man acknowledged him for the first time. “I’m sorry for this shameful scene, sir, but…”

“Maybe if you treat her kindlier, she’d be calmer and do things better” reprimanded Thomas, holding his daughter closer when he felt her shaking.

The man frowned at his snap. “Excuse me, sir, but how I treat my personnel is my business”

“And how you treat my daughter is my business” countered the southerner.

“Your daughter?” He gave the two an up and down look. “Huh, you’ve succeeded as a father” he falsely praised.

That time, it was Patsy the one defending her father’s honour. “More than you, that know nothing about your own children”

Her boss’ glare darkened as he walked closer to her. “Listen to me, brat…”
“Watch your tone” warned Thomas.

“Look, buddy, I don’t know what you work at, but spend a bit more of time teaching your daughter some respect. She won’t get anywhere like that”

“Well, looking at you, I hope you don’t think yours are an example to follow” snapped Thomas, taking easy offense. “And, for your information, I’m a father and then a secretary.

The man smiled with mockery at him. “You are? Then, teach your daughter how to clean properly” he ordered, pointing at the broken pieces on the floor.

Thomas clicked his tongue and returned the poisonous smile. “Of course, but before, allow me to clean the great piece of shit I’ve got in front of me”

And that was all the warning Thomas gave before taking a glass of water from the table they’d been standing by and threw the liquid to the man’s face. The action made the clients – who’d been seeing the quarrel nervously – to giggle under their breaths.

“Occupational hazard, sorry” apologised Thomas, sarcastically.

He turned around, dragging his daughter with him on his way out.

Patsy hadn’t met her father’s eyes on the way back. Thomas didn’t know how to start the conversation, either. In the end, they made it home in complete, uncomfortable silence. Thomas placed a hand on her forearm before the girl had a chance to jump out of the vehicle.

“I think we need to talk about this” he started, gently.

“About how you got me fired?” huffed the girl, though without her usual bite.

“You shouldn’t have had a job in the first place”

“Said the man who didn’t stop pestering about getting one”

“I did not pester. I simply told you you couldn’t be without doing something”

“Well, I was doing something until you showed up”

“And why didn’t I know until I show up? Thought you’d boast about whatever job you might get to shut me up”

“Oh, yes, you really got quite in there…”
“I was utterly shocked for the first five minutes I saw you serving tables, yes”

“Well, sorry I only managed to be a waitress instead the CEO of some big shitty company as you expect from me” snapped Martha, freeing her arm from Thomas’ grip and stepping out the car in a bad mood.

“I didn’t say that, Mar… Martha!” he called, receiving the passenger door slamming shut as a response. “Martha” he repeated, getting out himself. “Patsy, come on”

His daughter ignored him right away, leaving the front door wide opened. Thomas groaned, shut his own door and passed a hand through his face. A shuffling sound made him look up again, and he frowned at the sight of Anna, again with a stupid basket full of whatever the hell that was in hands.

“For God’s sake, Anna!” he complained.

“Merry Christmas” said the girl, giggling sheepishly.

“Merry for you, I suppose” he huffed, locking the car and walking directly to his house, barely casting a glare in his sister’s direction.

“Not in the slightest” she admitted, under her breath.

“The only good news I had today” snapped Thomas, about to close the door in her noses.

Anna stopped him. “Thomas, please, I just want…”

“Damn it all, Anna, do you have the slightest idea of what kind of day I just had?” he snapped, paying his frustrations with her. “Didn’t you see my daughter storming into the house, running away from me as if I were the fucking plague?”

Anna matched his fury. “And do you know what kind of days I’ve been having?! Not knowing when the damned phone would ring and you immediately become Lucy’s best friend to fuck my whole life up!”

“I did not! I have nothing to do with her stupid obsession!”

“That’s the problem!” exploded Thomas, raising one arm in frustration. “Neither you or Randolph ever stepped in! You didn’t call, didn’t care about how I was doing, how the girls were doing!”

“Yes, it is! It’s fucking hell to be a walking doll! And to have two brothers that don’t care about you!” screamed Anna, tears prickling at her eyes. “And to have one of them with material to blackmail me, as if Lucy’s stupid eagle eye wasn’t enough”
Thomas cursed himself when he felt bad for seeing his sister cry, and knowing he was the cause. Or part of it. Sighing loudly, he said: “Anna, I don’t give a damn about your life. Date whoever you want, do whatever you want and leave me out of it, as you all have always been doing”

“She’s trying to match me up with somebody” revealed Anna, voice volume turned down considerably.

“She’s giving you an alibi, good for you” dismissed Thomas, uninterestedly.

“No, it’s not!” snapped Anna, again. “It is not when you want to date somebody seriously and you can’t because nobody would allow themselves to be the other one, living in the shadows, while I have to play the perfect trophy wife beside a stupid conceited asshole that only befriends my family for status and not because he truly likes us!”

“Anna—”

“Though, who the hell will like us, anyways? I barely stand us sometimes, and we’re family!”

“Anna”

“I mean, the only ones I stood were you and Jen, and I couldn’t talk to her all I wanted because Mum was always in the middle, just fucking badmouthing her because she wanted to live her life, and it didn’t get any better when you decided to leave with Martha”

“Anna—”

“And now I can’t make it up to her, and I can’t make it up to you, because I don’t have the balls you two had to stand up against Mum or Lucy and live my fucking life as I want to! I can’t even spend Christmas Eve alone, even if it’s just to drown in self-pity!”

“Anna!” screamed Thomas, wanting to be heard above his sister’s rambling. He frowned at the sight of her, crying her eyes out, breathing heavily and one hand buried in her hair. “Calm down, you’re gonna have a stroke” he advised, opening the door completely.

Anna surprised him by dropping the basket and buried her face in his chest, wetting the clothe. “I can’t anymore”

Thomas let her vent, eventually tapping her back and rubbing circles on it to soothe her.

“There, it’s alright” he whispered. “Listen, I’m not gonna tell. I don’t want to have anything to do with whatever you do in your free time”

“I didn’t want you to get involved” sobbed Anna.

“I know, I know”

“I’m sorry I screamed at you in front of the neighbourhood”

“At the man that lives next door, they might be immune” he joked. “I’m sorry too” He sighed. “And, listen, you… You can stay with us tonight”

“You don’t have to do that” she said, getting separated from her brother and sniffing.
“Well, I don’t want you to go back all alone” he insisted, stepping aside to let her in. “And don’t worry over our sister. I’ll—I’ll call my lawyer and I’m sure he’ll know what to do”

“Alright…” she nodded. She picked up the basket she’d previously dropped.

“Leave that there…”

Her eyes watered again. “But it cost me 20 dollars”

“Alright, alright” he hurried to say, before she could start bawling her eyes out again.

He walked in with her, closing the front door quietly. Madison and Dolley were at the doorframe of the dining room, eyeing him with worry. The man’s eyes grew wide when he saw his friend’s companion.

“Thomas, what…?”

“I’ll join you in a moment” he interrupted, a million things in his head. “Could you please serve Anna a share too?”

“No, it’s alright” nodded Madison, turning around to do so.

“Come, honey. Are you alright?” asked Dolley, frowning at the tear tracks on her cheeks.

“I’m fine” replied Anna, making sure she looked half-decent.

Thomas sighed when he saw no trace of Martha at the table with the rest.

Once he was sat on his desk, he took his phone and vacillated upon the contact. He knew he could call the Caribbean whenever he needed it, Hamilton had made sure to remind him persistently. But even if it wasn’t for himself, he still couldn’t bring himself to do it naturally, and less during a holiday.

There were three knocks on his door. He got surprised to see his oldest daughter standing there, already changed into more comfortable clothes for being indoors. She walked in, glare lowered and placed an envelope on his desk.

“What is this?” he asked, putting his phone aside and opening it.

“It’s all I gained for working there” she explained, playing with her long hair nervously. “I… I was
saving for being able to buy Polly that tablet she wants” she admitted.

Thomas’ glare softened at the explanation. “Patsy…”

“I know it’s not enough, but less is nothing” she hurried to say.

“It’s not that” Thomas shook his head. “This is not your obligation, it’s mine”

“I know you’ve been struggling with money since… Since a few years ago” she omitted the real cause, knowing it was painful for them both. “And… Polly and I understand, but she’s still little, and, well, that thing was the most expensive on her list and I thought…”

“But this is not your problem to worry about, princess” insisted Thomas, tenderly.

“I wanted to help” stated Patsy, weakly stubborn.

Thomas sighed when his daughter still wouldn’t meet his glare. He got up and gave her a hug. At first she stiffened under the touch, but eventually returned the hug with all her might.

“I’m sorry I made you feel like this was your responsibility” he apologised, rubbing her back. “It’s mine, not yours, alright? And if you want to lend a hand, just tell me and we’ll look for something together”

“Okay…”

“You know you can come to me, right?” he asked, afraid of what answer he could get.

Patsy shrugged at first. “Yes, I guess…”

“You can” he assured her, holding her closer. “I know I can be a better father, but…”

“You’re already the best Dad” interrupted Patsy, frowning slightly. “It’s me who can get better at being a daughter and sister”

“Your stood that being to buy Polly a present” laughed Thomas, trying to lighten the mood. “I think you’re doing fine” Better than me, to be honest.

“Hm…”

“You and your sisters are the best thing that ever happened to me and that I still have, Patsy” he admitted, feeling her hugging him tighter. He didn’t see the tears prickling at his daughter’s eyes when he said ‘sister’ in plural. “Don’t forget that, princess, alright?”

“I want to study Performing Acts” she blurted out, nerves growing.

“What?” he asked, ending the hug.

“I’ve been looking for colleges and there are a couple I like” she admitted, writhing her hands in nervousness. “I know it’s not a steady career, like Medicine or… Or any other things, but…”

“Do you want to study that?” interrupted Thomas, gently. Patsy nodded, looking up at him in expectation. “Then, we’ll look for the college you like the most and you can start when you feel
comfortable”

“Can I?” she asked, hopeful.

“If that’s the path you think as yours…” he shrugged.

Patsy hugged him again. “Thank you, Dad” she said, clearly happy.

It put a smile on Thomas’ face. “Alright” he tapped her on the back. “Go down with the rest, dinner’s ready. I’ll join y’all in a bit, princess”

Seeing the envelope that contained his daughter’s efforts and sacrifice really helped Thomas the next time he picked up the phone.

Hamilton answered immediately.

“Yes?”

“Hamilton? I…”

“Is everything alright?” he asked, hurriedly.

“Yes, it’s… Do you have a moment?” he asked, frowning at the tone.

“Yes. Are you alright?”

“Yes, I…” He sighed, turning around so the envelope couldn’t look at him anymore. “Listen, I… I think I’m gonna be late to pay you next month” he admitted, and, rapidly added: “I’ll pay you eventually, but not on the exact d—”

“What day were we going to renew the contract?” asked Hamilton, a bit confused.

“February 9th” he answered, knowing it by heart.

“Alright, then, let’s spare these two months” decided Hamilton, quickly.

“Are you sure?” asked Thomas, unsurely.

“Yes, it’s alright. Enjoy the holidays”

“Okay, then…”

“Was that all?”

“I… No, I was… Could you please help my sister with something that’s been troubling her for a while?”
“Your sister?”

“Not Lucy. Anna”

“Ah, the youngest, with long hair?” he recalled, vaguely.

“Yes”

“Ah, yes. Is she alright?”

“I think she is now”

“Good. I liked her” he admitted, surprising the older man. “She was the only one of your siblings who cared if you were alright”

“Was she?” he asked, shocked at the new information.

“Yes”

Well, that was a quick way to make Thomas feel bad for something he didn’t mind in a whole week.

“All okay?” asked Hamilton.

“Yes” he nodded, automatically.

“Alright, then. B—”

“No, wait” he interrupted, just for his words to die in the tip of his tongue.

“Yes?” pressured Hamilton, strangely patient.

“I… Is… Does the appointment with your wife still stand?” he asked, awkwardly.

It took Hamilton a few seconds to answer. “Uh, yeah, whenever you want it”

“After the holidays? If she’s okay with it”

“Sure, I’ll let you know. Do you want to talk with her personally now?” he proposed, at last second.

“No, no, I… I don’t want to bother her” I’ve already bothered you enough calling on Christmas’ Eve for my mess of a life.

“You’re not bothering” assured Hamilton. “Anything else?”

“No, thank you” he answered rapidly, feeling slightly better.

“Okay, then. You’re doing good?” he asked once more.

“Yes”

“Good to know. Merry Christmas, Thomas”
“Likewise, Alexander”

As he hung up, he didn’t manage to ‘listen’ to Hamilton’s silence at the other side of the line.

It didn’t catch on that the Caribbean’s name had slipped naturally later on. He decided to not give it much thought and prayed for Hamilton to do the same.

Chapter End Notes

And Patsy and Thomas finally made up. Sorta. Their tempers aren't going to disappear any time soon.
Yes, Polly got her present and Patsy also had the few surprises Thomas bought when they were at the store. Those things will make a cameo in following episodes.
Just one more part to go that I'll try to have as soon as possible! ^^
Sursum corda!
Washington reclined on his armchair, breathing in the relaxing atmosphere his house was sunken into. Martha had gone to buy the ingredients she needed to prepare the dessert she prepared all Christmases. He took one gulp of his whiskey – fuck it, he was on vacation and he was going to enjoy it, because he deserved it – and looked out the window, seeing the clouds rolling by against a clear sky. The night would fall eventually, maybe too soon for his likings – he really liked summer better for how long the days were – but he’d enjoy the peaceful image nature was presenting him with as long as it lasted.

This was what he waited for all year. Just a relaxing end of the year. Without people wandering around his house, without pretending he liked the intrusion, without faked smiles, without the annoying hurry of preparing more dishes than what’s truly necessary. No. Just he and his wife, enjoying their time together and talking peacefully. Maybe he should look for those vinyl’s and invite his wife to dance, remember old times. George smiled and sighed happily. Yes, he should really do that. He was a nostalgic and a romantic, what was he going to do about it? He knew Martha liked it deep down, despite her petty protests.

He heard the front door opening and was about to get up to kiss his wife hello, help her with whatever she’d bought, and simply enjoy the day by her side.

God, how much he loved her.

“George, look who I bumped into!” called Martha, as she made her way into the living room, grocery bags in both hands.

Washington’s smile fell when he saw the tall and thin man behind his wife, waving at him as if they were still good and close friends. “Merry Christmas, George!” greeted King, with a wide smile.

“I invited him to have dinner with us” explained Martha, cheerfully.

George eyed them both, his wife especially.
Daughter of a fucking and filthy bitch…

“What the fuck is Maleficent doing in my house?” spat the oldest.

“George!” gasped Martha.

“Can’t you let me have a peaceful and happy Christmas, Martha? What’s wrong with you?” he complained.

“With me?” gaped Martha. “It was you the one insulting a guest!”

“I told you I don’t want any more guests! Did you learn nothing from last year?”

“Hey, if I’m bothering you, I can leave” proposed King, holding one hand up in innocence.

“No, no…” hurried to say Martha.

“Yes, thank you”

“George!”

“Let the man do his good deed of the year so he can still think he’s nice”

“George, he’s alone at Christmas’ Eve” revealed Martha, sternly.

“And what about his boyfriend?”

“He’s with the family” explained King. “He doesn’t want to introduce me yet”

“The only intelligent thing he’s done with you” nodded Washington, in agreement. “Let’s see if the blindfold falls completely when he’s back”

Martha scrunched up her nose in disgust. “Really, you’re so bitter lately. Then, you don’t understand why I insist on bringing guests!”

“I was happy and on good vibe, woman! It was you two the ones fucking my whole day up!”

“I won’t let anyone spend Christmas alone!” she proclaimed, stubbornly.

“Oh, for God’s sake, Martha, everybody wants to spend fucking Christmas alone! Only kids and who suffer from monophobia don’t! And I’m neither!”

“No, you’ve just turned into a grumpy old man!” she shouted, tears prickling in her eyes. She turned around, sobbing loudly as she ran into the kitchen.

“You made your wife cry in Christmas Eve” scolded King.

“The last thing I needed from you!” Washington jumped from his seat at his reprimand. “Get the hell out of here, you’ve done enough” he instructed, shoving him to the front door.
King fought back. “C’mon, man, it’s been ages since we had a peaceful dinner to chat”

“Because we’ve never had one, with you that’s impossible!”

“I can help! Just tell me what you need me to do!”

“To leave!”

The phone rang. King took it as a chance to free himself from the pushes and ran to the table the item was on. George watched in impotence, passing a hand through his face, in annoyance.

“Hell of a life…”

“Georgie, it’s your mother” said King, coming back, handing him the loudly phone.

“Fucking hell of a life…”

Washington took the phone with vehemence, marched in the room again and threw it against the cushions to let some rage out.

“Aren’t you going to pick it up?” asked King, surprised.

“No”

“Pick it up, man, you must always pick it up when it's your mum!” he scolded again, a frown on his face.

“No, not to this one mum, you must not” he contradicted, shaking his head.

Washington wasn’t surprised when King didn’t listen to him, but he surely was shocked when he saw the man answering the phone on his behalf. He tossed the phone in his hands, urging him with the glare. Washington sighed and pressed the mobile against his ear.

“Hello?” he said, with the fakest neutral tone he could perform.

“Hi, sweetie, how’re you doing?” asked a female voice, full of tenderness.

And if Washington hadn’t been shocked before, he surely was now. He took the phone away from his ear, read the ID and then spoke again.

“Mum? Is it you?” he asked, with insecurity.
The woman on the other side laughed. “Of course it is, honey! Who else?”

“I don’t know… Honey? Are you alright?” he asked, getting up to pace in worry.

Mary hummed in response. “Look, I’ve called to invite you to my Christmas party”

“Yes, George, a party. There won’t be much people, so don’t worry. I know you don’t like crowds” she promised.

“Mum, are you sure you’re alright?” insisted Washington. “I feel you a bit odd, like… Like happy”

“I’m better than ever, sweetie. I’m in love” she proclaimed, with a foreign dreamer tone in her usual raspy and cold voice.

“In love?” he repeated, eyes wide. “With life or something like that?”

“No, no, with a man I met the other day. We simply clicked” she explained.

Martha chose that moment to come back: “What happens?” she asked, when she’d heard not noise at all for a while.

King trotted to her side and whispered: “I think his Mum’s got a boyfriend”

“Huh, a Christmas miracle in its finest”

“Where did you meet him?” asked Washington, ignoring the other two persons in the room.

“At the park”

“Do you go to the park?”

“To scare little children” huffed Martha.

Washington looked daggers at his wife, until he heard the explanation of his mother: “There’s always a possibility of some child falling”, and averted her glare.

Martha smiled with superiority. “Did I get it right?”

“I wanna meet that lady” said King, interested.

“Hush!” ordered Washington, trying to put his thoughts under control. “Mum… Um…”

“Is that your wife?” asked Mary.

“Uh, yes…”

“She can come too. I’ve been missing her”

“Missing her?” he parroted, making his wife to scowl in equal confusion. “Mum, the last time you saw her, you threw her a marzipan”

King tried to drown his laughter. “Now, I absolutely have to meet her”

“Aw, the poor soul. I’ll have to apologise to her too”
“Apologise? You?” questioned the man, head spinning.

“Look, I have to hang up. Izzy came back from the store”

“Izzy?” he repeated, squinting his eyes.

“I’ll wait for your arrival. He’s dying to meet you!”

“Mum, hold on…”

“Bye, sweetheart!”

The line went dead. Washington looked at his phone, dumbfounded.

Martha sneered from spot. “So much for the peaceful Christmas you wanted to have”

Washington shook his head, in denial. “No, this… This cannot be” he muttered, looking at the screen to see if that had been his mother.

“That’s so beautiful” opined King, a hand on his chest. “Falling in love at whatever age”

“ Depending on whom you fall in love with” grumbled Washington, pocketing his phone.

Martha rolled her eyes. “Oh, there he goes…”

“There’s something fishy in here, and I’m not liking it one bit” he declared, striding to the front door.

“George, your mother’s finally being a nice granny. Why do you have to look for the cat having three feet*?” asked Martha, following him with King.

“Because my mother has never been a nice granny” he countered, putting on a jacket. “Red flag number one”

“Love changes people, Georgie” said King, wisely.

“Oh, yes, you’ve changed so much”

“Hey, excuse me, but since I started dating Sam I’ve only had…” He counted under his breath. “Like, two outburst per day. That’s a historical deed”

Washington shook his head, stubbornly. “That man must be putting something in her food”

“Maybe the meds the doctors had been reciting her for ages?” guessed Martha.

“And what kind of name is Izzy?” he kept complaining, ignoring his wife. “That sounds like the name of a stoner from the 70’s!”

“Good old times” nodded King, nostalgic.

“You were underage in the 70’s” pointed out Martha.

“Still have memories of that time, though…”
“Hey, if we’re going, let’s buy her something” said Martha, taking her coat too. “We didn’t buy her anything for her birthday”

“You weren’t very up to it back then” reminded Washington.

“But if the poor woman wants to apologise…”

“I just wanted to have a peaceful dinner and night…” lamented Washington, opening the door with vehemence. “Read a book, dance to some carol’s music…”

“What a bitterness of a man” complained Martha.

King patted her on the arm. “Can I go with you?”

“Yeah, if all this is an elaborate joke, I can fuck her party up. As she did with mine” she recalled, vindictively.

“I like you” decided King, looping arms with her. “We should hang out more often”

They stopped at the first store they saw near where Mary’s house was.

“Stay here” he told his wife, who gaped at him, offended. “I don’t want you to spend all our money before the new year starts”

“And if I give it back before New Year’s Eve?”

“No”

“You’re no fun” she pouted.

“He’s been bitter since college” recalled King.

Washington frowned at him through the rear-mirror. “You’re coming with me”

“I prefer Martha”

“That’s not new” smirked the woman.

“No, you’re coming with me, I don’t trust you two in my car” he ordered, unbuckling the seatbelt.

“That’s cruel, man, that’s your wife you’re talking about”

“Thank you!”

Washington looked at both of them, eyes half-closed. “My point exactly. I’m still paying this”

“Well, I’m sorry to tell you it won’t pay off. This car is a four-wheel junk” said King, looking at the vehicle with disdain.
“Because he’s a tight-fisted who bought a second-hand car” agreed Martha.

“God, and just thinking you’ll be joining my mother soon” he grumbled, jumping out of the car. “C’mon” he insisted, opening the backseat door.

“I’ll be good” promised King.

“I don’t believe you. Come on” he urged, sternly.

“Well, okay…” gave in King, opening his bag and getting something out of it.

Martha noticed what it was first. “What’re you doing??”

The Washington marriage looked dumbfounded as they saw King putting a stocking on his face. King looked at both of them, not understanding their perplexed expressions.

“What?”

“Why are you wearing that, my dear child?” asked Martha, turning around completely.

King again looked at both of them. “Oooh, are we going to do it legally?”

Washington frowned darkly at him. “Of course we are!”

“Alright, alright. As you were complaining about spending money on her, I thought…” he tried to elaborate, removing the stocking from his head. He laughed, shaking his head, as he put it back in the bag. “Hehehe, we almost made a show out of a simple confusion, huh?” he said, patting Washington on the arm and getting out of the backseat.

“You always take that with you?” asked Washington, looking at his ex-workmate’s bag with squinted eyes.

“You never know when you’re gonna need rob and run” he defended himself.

Martha hummed, pensive. “Mh, that sounds good”

“Martha, don’t you dare”

When the trio arrived at the house, they were speechless at the number of cars parked around the house, as well as the sound of music and laughter coming from the backyard. The house was unrecognisable, full of colourful lights and Christmas decorations. Martha took a couple of pictures of some she found cute and joked about stealing them when they left. Or, at least, Washington wanted to think she’d been joking.
The shock turned bigger when the door opened, revealing a smiling Mary. She seemed to be ten years younger and, for once, she was wearing a nice and eye-catching yellow dress that clung to her tiny figure. And if that wasn’t enough, the Washington marriage was left speechless when Mary hugged her son with all her might.

“George, so nice to see you! Come inside, it’s cold… Martha, honey, merry Christmas!” she greeted her daughter-in-law, kissing her in both cheeks, leaving her stone cold by the strange behaviour. “Oh, did you bring a friend with you?” she asked, shaking hands with King.

“We’re going to spend the holiday together” explained the man, looking at the couple with a frown.

Martha was the first one to wake up from the daze. “Um, we hope it’s not an inconvenience?”

“Not at all! We’ll have more than enough. Between you and me, I think I ordered too much food” she admitted, blushing slightly and closing the door as the three were in. “Izzy’s in the kitchen making dinner”

Washington tried hard not to show his discomfort while making their way where his mother’s boyfriend was. Martha nudged him on the arm, as a silent reprimand and finally he could soften his stern features.

The man in question didn’t give him any strange vibe, whatsoever. He might be around his mother’s age – which calmed him considerably for some reason – and almost shared his height. Izzy turned around, showing his built complexion, and greeted them with a warm smile.

“Ah, you must be Mary’s boy, George, right?” he said, as he cleaned his hands on the apron he was wearing before offering one to shake.

Washington obliged, with a tight grip. “Izzy, I guess?”

“That’d me be”

“And I’m Martha, the unsatisfied wife” proclaimed Martha, getting in between the two men. She gained an angry glare from her husband and a struggle of not letting a loud laughter out from King’s part.

Mary giggled. “She’s a quipster”

“Now she’s that…” muttered Washington, managing to not roll his eyes.

“Well, I’d like to keep chatting, but here are people waiting to dine” excused Izzy, with an apologetic look.

“His turkey’s one of the best I’ve ever eaten” boasted Mary, with a proud smile on her face. “And his sauce is a delight to taste!”

Something inside George’s chest constricted at her words. “You know what?” he said, casually. “I was thinking that maybe I should cook you dinner” he proposed.
“What?” asked his mother, blinking dumbfounded.

“What’re you doing?” muttered Martha, between gritted teeth.

Washington ignored her right away. “You know, it’s your first Christmas together. Enjoy then. I’ll take care of it”

“You are guests” said Mary hurriedly. “I can’t let you…”

“Enjoy the night, we’ll take care of it” interrupted Washington, taking the cook book from the counter, maybe more brusquely than he’d wanted.

“Really, George, it’s not an inconvenience…” joined Izzy, with a frown.

“Absolutely not. Please, I insist”

“Let him do it, Mary, you know how he can be” supported Martha, knowing what this was coming from.

“Well, alright, but if you need help at some point…” ceded Izzy, after seeing his partner nodding.

“I think we three can handle it”

“Three?” echoed Martha, eyes squinting.

Izzy and Mary exchanged a glare and the woman sighed. “He’s as stubborn as an old mule…”

“You can bet” agreed her daughter-in-law, crossing both arms.

______________________________

It wasn’t until they were left alone in the kitchen that Martha dared to speak up.

“You use the plural too lightly”

“You can leave if you want. I can cook” countered her husband, venom in his tone.

Martha looked at him up and down. “This has to do with the Christmas of 2006, right?”

That made Washington snapped under his breath. “His sauce’s a delight to taste… The best turkey she’s ever eaten… Isn’t his turkey too dry or the sauce to spicy, you sharp-tongued nit-picking?”

King looked at his ex-workmate: “You know? I’ve been going to a therapist lately…”

“They’ve earned Heaven to have you as a client, then”

“I’m only saying if you want their number, I can…”

“Yes, please” interceded Martha.
Washington threw her another hateful glare. “Didn’t you want to leave? Shoo, then”

“Don’t have to tell me twice” she beamed excitedly, making a beeline for the door.

“Having a wife for that…”

“Georgie, you’re bitter” pointed out King. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No, I want to make this turkey and see what my mother has to say about it… Saying it’s too dry and spicy…” he repeated again, mumbling in anger.

“Here, let me” said King, taking the book from his hands. “I’m a cooking ace”

“According to who?”

“To everybody that has tasted my food”

“Are your employees those people? Because then I can’t take the review seriously. They’d say whatever so you don’t fire them”

“Excuse me, but my cooking is known all across the country” countered King, taking easy offense.

“Open a restaurant, then…”

“No, that world stresses me” He snapped his fingers twice as his old friend rolled his eyes. “Here, I need salt and pepper to season the turkey” and he tapped it to reassurance.

“Look for them, then” said Washington, taking the book back to his power.

King surprisingly obliged, looking in the cabinets for the condiments and placed them by the turkey, waiting to be cooked. He also brought to their work place a bottle of wine.

“Are you going to start drinking this soon?” he joked.

“It’s part of the recipe your mother’s boyfriend was gonna make”

Washington read under his breath. “Inject the wine with a syringe in diverse parts of the turkey…” He looked at King fearfully. “I’m scared to ask you if you have a syringe”

“I actually have one once” he nodded. “For my stuff”

“What stuff?”

“Mine”

“…”

“Anyways, I don’t have it anymore. Sam saw it and threw it away” he recalled, almost sadly.

“Pity”

“Yeah…”
“I was saying it for the food”

“Yeah, for that too…”

“Maybe that guy had some…” said Washington, about to go to look for one himself.

“Drop the bullshit. My mother did it like this when I was younger and nothing ever happened to me” snapped King, taking the bottle and bathing the turkey with it.

“What’re you doing?!” asked Washington, witnessing it all in bewilderment.

“There!” declared, putting the bottle back where it was. “Next step. Hurry!” he ordered, clapping both hands to emphasise.

“Stuff the turkey with the apple and plums” read Washington, frowning at the exasperating expression that had taken over King’s features all of a sudden.

“Stuffing it how? It has no head”

“The rear part of it, King…” explained Washington, boringly.

The man looked at it, processing his ex-workmate’s words. “The arse?” he said, more coarsely.

“If you want to be badmouthed about it, yes”

“It doesn’t fit! Is that why we needed butter?”

“Try and see”

“Yeah, what else? You try it”

“I have the book, I can’t”

“Come on, you wanted to do this for a puerile pride”

“The pot calling the kettle… Weren’t you an awesome chef?”

“Fuck’s sake… This is why I don’t help people” he complained, facing the turkey. “Come here, little one…”

“But don’t talk to it like that, it’s weird”

“What could have this poor soul done to deserve this ending?” kept commenting King, not knowing where to start.

“Grab its legs like this” instructed Washington, leaving the book aside. He grabbed both legs to put them up.

King looked it with a disgusted face. “What for?”

“Maybe it fits more easily”

“Look, why don’t we skip this part? I don’t like stuffed, anyways”

“You don’t, but there are more people in here!”

“Read them that, I’m sure they’ll share my opinion right after”
Washington sighed frustratedly. “No, we have to follow the recipe. I told my mother…”

“I’m fucking tired of this shit…”

“If we don’t follow the recipe, we’ll do it wrong” insisted Washington, frowning at the stubbornness of his companion.

“Let me see that… I’m sure we can skip it” said King, ripping the book out of his hands. He started to read, growing more disgusted as he did so. “Stuff it with blah blah blah… And then sew the hole, so the stuff doesn’t…” He closed the book vehemently, looking at it with rage. “What kind of sick-minded wrote this?!” He threw it aside and declared: “I refuse to spend Christmas Eve sewing the arsehole of a bald dead bird”

“I’m gonna look for Martha, maybe she knows another way…” he said, sprinting to the door.

“Last fucking time I spend Christmas with you, stirrer…”

“I hope so!”

Finding Martha was easy, the difficult part lay in convincing her to go help them and make her have only one glass of alcohol with her.

“George! I was about to go look for you!” exclaimed his wife, looping their arms together. She pointed at some display cabinet that stood proudly in front of them. “Izzy was just explaining how he managed to keep that in place. You know? Like the one we have back at home. The one you’ve been promising to attach to the wall but never do?”

Washington squinted his eyes at his wife’s poisonous sweet tone. When she wanted to, she could be a real asshole. The vengeance for spoiling her Christmas Eve was clear in her dark eyes, and the tall man simply sent her a warning with his own. He was having enough for the night.

“He used to work at a furniture store when he was younger” chimed in Mary, again boasting about the many things her boyfriend seemed to do right.

“I was a bit rusty, but I think I could do it properly” added Izzy, laughing a bit shyly and with humility.

“Try and teach this hard-headed man. Maybe he listens to you” joked Martha, taking the last gulp of her glass.

“Do you want a divorce, Martha?” hissed Washington, under his breath.

“I’m about to drink my fourth glass, don’t tempt me” she snapped back.
“How’s dinner going, George?” asked Izzy.

In retrospect, George would facepalm himself later for his stubborn and puerile pride in that moment. He’d comfort himself thinking Alexander wasn’t there, or he’d never hear the end of it any time he tried to lecture his young friend about the same behaviour. He eyed his wife, though, considering how many options there were that she’d tell him anyways. Maybe he should let her drink all she wanted for the night…

“Fine” he lied, forcing out a smile.

“If you need help at some point…” said Izzy, frowning in concern. “I admit I chose a difficult…”

“No, it’s very easy. Besides, I’ve got help already”

Martha scoffed. “Yeah, his favourite person in the planet. Have I told you how the deal they made when George left ended up?”

Vindictive bitch…

Not wanting to drown in more embarrassing memories – and trying to keep his bother to a minimum now that he was going to go back to King – Washington turned on his heels and decided to head back to the kitchen. He was too focused on not listening to his wife’s telling about the wall that fell and all that followed, that he didn’t saw the that the little step he had to take to exit the living room had a little bump, it made him fall to his knees, hissing form pain.

“Georgie, are you okay?” asked his mother, going as fast as she could to his side.

“Yes, yes” he lied again, his annoyance growing.

“I’m sorry. I’ve been pushing fixing that step for too long” apologised Izzy, sounding genuinely bad.

“Well, I guess all husbands are the same, then” joked Martha, though eyeing her husband to make sure he was alright.

“I wasn’t looking, it’s alright”

“You’ve always had your head up in the clouds” complained Mary, though more tenderly than he was used to.

“I’ll fix it, so nobody else trips” decided Izzy, trotting to the back of the house.

“Only he has in all this time”

George frowned down at his mother. He didn’t know if it was good or not that her habit of
calling him out hadn’t died down.

“No, no, just in case. There are plenty of people tonight!” insisted her boyfriend.

“Making your father work in Christmas Eve, you should feel ashamed” joked Martha, giggling in the end.

Washington ignored her and went back to the kitchen as fast as his legs could.

His mood didn’t get any better when he saw his ex-workmate.

“What’re you doing??” he asked, trying not to scream as he wanted.

King raised an eyebrow, as if the crazy one was Washington and not him, who was cleaning a – very black-burnt – turkey in the sink. With soap.

“I’m bathing the turkey”

“I’m seeing it! I’m asking you why. Are you already in that phase when you know what you’re doing without seeing the crazy in it?”

“There says we have to bath the turkey” explained King, pointing at the open book with his chin.

Washington finally put the pieces together in his mind. “It meant bathing it with the sauce!”

“I did that too, but this crap kept being drier than a tuna jerky*!”

Washington’s ire matched his when he saw the temperature in the oven. “How do you want it to be, when you put it over 500 degrees??”

“Because it said it’ll be four hours at 300, I thought that way it’ll only be two!”

“What kind of reasoning that is?!”

“It’s still raw in the inside…” complained King, scrunching up his nose at the turkey. “This oven is shit!” he declared, kicking.

“Be careful, it’s my mother’s!” Then, it hit him like a thousand bricks. “Gosh, we don’t have dinner now. They’re gonna kill us”
“Uh, they’re gonna kill you. I didn’t promise anything”

“Go to hell, this is all your responsibility” snapped Washington, taking the turkey in his hands. He looked it over. “Well, only the outside is useless. We can still save this”

“Why can’t we just order some meals on wheels?”

“Yes, and who pays them? You?”

“Georgie, you’re obsessed with money. I didn’t remember you like this” said King, changing his demeanour rapidly for one of concern.

“Because there are plenty of people out there! I don’t want to start the year in the red!”

King clapped both hands. “Oh, idea! Give me some sliced bread!”


“I’m gonna make my own pizza invention” he declared, taking the bread himself and taking out slices.

Washington shook his head. “What a mess…”

King’s invention consisted in placing slices of ingredients – just as cheese and ham – on the top of the bread, and then put them in the oven. It smell wonderfully, especially when he added oregano on the top of it all. Compared to that, his small pieces of turkey placed in little dishes – so they’d look bigger and as if there were more than there actually were – looked very ridicule.

“Do you want me to pray to the Virgin of Lourdes so somebody it’s allergic?” asked King, as they made their way to the backyard, where the party had migrated to.

“No!” exclaimed Washington, horrified.

King shrugged. “It’d be a good excuse to flee from here…”

Washington saw his wife, mother and Izzy chatting near the pond, that for once had the lights around it functioning, even if just for aesthetic. Martha noticed them first, again with a full glass in her hand. Washington never knew where she got that superpower from.

“Ah, here’s the food!” she exclaimed, about to devour whatever that was on her husband’s plate, but stopped. “Ah, it’s only the appetizer…” she pouted. “When’s the turkey gonna be ready?”

“Honey, that’s the turkey” laughed Washington, sweat cold running down his neck.
“Who ate the rest?” she asked, eyes wide.

“The garbage disposal unit” answered King. Then, with a bright smile, showed them his plate. “King’s Pizzas, anyone?”

“Gosh, George, why didn’t you let Izzy make dinner?” snapped his mother, frowning up at him. “Now, how am I going to feed all these people?”

“Now, Mary, calm down” interceded Izzy. “The man just wanted to have a gesture by doing the work himself. I can call one of my friends to deliver food if what the friend is offering is not enough”

Mary’s features softened and she sighed, turning to her son. “You’re right. Sorry, George, I know you had good intentions”

Silence reigned for a moment, in which the Washington marriage interchanged a look, dumbfounded.

“You made her apologise” said Martha, in awe. “That’s an historic deed! How did you do it?”

“She was just stressed, it’s not a big deal” shrugged Izzy.

“The heck is not…”

“George, are you alright?” asked Mary, when she saw the emotional state her son was in, shaking slightly and with tears prickling his eyes.

“Welcome to the family!” he exclaimed, going to hug Izzy, who returned the gesture. Martha took the food so they could hug properly and eat something, in the meantime.

“Told you you were going to like him” said Mary, smiling slightly.

“If you knew” huffed King, barely moved by the scene.

Martha sent him a glare. “Why don’t you go offer your creation, that you surely got from YouTube, to the guests?”

King raised his chin, pride hurt. “Gladly”

He turned on his heels, too fast that he almost tripped on the pebbles that adorned a little path around the garden.

“Careful!” said Martha, helping him to steady himself.

“Who the hell puts those around anything?” complained the man, grumpily.

“Be still, you’ll fall into the pond!” admonished Martha.
They wobbled on their feet; the movement made Martha to also almost fall. She tried harder not to drop her husband’s food than the wine she had on the other hand, bathing her mother-in-law’s dress.

“Oh, gosh, sorry!” said Martha, paling at the sight.

“For one night I decide to wear a bright colour!” whined Mary, seeing in horror the big dark red stain.

“Are you okay, Mum?” asked Washington, ending the hug finally and going to help her.

“We’ll have to get you a new dress, so we can clean that one properly” commented Izzy.

“I’ll go get some napkins” informed King, tossing his plate to Washington.

“How’re you going to clean wine off of a dress with napkins?!” exclaimed Martha, still scared of how well Mary was taking her clumsiness.

“No, no, it’s not necessary, I’ll go and change” said Mary, sighing in defeat.

“I’m very sorry” said Martha.

“It wasn’t one of my favourites, it’s alright” dismissed Mary, though frowning.

Izzy’s glare drifted to where King had walked off. “Sir, it’s alright… Careful, the wire!”

The four of them saw King’s foot tangling itself with one wire lying on the floor. He kept walking, thinking force was the best option, and made the lights to go down, breaking some glass in the process. King fell too, groaning loudly.

“Ah, gosh, someone clean that before someone steps on it” said Martha, a hand over her mouth.

“Don’t worry too much for me, huh?” complained King, rubbing his forehead.

“King, stop doing things” admonished Washington, sternly.

“Here, let me help you” offered Izzy, trotting to the man’s side to help him stand.

“Georgie, honey, could you go fetch the mop?” said Mary, patting her son on the arm and watching her boyfriend with a frown of concern.

“Yes, right…”

“I’m alright, it’s just that I decided to wear new shows today and, you know…” talked King in the meantime, when he felt Izzy kneeling beside him.

He decided to prove his point by getting up rapidly, hitting the man in the chin and making him fall backwards. They all watched in horror how Izzy fell right into the pond, where some of the lights –
still on – had fallen. Mary screamed when she heard the painful sound of water mixed with power, paling considerably, while Martha gasped, and Washington felt dizzy. King simply looked at the now still form of the man, floating facedown.

The ambulance was called, and Mary didn’t stop crying, refusing to see the body of her boyfriend covered with a plastic bag. Some of the assistant had put a blanket over her shoulders, consoling her, just to receive a snap from the old woman.

Martha stood by her husband’s side, holding his cold hand and biting her bottom lip. King was by her right, scratching the back of his neck, feeling remorseful.

“It was an accident, I swear” he whispered.

“We know, let her calm down” advised Martha.

“I’m saying because I don’t have enough money for a lawsuit now”

“For god’s sake, have a bit of humanity!” snapped Washington, looking furiously at the man. He knelt in front of his mother, whose crying was now more controlled. “Mum, if you need anything…”

He shut his mouth quickly when Mary looked daggers at him.

“I need you, your fucking friend and your bitch of a wife out of my property!” she screamed, getting on her feet, the blanket falling down.

“She’s back” mumbled Martha, gnawing down at her lip.

“Mum, I know you’re upset, but I want to…”

“Upset?!” she interrupted, voice going back from her raspy one. “You just killed the only man I’ve ever loved!”

“To be fair, it was his fault” defended Martha, pointing at King.

“Well, that was a very stupid way of dying if you ask me” commented the British man.

“Nobody has” snapped Washington, seeing the distress in his mother’s face.

“I once watched a show of stupid deaths in the TV. I’m hooked” he kept saying, ignoring his ex-workmate.

“King!”
“Well, in summary, we must live life. Because nobody knows where you’ll be six feet under”

“You will very soon if you don’t shut your mouth” exploded Washington.

“Get him out of here!” ordered Mary, voice cracking.

“Come on, let them talk” ordered Martha.

“Huh, coming to think of it, that was more of a shocking death…” joked King, receiving a whack in the back of the head.

“Son, I never thought you could outdo yourself, but this proves me wrong” snarled Mary, looking at the nothingness with powerlessness.

“Mum, listen, I… I can stay with you for a few days” he offered, feeling terribly. “Or you can come to our house, until you feel better…”

“I’ll feel better when you finally stop being part of my life” she spat. “Isn’t this children nightmare even gonna end?”

“Excuse me, but you invented me here” Washington reminded her, starting to feel angry himself.

“Because he convinced me to make amends. One hell of an idea…” She took the blanket off the ground. “You’ve always been an emotional unsatisfied”

“Because you never paid attention to me” said Washington, feeling hurt. “You hated me as soon as I was born. You ignored me!”

Mary rolled her eyes, upper lip scrunched up in disgust. “Because you were very, very ugly” she admitted, making Washington tense under her cold glare. “All covered in hair, you look like a fucking monkey. That was your father’s gene”

“And what the hell happened to you?” asked King, frowning in concern, along with Martha.

Washington looked at them and the at his mother, with fury. “What happened? That she embittered my existence and my hair fell out of stress”

“Well, now you’re even, then” decided King, coldly.

“Stop it already!” hissed Martha.

“Don’t lie, that fell because you were obsessed with put whatever shit that announced on TV!” argued Mary.

“This is useless” decided Washington, under his breath. “You know what? Maybe we spared that poor man of spending his last years with the worst company ever”

Mary gasped. “I hope you’re referring to having you as a stepson, you disgrace!”

“How many times have I told you to get those fucking lights off? That’s not a place to have them!”

“I never use them! I’ve asked you for taking them off, but you never come! You’re always too busy for own mother!”

“And more I’m gonna be from now on” he swore, striding to the exit and being followed by his wife and King.
“Run” taunted Mary, with a mocking smile. “Run away, as you usually do. Run away, you bald-headed bastard!”

Washington turned around one last time. “And your oven is broken, for your information!” he informed, dodging the hell his mother threw him with mastery.

“I knew this could end badly, but not this bad” admitted Martha, under her breath.

The same day Washington had to go back to work, someone knocked on his door. Waiting any kind of problem, he sighed and allowed them to come in.

“Good morning, sir” said Alexander, placing some rectangular box that was wrapped thoughtfully on his desk. “From Lu and Henry’s part”

“Ah, they always send me this annually. I almost forgot” he nodded, smiling fondly at the present. “I assume you paid them a visit?” Alexander nodded, which made him smile wider. “At least, someone spent a nice Christmas Eve”

The immigrant frowned at the statement. “Is everything alright, sir?”

“I think I’ll need to drink to retell that”

“I think Angelica’s mind is quite busy right now. According to Jefferson, he and Hercules have been trying to help her understand the new IT equipment”

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you both, but don’t change it” congratulated Washington, receiving a sided smile from the Caribbean.

“That surely needs a drink to explain” he joked.

“Let’s go before we hear keyboards hitting walls” laughed Washington, though knowing his staff both men knew he wasn’t very far from reality.

The bang they heard by the time they were exiting the building confirmed that and both friends laughed on their way to Washington’s car.

Chapter End Notes

Remember when I told you this was dark humour? Yeah, well, you were given fair warning...
As posting this by the end of March might be another friendly warning of the speed which I'll write the next episodes XD.
NOTES:
"To look for the cat having three feet" (Buscarle tres pies al gato): To make things complicated, difficult. We also say it with the number five.
To be drier than a tuna jerky (Estar más seco que la mojama): Our equivalent of "as wrinkled as a prune".

Here it is! Now, to the final round of episodes! I guess uploads will be a bit slower than usual (you've seen for yourselves) as life's getting in the way in the good way. Thank you for the patience and support!

BTW... more than 3K views in here? Wth, when did that even happen? Thank you all so much! =D

Sursum corda!
Yeah, not in my best emotionally talking lately, so I figured I should write this (which I've been wanting since a long time). I'm not a therapist, but if one of my advices can help you sort things out in your own way, I'll be happy.

I put counsellor because that was what we called them in here (the most accurate translation), but maybe I got it wrong.

James had suggested him to write it all down, no matter if it was unorganised or in a messy handwriting. Anyone who knew him would feel the irony of the innocent advice; Thomas was obsessed to write everything down. Since very little he’d been a maniac of makings lists about everything, earning some teasing from his siblings and some classmates that his little-self considered friends on its time. He never knew where he took it from or why it made him feel mentally calm and stable, but whenever he opened a drawer, a list would greet him, reminding him of one of his many eccentricities.

There were days when it made him feel sick to his stomach, when he felt guilty of ‘losing time’ by writing something that wouldn’t change his situation or make it better in any form. To logically know doing it won’t guarantee him the security he longed for and keep on doing it because he felt the irrational urge to.

Unlike now.

Thomas didn’t know where he’d taken his sense of humour from, but he’d never been more thankful of it until today. Because, spending his life writing lists of stupid things just to feel steady and skipping the task when it’d finally be useful for him had to be comical, right? At least, at some extent.

Maybe that was why he was more nervous than he thought he would be when he knocked on the Hamilton’s door. He felt like a kid who went unprepared to a test. Which had happened to him a couple of times in his youth. But those times he’d had a good excuse, or so he thought.

Peggy opened the door, being, once more, the happy medium of the family. She seemed surprised at first to see him at the other side of the door but managed to conceal it by a mask of manners her parents had taught her.
“Good afternoon, Jefferson. Alex’s not here yet’

“I came here to talk to your sister” he corrected, not surprised about the fact that Hamilton had decided to stay late to work on whatever it was now.

Cocking a curious eyebrow, she replied: “Angelica’s not visiting tonight’

“I was talking about Mrs Hamilton” he went straight to the point, ignoring the shocked expression of the youngest Schuyler.

“Um, she’s down the hall. I’ll call her for you” she said, stepping aside to let him in.

He nodded, grateful, as the girl walked off, in search of her sister.

Now, the queasiness of his stomach was similar to when you’re called into the Principal’s office, or have to wait in the secretary’s office, waiting for your parents to pick you up. Or, in his case, for his housekeeper.

“Jefferson?” called Peggy, taking him back to the real world. “Down the hall, in Alex’s office” she informed, dropping herself back on the couch and resumed watching whatever that’d been on the TV.

He gave her another silent nod and marched in the direction he was told. The door was opened, waiting for him to come inside the room and start with whatever his rival’s wife (or ex-rival’s, maybe) had prepared for him.

Mrs Hamilton was at the other side of her husband’s desk, a clipboard in hand and a shaking pen in between the fingers of the other. Without giving him a chance to knock politely, she raised her glare as soon as she caught a glimpse of his tall from under the lintel. Her warm smile helped to calm his uneasiness a tiny bit.

“Hello, Mr Jefferson. Please, take a seat” she said, getting up to close the door herself as he chose the chair at her right to sit on. “How’re you doing?” she asked, sitting back in front of him, her smile on place, though smaller.

Thomas felt his words piling up in his throat, making him to sit straighter and more rigid. He opted to use his shrug card, which was ambiguous and not binding enough for a first session. The woman’s lip quirked up, and for a moment Thomas thought he’d chosen wrong, until she talked:
“Well, I guess not very good if you had to come” she giggled, trying to erase the tension and succeeding easily. She lowered her glare, clicking her pen. “So, what made you come here?” she asked, gently.

Well, that was a more difficult question to answer. Everybody was taught to dodge the polite ‘how’re you doing?’ with a faker ‘fine’, or a ‘getting by’ accompanied by a laugh if the person was close to him. But nobody learns how to answer to Mrs Hamilton’s question, how to confront the several situations that had led him to this, sitting in a therapist’s office because Hamilton, a man who’d despised him since the beginning, felt bad for him.

Before he could control himself, he began to chuckle under his breath. It was ironic, cruelly ironic, but he could find the funny part in it. However, he wasn’t laughing because he could see that part now. He never knew why he chose to laugh. It was a natural reaction, one of the many that was normal only for him, that had gained him several dirty looks.

He remembered when he was called to the counsellor’s office to talk about his dropping grades and he found himself in that same situation, cackling as if the problem was funny. The counsellor had knitted her brows, her lips curving slightly.

“You need to take your problems more seriously… Maybe this is the reason why your grades aren’t as good as they used to” she’d told him, words that haunted him for some time until they vanished.

And that had come back before the similarity of both scenarios. This slightly worse, for he wasn’t a teenager anymore.

Another scene came running to the front of his mind, less detailed. Those were the worst sometimes, because though it hurt, Thomas preferred to have all on the table to know what to do, instead of having an unfinished puzzle that’d cause him a migraine as he looked for the missing pieces.

“Do you think is funny?”

“No”

“Then, why are you laughing?”

Jane saw her little son still laughing, holding her tummy and all, with a dumbfounded expression. His father was by her side, and the couple exchanged a glare. Both worried for different reasons Thomas wouldn’t understand until adulthood hit him.
“This kid is dumb…” lamented Jane, pinching the bridge of her nose, exhausted.

Thomas jumped slightly when a hand landed on his forearm. Shaking from containing a louder laugh, he saw Mrs Hamilton lowered to his eye level, a few tissues on her hands he took, a bit relieved when he felt no tear tracks on his cheeks.

He wasn’t a crier, had never been. But lately, the habit had changed and he found his dam breaking without his consent. He’d managed to wait until he was alone to let it happen. The only time he couldn’t hold it in was almost a year ago, in front of Hamilton of all people. And though the immigrant had acted honourably, the memory embarrassed him to this day.

“Take your time” said the woman, taking a seat and waiting patiently for him to calm down. “I’m not going anywhere, that’s the good part of coming over” she joked again, giggling. Her smile turned less forced when the man returned the sound.

“Sorry” he managed to say, after taking a deep breath.

“Don’t apologise, it’s normal” she assured, waving one hand. “Just tell as much as you want”

He nodded, thanking to have the tissue to toy with and keep part of his mind busy with something else. He diverted his glare to the floor, feeling his discomfort growing at each silent second. Saying it was okay if he didn’t want to talk was easy; doing it, being him the one who was supposed to talk, was way more difficult. No matter how many times the specialist at the other side of the desk swore the contrary.

“Is it your first time visiting a therapist?” asked Mrs Hamilton, voice tender.

“As an adult, yes” he answered.

“So, did you go see a child psychologist when you were little?”

“I went to the counsellor” he admitted.

“So, is the reason why you’re here today not recent?”

“I guess there are plenty” he kept replying ambiguously.

The woman sized him with a glare, pensive. “Alright. Is there one which you wouldn’t mind talking about? Or just comment it”

None. “I don’t know” He went rigid when he saw the woman pursing her lips. “I’m not that talkative” he excused himself.

“Have you always?”
"Yes"

She narrowed her eyes, the gears and cogs in her brain working exhaustingly. “You said you were to a counsellor before?”

“Yes”

“The one you school had, I’m guessing?”

“Yes”

“Answer me if you want” she started, calmly. “Did you go there willingly or were you called there?”

Thomas thinned his lips at the question. Well, the acuity was present in all the Schuylers, it seemed. “I went willingly. I was in my teens” he added hurriedly at the end.

“And you’ve never gone before? When you were younger?” She rested her chin on the palm of her hand, seeing him shake his head. “I’m asking because it’s common to see teachers worried over how shy a kid can be…”

“They sent a few notes” he interrupted her, cringing in the inside for the rudeness, although she appeared not to be disturbed or upset about it. “The teachers. To my parents” he explained, a bit more deeply.

“About you being shy?”

“Yes…” he replied, a bit hesitant. Mrs Hamilton felt it, to his disgrace, and he felt urged to get into detail. “They… Well, they grew worried”

“Over you being shy?”

“Yes, I guess…” He sighed, feeling his shoulders heavier. “I guess if I had a kid who wouldn’t talk, I’d do the same”

She titled her head to the side. “But were your grades good?”

“Yes” By the moment.

“I’m saying because my sister was very quiet when she was little, but as her grades were good, teachers didn’t mind much”

“Yes, but I… I wouldn’t talk to the teachers either”

“Well, you were little and didn’t see a probl…”

“When they talked to me, I mean” he interrupted again, biting his bottom lip for the impoliteness again.

“Ah” she said, eyes wide in understanding. “So, you’re talking about that when you were asked something you remained silent?”

“Yes”

“Alright, then… In class or even when you were alone?”

“When I didn’t feel comfortable” He moved uneasy in his seat. “Your husband thought it could be
selective mutism”

“Yes, it could be” she agreed, still deep in her own thoughts. Thomas didn’t know if he wanted to hear them or not. “Did it happen with everybody? Or…”

“When I didn’t feel comfortable” he repeated, again drifting his glare.

“You aren’t comfortable now” she pointed out, still gently and no reproachable. “And you’re talking to me”

Alright, point for her.

“My father and oldest sister were the only ones” he revealed, feeling exposed. “Would still be if there were here”

She smiled sympathetically at him. “Is there someone else right now?”

“My daughters and James” he replied, without thinking too much.

“Madison?”

“Yes. My wife used to be too”

“So, there are people you still talk to when you have one of those episodes?” she asked, and Thomas breathed out a sigh of relief for her not talking about the persons he’d named.

“Yes. In a very low voice, but yes”

“That’s what I thought” she nodded, writing something down. “It’s like extreme shyness. You are capable of understanding the language and use it correctly in other environments. Yet, they avoid working in groups despite they having no trouble in the learning field, whatsoever” she explained, raising her glare once she was finished writing. “Were you a good student?”

Again, he doubted a bit. “Yes, I guess”

“So, there had been no inconveniences with you until the day one of your teachers decided to send a note home?”

_Not in the school field, there hadn’t._ “No”

“And what did they write?” she asked, her tone turning relieving comical. “Your kid is too quiet?”

Thomas chuckled. “Something of the sorts, yes”

Mrs Hamilton huffed, wanting to laugh her disagreement off. The similarity to himself in these situations made him a bit more at ease in her presence.

“What did your parents do?”
“Well, my mother witnessed another silent episode of mine”

“It happened with your mother too?”

“The first one to suffer from it, yes”

“Well, not suffer…” tried to correct the woman.

“She called it that” he dismissed, interrupting her a third time.

“Did she?”

“The only verb she uses when it came to me” he revealed, without thinking. “That hadn’t been the first problem with me”

“What do you mean?”

“I… I had a few habits. Still do”

“What kind of habits?”

“A few. Mannerisms, obsessions? I don’t know. Just things I did when little”

“Do you remember anything in special?”

“I stress-clean” he gave in. “Though that might be because I spent great part of my time with the housekeeper”

She hummed, taking his words into account, but Thomas saw she didn’t believe that theory very much. Instead, her trail of thought went to other directions. It was clear in the way her eyes kept narrowing, as if trying to decipher a very difficult riddle.

“And how did she take it?”

“What?”

“Your mother. How did she take the note?”

“Well, she reprimanded me”

“And you couldn’t defend yourself” she guessed.

“Not even if I’d been able to talk” He took in a deep breath as Mrs Hamilton tilted her head once again. “She didn’t like us talking back”

“You and your siblings?”

“Not even my father” he huffed out a humourless laugh.

“What did he say about the whole ordeal?”

“He told me it was alright because I was doing good”
“That’s nice”
“I guess…”

“And what happened after they went to talk to the teacher?”

“They never did”

Mrs Hamilton frowned. “I thought the teacher sent a note because he wanted to talk to them about the issue?”

“No, just to inform”

There was a pregnant silence. Strangely, Thomas felt the need to cut it.

“There were a few phone calls in the following years, though…”

“About the same subject?”

“Yes”

“But you were still doing good?”

“In Elementary, yes”

“And when Elementary ended?”

Well, crap.

“Was that the time period you said you went to the counsellor, right?” she tried to recapitulate.

“Yes”

“Did something happen?”

“My grades dropped” he admitted, feeling as ashamed as it was still a present problem.

“Was there anything different?” she asked, turning the tone gentler, if that was possible. “Something that makes you think…?”

“My father passed” he explained, trying to control her voice from trembling and biting his bottom lip to prevent a smile to appear. He didn’t know if that was worse than showing no emotion when talking about his father.

“I’m sorry” was the expected response he was given. “How old were you?”

“Fourteen. Thought, he’d been sick for a while”

“Alright… So, correct me if I’m wrong, but you thought there was a link between that and your
grades getting worse?”
“I… I guess, yes. Not like that in its day”
“What did you think in its day?”
“I don’t know. I just felt something wasn’t right after… Well, after another thing happen”
“Can you tell?”

He moved a little in his seat, again looking at the floor.

“I almost ruined a group project”

There was no reply. Those responses were the worst and what Thomas feared the most about coming to something like this. The pressure of keep going and not knowing where to stop.

“I didn’t focus properly”
“Did that happen…?”
“Shortly after I went back to the boarding school”
“Oh, was it a boarding school?”
“Yes”
“So, did that happen after a holid…?”
“No, it was a couple of years after the new years started” he interrupted a fourth, this time feeling worse due to his bitter tone.
“Oh”
“And I only missed a few days” he explained, turning away his glare once more when Mrs Hamilton’s eyes grew wide. “My mother called the school to let a teacher inform me, then my oldest sister made a fuss and I could go there to spend a few days with the family”

There was another silence. This wasn’t pressing or demanding, but more of a shocked one, if Mrs Hamilton’s face was any indication. He guessed the good thing about having the wife of his workmate as a therapist would be the transparency the two seemed to share. Thomas wasn’t good at reading people, and so, that trait was always welcome in any person who had to be close to him for X reason.

“And when I came back” he continued, seeing the woman wasn’t going to comment on it. And he
couldn’t blame her, he doubted there were enough textbooks to give you a good response to these taboo subjects. “It turned out one of my teachers, who happened to be my tutor, had assigned a project and everyone had a group but me”

“But didn’t they know the reason you had to be absent?” asked the woman, once she’d had her voice back.

Thomas shrugged. He actually wasn’t surprised or interested. “I guess. But according to them, the world doesn’t stop moving because I missed class”

And then Thomas saw another trait Mrs Hamilton shared with her husband, as a lighting of annoyance crossed her dark eyes at the sentence and her grip on the pen tightened. Well, Thomas guessed he and some more were wrong at thinking those two were polar opposites and incompatible.

“Anyways, one of the groups wanted me with them and I went with them”

“Were they your friends?”

“No, I didn’t have… many of them” he fixed it at the end, not wanting to get into a more confusing explanation. “Otherwise, I’d have had a group with a vacant place for me”

“True” she conceded. “They were very nice, then” Thomas huffed again. “What is it?”

“We… didn’t work very well together”

“Well, that happens sometimes”

“Yes, but it doesn’t give me the right to screw their project up”

“It was yours too” she reminded him, firmly.

“Yes, but they were there first. And were friends”

“But they accepted you there”

“I thanked them and did what I was told”

“I’m not saying you weren’t grateful. I’m saying that when you do something nice for someone, you do it because you want to. Not because you want something in exchange” she explained, calmly.

“Yes, I know”

“And when you work in a group” she continued, her tone turning a bit harsher, but Thomas felt it wasn’t because of or directed at him, “everybody is the same and everyone must share a bit of responsibility”

“And I didn’t”

“You didn’t?”

“No”
“Why?”

“I told you, I wasn’t focus enough”

“Take into account your environment and the reason why you missed classes” she insisted.

“But I wasn’t mature about it”

“You were fourteen” she reminded him, as if he didn’t know. “From what you’ve told me, I think you were mature enough. More than the average of your age”

“But I almost ruin other people’s work because I was not” he argued, stubbornly.

“What did you do to think that?”

“Well, I…” He swallowed and again looked to the side. “I didn’t work as hard as I used to”

“It’s normal when you have an emotional weight to…”

Thomas cut her off, the guilt still intact since the first time he’d done so. “And what I did wasn’t good enough”

“The teacher told you…”

“They. The kids in the group with me”

“Did they give you a reason why?”

“Well, for example…” He took in a deep breath, feeling the room a bit smaller, no matter how unrealistic that sounded. “I had to buy the stuff to make the project, like, the poster board”

“Aha”

“And I bought it in the wrong colour”

“Was there a rule about the colour?”

“No, they said it wasn’t the appropriate”

“Ah, so they told you what colour they’d like…?”

“No, they told me to buy it. I did and they told me off when I brought it the next day”

“And don’t you think they should have told you or given you an approximate idea of what they wanted?” suggested Mrs Hamilton, pen shaking nervously.

“Well, I should’ve known”

“Okay, let me give you an example” she said, sitting more comfortably in her chair. “Imagine you asked Madison for something you need, but you don’t give him the details, or what you exactly want” she started, and Thomas then understood where Hamilton had learnt his psychological logic from.

“It’s not the same” he interrupted, before she could continue.

“Why not?”
“Because it was my job to know”

“A student’s job is to go to school to learn, not to do manual arts” she argued, raising her pen. “Unless you’re in Elementary or in an Art School, of course, which you were not. What subject was it, sorry?”

“English”

She smiled and shrugged, as if just with that he’d proved her point. He thinned his lips and lowered his glare, still with a tiny voice telling him it’d been his fault somehow.

“A project can’t be ruined for a little confusion” she spoke again, her tender tone back completely. “No, it wasn’t that only…” he admitted.

“What else happened?”

“Well, I got some information wrong on the paper I wrote and according to…” He struggled to find the right word. “The bellwether” he decided, making her smile slightly. “According to him, he spent hours rewriting it”

“How much time did it take you?” asked Mrs Hamilton, containing her giggle.

Thomas shrugged. “A couple of hours? Not much”

“Then, why did it take him so much?”

And he didn’t have an answer for that, honestly. He hadn’t thought about it until now.

“Maybe he wasn’t that well informed” she guessed, with a playful tone.

“I was the one who made the mistake”

“One mistake on a whole writing that took you a couple of hours” she detailed.

“Maybe because of that I got it wrong”

Mrs Hamilton seized him with a glare. “Mr Jefferson…”

“Thomas is alright” he corrected.

“Thomas, then” she nodded, grateful. “You told me you bought the poster board and wrote the…”

“It was just a script to follow for the presentation”

Mrs Hamilton nodded. “You did those two things. And them?” she asked.
Again, Thomas fell quiet. Mrs Hamilton waited patiently, but before seeing he’d not answer, she exposed her theory.

“I presume to write the script you had to look for information. In fact, you previously stated that one mistake you made was a thing you got wrong”

“I mixed two things, yes” he explained.

“Alright” she nodded. “One thing I forgot to ask you before: did you split the price of what you bought?”

“No, that was my task”

Mrs Hamilton’s lips turned into an annoyed grin. “So, you spent your money and time to try and make that project right. How does that ruin anything?”

Another pregnant silence from his part. The woman tapped his pen twice on the desk before proceeding.

“You also told me you used to be a good student in your early years. Did they know that?”

“I was until that point, yes” he nodded.

She now shrugged at him. “I consider you a smart man. So, I assume you can place all those pieces together and see the whole puzzle by yourself”

He curved his lips, feeling overwhelm and confused. “Don’t tell your husband that” he joked, wanting to erase the tension.

Mrs Hamilton returned the gesture. “He thinks alike, so I don’t think it’d be a problem” she surprised him. “Did the teacher ever know?”

“They told her what happened and she split us a couple of days before”

Mrs Hamilton again showed a shocked expression. “A couple of days before the presentation?”

“Yes… It wasn’t a big deal. I just had to look for another writers to talk about, and I read a lot, so…”

“So, it went well?” she asked, genuinely curious.

“She told me it was a bit rushed”

“With two days to work on it, I’m surprised you ended it”

“It wasn’t that difficult, but she liked little details”

“Hm… And the group?”

“Well, they had everything done already…”

“Done by you” insisted the woman. When he didn’t reply or add anything, she asked: “Did you talk
to the counsellor after that?”

“Yes”

“About that?”

“No, when… Well, after that I thought something was wrong and I decided to talk it out with her”

“Well done” encouraged the woman. “So, you told her you’ve been feeling bad”

“Well” he corrected. “It… I actually didn’t feel anything”

“You felt numb?” she helped.

Still do. “Yes, I guess”

“And what did she tell you?”

“Actually, I don’t know how, but the conversation turned about why I didn’t talk to anyone or participate in class”

Mrs Hamilton seemed taken aback. “She simply passed from your problem to that?”

“I’ve been dragging that label all my life” he dismissed.

“But when you go to a specialist, said a counsellor or a therapist, you talk about what you’re worried about” she explained. “I can’t make you talk about something you don’t want to, at least not the first time”

“I suppose she just wanted to know because she talked with my teachers, I wanted to know. I didn’t mind” he half-lied.

Alright… What did you tell her, then?”

“I simply told her the same I did to you” he shrugged it off. “I’m not talkative, and besides…” He hesitated about if sharing the next piece of information or not. “I didn’t feel like anyone cared, anyways”

“Your classmates?”

“Yes”

“You didn’t match”

“At all”

“Alright. What did she tell you?”

He pressed his lips, feeling more annoyed than in its day. “That it was normal because I’m a bit disagreeable”

Mrs Hamilton again was shocked. She huffed. “She cheered you up…” she commented, sarcastically.

“Made my week… She also said I was a bit asocial and that it was my responsibility because they saw me as a stranger in there, so didn’t feel me as part of the group”
“A nice woman, unlike you, I’m seeing” she joked.

Thomas chuckled. “She wasn’t very loved there, I guess. Almost nobody went to her”

“I wonder why. I apologise, don’t think we all are like that”

“I’m seeing it…”

“I hope it didn’t affect you much. It’s not truth”

“A bit it was. I’m not the nicest person”

“You’ve been very polite to me” she pointed out. “And you’ve got a sense of humour, which I think it’s very important in these situations”

“And a hell of a temper, too” he added, with a little laugh in the end.

Mrs Hamilton smiled at that. “I’ve got my own experiences with bad tempers, and I assure you, you don’t have a problem with yours”

“Say that to the people who ended up leaving” he admitted, cursing himself in his mind for the slip up. “I’m difficult to be around. Between that and my habits, I can’t blame anyone but me”

“Madison stayed” she argued rapidly. Another trait she shared with her husband, though more easy-going. “Your sister, your wife, Libby from what I know, Laf, Angelica likes you too… And so do Alexander and I, though try not to tell him I told you that…” she ended, with a small smile. “We can’t get along with everybody and we all have flaws. You’ve got people by your side who stayed despite yours, because they’re not that horrible as you think”

She smiled sympathetically again at him at the doubt reflected in his eyes. She looked at her watched and declared. “I think we’re done for today. Would you want a second appointment?” she asked, taking out her phone to write the date they’d agree on.

“Sure” he said, shrugging one shoulder.

It hadn’t gone as bad, with his time and space still given to him and respected. In fact, though still under tension, he felt more comfortable and relaxed than when he came in. After agreeing on a day and hour, Mrs Hamilton turned to him.

“Listen, I want you to do something for our next session” she said. “I’ve heard you say a lot of flaws of you and talking about things you’ve done wrong. Now, I want you to write a list of things you like about yourself and of things you’ve done right and/or feel proud of. Alright?”

“Okay” he said, huffing before the irony of the homework.

“It has no right answers and it doesn’t matter how many things you write there, even if it’s just one” she told him, tenderly. “Just be honest and we’ll talk it out next time we see, alright?”

“Alright?”
She made a gesture to stand up, and Thomas imitated her, both getting to their feet at the same time. The woman stretched out a hand Thomas shook.

“It’s been a pleasure, Thomas”

“Likewise, Mrs Hamilton”

“Eliza” she corrected.

The pair found Hamilton making dinner while Peggy was still watching TV, now with the kids. Eliza went straight to her sister, to reprimand her about letting her husband do all the work when he most likely just arrived. Thomas decided he could leave as they’d already bidden their farewells.

Hamilton stopped him at the entrance when he noticed the front door opening.

“How did it go?” he asked, walking to him.

“Fine” he answered, not wanting to explain any further.

Hamilton knitted his brows. “Don’t feel obliged to keep on coming only because she’s my wife. If you see this is not the kind of therapist you need, we’ll help you look for another one” he promised.

“No, she’s alright. I’ve got another appointment in a few days” he answered.

“Okay, then. Goodnight” he said, tapping him on the arm before turning around.

“Night”

Thomas kept to himself how lighter he felt when he walked back home. He didn’t want to give his confidence right away, but was willing to try.

Chapter End Notes

I'll try to update on April 15th, as it's Children's Day in my country.

BTW!, the directive of copyright was passed. Which means the European Council must now approve it for it to be definitive (around April 9th), and then it'll take around two
years so it starts to work. As long as I know, this directive is a bit better, because it
doesn't ban animatics, or fanarts or covers. It's more of a Fair Use made in Europe, so
you understand. It's still pretty tricky, though, because the filter will be a machine,
obviously, and it can get things wrong (just as it's been happening on YouTube lately,
from what I notice).
Anyways, on May 26th there are elections to choose the European representatives. So,
if you're from Europe, I'll highly recommend to go vote. Always being true to what you
believe in and your ideas, but go if you're able to ^^

Sursum corda!
Right hand man

Chapter Summary

Angelica earns a new sense of respect towards Thomas after a clash with Lee.

Chapter Notes

My God, almost two months without uploading... I've been a bit tired (mentally talking), so my writing has become slower than usual.

I mean, there are only seven episodes left before the story is finished, so I guess the longer it takes me, the better (?) Hehe... Right? It doesn't wash, right...? Alright...

This plot was going to be part of the main episode, but they became too many plots. Still, I wanted to write something to show Angelica's relationship with Thomas, and so, I decided to write this little thing.

Some of the comments Angelica remembers at the beginning of this chapter are true things I've been told when I was little.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were people who compared Angelica to her brother-in-law. At some extent, she understood them. Both Alexander and her shared a quite share of habits and traits. The teasing had started when she met the immigrant from the first time and both began chatting about their majors. When Hercules heard she had decided to go for a joint degree in Law and MBA, he couldn’t stop his tongue in time to repeat out loud and turn it into a in-debate among her sister’s friends.

Eliza, bless her soul, had tried to keep peace and change the subject, but Angelica had assured her she didn’t mind. Because it was true: she didn’t. She’d heard it all before. From her own blood, to make matters worse. Her aunts had tried to dissuade her; only by going for Laws she had her life figured out, her father would help her. Some cousins had looked at her with envy (she never missed those on the Christmases she’d skipped to spend with her then fiancé). Thank goodness her parents cut ties with that part of the family rapidly when they heard all the things they truly think about her decision when she wasn’t present.

Angelica felt thankful for the choice, but still assured her parents that she didn’t mind. And when Peggy insisted on telling her what they’d been talking, she persisted. She didn’t mind. At all.

She didn’t care they called her insane, a fool blinded by unreachable dreams; a boor and ungrateful brat to turn the deaf ear to them when they were only trying to guide her through the better
Angelica always grimaced at the wording. She never thought anybody knew what they wanted for their lives. Or, at least, the people she grew up with didn’t. And that was why she didn’t care, she didn’t listen, she refused to talk to them at some point, when the only sign of life she received from them were tainted by mean words, shooting to kill her will: her family, for the major part, were all unsatisfied people. They had kept going with what was expected from them instead of following their dreams and ambitions, their true vocation.

Angelica felt bad for thinking this way, but it was a reality: her family envied her personality.

She’d been raised under sexist comments regarding her fiery personality, how it was unfitting for a female, that (and this had been literal, she wouldn’t be able to forget about this even if she tried with all her might) ‘if she’d been a boy, it wouldn’t have mattered; but she was a girl and it made her look bad’. She was also reprimanded when she showed she had an attitude and was proud of it, also told she’d find no boyfriend with that behaviour.

Stupidity of thinking she needed someone by her side to be happy aside, joke’s on them: she dated and married a decent man who loved her for who she was and supported her in her fight to be who she dreamt of.

It was for all that stubbornness, ferocity, willpower and hard work that their friends compared Alexander and her.

And, true, Alexander had his own share of all those traits, but the roots were different. Angelica didn’t need to prove everyone who doubted her wrong by shouting to the four winds; she allowed her success to be loudest slap. Alexander, on the other hand, poisoned by a harder childhood and trust issues Laurens and her sister helped him overcome, needed to prove himself right, fight against anyone who dared to doubt his skills.

Where Angelica longed for showing herself she could do it and had it in her, Alexander needed to show the world how he could be the best at anything he did. Where Angelica had moved for intuition, Alexander did it for survival, despite not needing it anymore. It was kind of sad, so she always kept a tiny bit of compassion for the man and learnt to be less hard on him when Eliza asked for her help in convincing him he didn’t need to spend nights with no sleep and days with no food. No matter how used he was to it, as he put it. It gave her and her sisters the chills whenever Alexander talked like that.

But just as him, Angelica was in the right place at the right time to catch her once-in-a-life chance. Washington saw something in the two of them that allowed them the luck most people would feel guilty and undeserving. Thank goodness Angelica and Alexander also shared a good sight to see reality as it was: they had worked hard, without rest, to achieve this. If they could taste it sooner, who could complain? Everybody would’ve done the same. Even the ones who hadn’t
worked a half of what they had. Besides, Alexander deserved a second chance to keep on working as he liked, though it couldn’t be directly on the law field. Angelica never lost hope of seeing her brother-in-law taking cases and helping people as he used to, and made sure to remind Alexander of it whenever she saw the slightest doubt flashing in his eyes.

The problem came when it was about her.

She had a strong intuition, a sixth sense, a witch side. She could read people in seconds; could feel vibes nobody else could (as far as she knew) about people and places; could read minds by looking at the eyes and it had saved her a handful of times from some bad person or situation. So, naturally, she followed it and always let it have the last word. It also made her a good therapist without the need of a degree, a good listener, the friend everyone went to when in need.

But when she was the one suffering, little people noticed. And if they did, they never got anything but evasive and white lies from her, along with a fake smile she’d perfectioned over the years. She was a hypocrite and she knew it. She’d berated Alexander countless times about his bad habit of bottling up things when she did just the same when someone tended her a shoulder to cry on. But Angelica couldn’t help it for the life of her; she had the impression she’d be a bother to her loved ones, and despised the idea.

Alexander had been, surprisingly, the only one who noticed the evasive behaviour and confronted her about it. Maybe in search of some reprisal for all her reprimands. He’d compared her to a genie, able to grant people with what they needed but trapped in her own mind, where her powers were useless. She supposed the metaphor fit her like a glove, but refused to admit it out loud.

It stuck with her, though.

Angelica wasn’t a fan of mornings. Her brain always worked better after the afternoons and reached her best creativity at night. Sadly, her schedule hated her.

“Angelica” called Church, a hint of worry in his voice. “Angel, wake up”

“Five more minutes” she groaned, turning her back on him.

“Angel, Washington called”

“Tell him I’ll answer in five”
Strangely insistent, her husband grabbed her by the arms and put her in a sitting position. He tossed the mobile in her hands before she could complain.

Angelica sighed, resigned. “Yes?”

“Angelica? Sorry to bother you, but…”

“I was about to step out the door, don’t worry”

Church threw a disapproval look in her direction she ignored with mastery.

“Listen, you know Alexander took this week off, right?”

Angelica nodded. Everybody in there knew Alexander would miss work at least a week in February. Only his closest ones knew the reason behind, though.

“Well, I know this is sudden and I’ll make sure to compensate you by the end of the month…”

“George, what’s wrong?” she asked, squinting her eyes in suspicion.

“This week’s is my medical leave” he responded, sounding apologetic. “At least, by now”

Angelica frowned in concern at the news. “Everything alright?”

“Yes, just… Doctor’s orders” he eventually said, not wanting to get into detail. Not that he needed to, George’s health hadn’t been the best lately, with all the stress he had to face. “I know you’ll have to take care of the meeting, so I sent Lee to help out this week” he continued, the strength in his voice back.

Angelica groaned. “I can handle it myself”

“Both Alex and I disagree there”

“He’d bother more than help” she insisted.

“I don’t want you to face it all on your own, and he has his own experience. Remember we were both under the same conditions to be CEO”

She passed a hand through her face. “Alright” she gave up, reluctantly. “Alright, but if he tries to overstep the limit and interferes in my work, I won’t hesitate”

She didn’t need to specify what.

“Not needed… Get better, George, and say ‘hi’ to Martha”

“Will do. Have a nice day”

She answered when Washington had hung up:

“One shit of a day, that’s what I’m gonna have…”

Angelica had decided to imitate her brother-in-law and have the meeting in the afternoon and kept it to herself in case her workmates could use their brains to formulate escape plans.

Knock, knock.

“Come in!”

“Mr Washington, I…” Thomas stopped right under the lintel when they locked eyes, confused to see her sitting behind their boss’ desk. “Ah, good morning, Angelica. I just wanted to hand Washington these for the meeting” he explained, walking in and setting some papers on the desk.

Angelica eyed it, fearing its thickness. “Washington’s absent today. I’m taking care of it” she explained.

Thomas barely blinked an eye. “Do you want me to tell the others?”

“No, let’s see how much they take to realise the meeting’s not happening until the afternoon” she said, with a playful smile.

Thomas returned the gesture. “Alright. Have a nice day. If you need anything…”

“Sure thing, thanks” she dismissed, turning her attention back to the monitor. “I just need this piece of crap to let me do my job” she hissed, reaching the limit of her patience.

Thomas looked at her over his shoulder. “What is it?”

“Nothing, the programme doesn’t work” she complained, hitting random keys with no avail.

“Do you need help?” he offered, walking back to her.
Angelica hesitated a bit. When she felt the man by her side, sighed helplessly and pointed at the monitor.

“It says it’s not compatible” she explained, frustratedly. “But it worked yesterday”

Thomas read the warning and then asked: “Did the software update?”

Angelica scrunched up her nose. “Again? I thought it did that the other week!”

“More like two months ago”

“Whenever! It’s updated”

“No, it has to update again, because there’ll be more programmes that won’t work if you don’t”

Angelica groaned again, in exasperation. “How much will that take?”

“With this computer? Maybe a couple of hours”

“Why?”

“It’s old, it won’t work as fast as a new one”

“Damned George and his habit of not buying new things” she complained, under her breath. “But I need to do things for before this afternoon”

“Well, the programme won’t work until you do”

“Why did the programme update but the software didn’t?” she complained again, rubbing her nose.

“Do you have it in automatic?”

“The hell I know… This is not my computer”

“Well, I can change that after it’s done” proposed Thomas.

“Yes, please. Let’s not repeat this again”

“Maybe it won’t take as much” he tried to cheer her up, but keeping the distances before her grim face.

“Let’s hope…” she ceded, leaning back on her chair.

They watched patiently as the monitor turned black and the sound of the fan became louder. Angelica tapped her fingers on the desk, humming under her breath to calm her nerves. She went silent when they were shown the log-in screen, with a 0 per cent in the middle that was taking its time to change. Angelica frowned and rubbed her temples once again, feeling Thomas’ intense glare.

“Maybe it’ll take more than a couple of hours” he remarked, not lifting her spirits in the slightest.
“I wanted to have the meeting this afternoon, not at night” she groaned.

“What did you want to do?”

“Write and print a few things”

“I can do it on my laptop for you” he proposed, after a moment of thought.

She looked up at him. “You don’t mind?”

“You dictate and I write it down” he explained, shrugging one shoulder. “It can be part of my job, actually”

She smiled at him. “Thank you, Thomas, you’re a life-safer”

---

Until then, Angelica hadn’t thought about the typing course Thomas had in his CV as that useful. She knew he’d some past experience as a secretary, apart from when he worked for King. She hadn’t witnessed as much as Madison or Isa, but heard the stories of how that man treated him for his position. Angelica wished she’d been there to do something, even if it was just to talk to him in private. Despite the feud her brother-in-law and the southerner had shared within the first years of knowing each other, Angelica liked the man and wasn’t blind or entitled to deny Thomas was one of the essential pieces of this machine.

She was just glad Alexander had come to terms with him, though he refused to tell anybody why that happened in the first place.

She was surprised when Thomas had asked if the immigrant was alright at some point, nodding when he received an affirmative (and ambiguous) answer from her part. She supposed this is what Eliza felt when they refused to explain her the aftermath of that day in the cabin.

“Where are the reports from Human Resources?” she asked after making sure there was no trace of those after checking two times. She looked at Thomas, pressing her lips at his shake of head. “Have you seen Laurens today? Did he even come in today?”

“Yes, he did. He says Lee doesn’t answer the phone calls” explained Thomas, pretending to be correcting to avoid eye contact. After hearing only silence from her part, he added. “He’s here, though”

“Lee?”

“Yes”

“Call him on my part”
“He said he doesn’t want to be disturbed”

“He said he doesn’t want to be disturbed” she deadpanned. “Call him on my part, please” she ordered again.

It took Thomas only five minutes to go and be back, of which Angelica waited patiently, tapping her nails on the wooden desk and eyeing the closed door as if it had insulted her family. The southerner looked to the side before her intimidating glare.

“He says he’s doing it now”

“All the work from this month?”

“I suppose”

“All of that now? In a day?” she insisted, disbelief hanging on her tongue.

“Yes, I guess”

Angelica narrowed her eyes. “Tell him to hand part of that work to me” she decided.

“What part of the work?”

“He must have something done, the beginning for example”

A bit hesitant, Thomas exited the room and Angelica now gifted the hallway with her death glare. There was a moment when a door opened and Hercules wanted to get out, but once he felt her cold stare, re-entered his office slowly, closing the door as quietly as he could.

Thomas emerged from the stairs a couple of minutes later, his grim expression giving her the theory that Lee had snapped at him. She made sure to keep that in her mental hard disk. Thomas handed her a couple of papers with sloppy handwriting due to stress while doing it so. She scanned the two sheets, nodding to herself and then clicked her tongue.

“He’s in his office, right?” she asked, getting up abruptly.

“No, in the breakroom”

She froze in spot. “Didn’t you say he told you not to be disturbed?”

“Yes, because he was having a snack”
“Ah, so, he doesn’t want anyone to interrupt the snack, but if he were working, then it’s okay?”

“I don’t know, honestly” he admitted.

“My sixth sense does and it’s screaming at me that yes, that that’d be the case” she snapped, striding out of the room, a tight grip on the papers.

Hercules’ door opened slowly when he heard her going downstairs and looked at Thomas.

“Don’t say she’s in charge of the meeting today”

“Yeah…”

“Fuck, I’ll better get some work done, then” he muttered, terrified.

Thomas simply sighed and followed Angelica.

If her blood wasn’t boiling enough when she read what Thomas had given her, now it surely was when she reached the first floor and heard Lee’s voice complaining about something. More correctly, about someone. Her, to be more exact.

Thomas almost bumped into her when he reached the end of the stairs and he looked worriedly at her when he also made out Lee’s words from a distance.

When she thought it was right, she resumed her walking and went straight to the end of the hall. Thomas stood close to her, in case her red face was an omen of danger as it happened with her brother-in-law.

He started to share her anger when Thomas saw himself having a part in his workmate tirade. Burr, Maria, Isa and Laurens were there, listening while sending each other looks of not understanding the drama. They paled immediately when they saw Angelica there, arms crossed, allowing Lee to keep going. The man barely noticed them standing there, and the others didn’t interrupt him.

“That gal comes here, thinks she calls the shots because Washington’s sick and Hamilton decided
today he didn’t want to do his job… Sending the delivery man twice, disrupting me… I’ll give you the reports when the rest do, woman!”

“For that, you’ll have to have it done properly” interrupted Angelica.

Lee jumped in spot at the sound of her voice and locked eyes with her, before looking down, keeping his balance by grabbing the counter. The four witnesses looked from right to left, uneasy under the tension the room had fallen under and that could be cut with a knife. Angelica spent a few seconds in silence, eyeing the man with ire, before she took the torch of speaking.

“I’ve been here for a while” she revealed, seeing Lee shrinking across from her. “And I’ve been hearing a string of idiocies”

Maria started to pull her phone out of her pocket and started recording.

“First of all, I want it to be the last time you cast doubts on why Alexander comes or doesn’t come to work. Or any other workmate, for that matter. That’s only Washington’s role to judge and considerate. And if you did your work fine, you’ll know that he chooses always a week or two of February to take his vacation, from the free days he has by law” she defended her brother-in-law before anything, keeping the tone level but harsh enough so there wasn’t any room for a discussion.

“Secondly, Thomas is not the delivery man, he’s the secretary, and he, as anyone else in here, has his part of work. And he does it. And I ask him to do certain things that fall within his obligations and he does them because he is professional and takes his job seriously. And I’ve seen him do things he shouldn’t have in order to have things under control and properly done. Something you haven’t done or shown interest in doing. So, have respect. No one is inferior to no one in here.

“Thirdly, if you’re not going to say anything pretty or ask out of concern or with good intentions about someone’s health, keep your silence. The world will thank it.

“And lastly, I don’t know how you think you have the right to rest when you still do things like this” she finished, showing the two sheets she’d holding that whole time. “Are you listening?” she asked, raising her voice slightly, when she received no answer. “When you have to talk to the face you become mute?”

Lee raised his glare a bit and recognised his work. “Those are mine”

“Yes, I know. The sloppiness is unmistakable”

“I wouldn’t have time to have it all done…”

“You’ve got the whole month to do so” she interrupted, sternly.

“No”

“No?” she repeated, frowning her features. “Are you trying to sell me that all these certificates, these petitions, these reports all happened today?” She looked at the other people in the room. “What
happened here today, the World War, a virus spread or what?”

“I gave my part to him today, that’s true” admitted Laurens.

“If he doesn’t do his work properly, then I can’t…” tried to excuse Lee.

“If you answered your phone, this wouldn’t have happened” she interrupted again, sharply. “You’ve lied twice already”

“No, I…”

“I’m not going to accept this” decided Angelica, taking a couple of steps closer and placing the papers there with a thump. “If you don’t have enough time today, I’ll give you till the end of the week” she ceded. “But I want you to hand me what you’ve done for the day until then”

“Can I do it back at home?”

“Just get it done” she dismissed. “If you don’t get it done, I’ll write a report on you myself”

“You can’t do that”

“I can’t? Oh-ho, I can assure you I can and I will” she swore, darkly.

“Okay”

“Good” she nodded, already turning on her heels.

“Then, don’t complain when someone says you’re big-headed”

“Only you said that” commented Isa.

Angelica turned back again and walked until her hip bumped into the table. “Listen, mister, I’ve got more than today’s actions to fill a report on you. Of things you’ve said and done to me and to other people, which is worse” she revealed.

“Alright, whatever…”

“Whatever you say about me goes in one ear and out the other”

“Sure, I’m seeing it”

“What bothers me is that you make up crap about people close to me, and I won’t tolerate it anymore” she continued, ignoring him to not get angrier. “What gives you the right to look down on a workmate for his position and talk with that condescension? ‘The delivery man, the delivery man’… So what if he were? Even if he’s the cleaner, he’s a person and does his work properly. Learn from him, because you don’t even make the egg* in here”

“And the paperwork I’ve got done?” argued Lee, pointing at the sheets on the table. “Is that made up too?”

“This is not paperwork, Lee. You can do better”

“That’s the best I can do”

“This is the best you can do?” exclaimed Angelica.
“No”
“… … You’ve just said it was”
“This is not the best I can do when it comes to…”
“And why didn’t you do it the best you could, dang it!” she complained.
“I gave you what you asked me for!” he complained back.
“This…” She took one of the sheets and showed it to him again. “This that I’m holding. This paperwork, this. Is this the best you can do?”
“Yeah” he nodded.
“This is utter shit, man” she declared, tossing the paper aside.

The five people watching the interaction held their laughter at the face Lee made after Angelica’s word.

“Well, it’s never too late to learn, right?”
“You’re the personnel manager. You don’t have to learn; you have to teach, at much”
“Well, in that case, you’re above me, teach me” he countered, cockily.
“I don’t have to teach you…”
“But knowing how you get your position, it’s normal you don’t have anything to teach”

Angelica felt herself freezing up before she felt heat rising to her cheeks, a faint insecurity she thought to be long gone coming back at the front of her mind thanks to Lee’s words. She gritted her teeth and opened her mouth to retort, but Thomas beat him to it, snorting a laugh at the manager’s words.

“As if you’re here because you hit the books back in college”
“Lol” muttered Laurens.
Lee shot him a glare. “Sssh, be careful, lad. Careful”
“Careful? Are you going to pull an Adams on me? Because, may I remind you, the man got the heck out of here a few weeks later” recalled Thomas, straightening himself and walking closer to the table too.
“Yes, and he’s living in your house. Dupe”
“Living in my house because he was left with nowhere to be dropped dead. More or less like your situation”
“Well, your house” snorted Lee.

“Yes, son, my house. I pay it religiously”

“Pay it to…”

“Just like my in-laws had to pay you for doing nothing because your parents didn’t know where to put you” revealed Thomas, managing to shut Lee’s mouth with a resounding ‘click’. “Because you studied so hard and you worked so hard since so young that they didn’t know where to put you? That my father-in-law, who was so nice that sometimes he bordered naivety, was fed up with you within two weeks? You must be the first novice that owes their boss money, pal”

“That’s some juicy shit” commented Laurens, nudging Maria on the arm to make sure she was recording.

“And like that anecdote I have a million more” he warned. He stretched out his right arm to acknowledge the rest of the group. “I’ve got pearls for everybody that’s in here. Except from this young lady, which I don’t mind because she minds her own business and doesn’t bother anyone” he added, pointing at Maria with the chin. The girl smiled brightly at the rest of the room. Thomas looked back at Lee, who was still shocked for how easy the southerner had dropped the previous bomb. “But the rest? Keep getting on my nerves, patronizing me and complaining of things that you do with no shame…

“Trying to make the miss look bad… The problem is not if she’s COO while young, the problem is that you’ve done the same without being as worthy. Compare. The only thing she has to do today is prepare the meeting. You’ve got a month of paperwork to catch up. You come once a month and because we call you, because you have no interest. Never had, you’ve been like that since young.

“That’s enough reason to be shameful, not wanting to feed your family and give them a roof over their heads” he added, before turning to leave.

“I didn’t pick up on your family” argued Lee, weakly.

“You mock where I live” he reminded, turning around to face him. “I don’t feel ashamed of having to pay someone a rent. I would if I feel the owner of this place when I’ve called all previous weeks to say I was sick and then going out”

Lee looked at Angelica. “He can doubt my sick days but I can’t of other people?”

“No one must” nodded Angelica, sending a glare to Thomas.

“I’m not doubting it” said the southerner. “I am confirming it” He looked at Lee, with the same amount of smugness. “Don’t think that because the stories of Instagram lasts a day I’ve got no evidence. I’ve got a folder full of screenshots. If you want, I can bring them to the meeting and we comment it, since you love commenting on everybody’s business”

“Are you stalking us or something? You don’t have life or what?” snapped Lee, enraged.

“I have a work. And when somebody criticises it I make sure to see if their word has some value. And a man that calls in sick on the same day you post a photo of yourself in a barbecue is not a good source for advice, in my opinion” stated Thomas.

“I could’ve taken that photo any other day”

“Sure… Listen, don’t play the villain if your IQ is a negative number”
“Nice, I’ll make sure to let Washington know…”

“If he’s going to listen as much as he did with the other times you complain about nonsense, don’t waste your time”

“What times did I complain?”

“In writing or in word?”

“Whatever, I haven’t…”

“Do you know why I have your intelligence in so low esteem?” interrupted Thomas, almost boringly. “Because, by order of Washington, each report you fill comes first to me, and I proofread and explain the matter to him. Because he doesn’t have that much time to take care of everything and trusted me with it. So, each time you want to make a workmate look bad, I know first. And I’ve read the things you write about me and everybody else”

The silence stretched between the two men, to the point where one could hear a pin drop. Angelica watched the two, her own anger now subsided. She took the sheets and passed the to Lee, who grabbed them in bad manners before rounding the table and storming out of there.

“Whatever work you have done by the end of the workday, I want it” she reminded, frowning at the lack of response. She turned around to face the group of five. “At three, give me whatever you’ve done and then you’re free to leave” she declared, surprising them.

“And the meeting?” asked Burr.

“I’ll be too busy making sure Lee makes all he’s got behind schedule”

Washington came back to work the following week, congratulating Angelica for her work and dedication on his behalf. The oldest Schuyler sister nodded and accepted the praise. She was more taken aback when he suggested her to take care of the business trips that would come across the following month.

She only needed to get out her shock to accept without doubt.

Washington cocked an eyebrow when she asked if she could take a companion with her, but allowed her without question, trusting her judgement.
“Hey, you’ve got something to do next month?”

Thomas jumped in his seat and looked up, seeing Angelica leaning on the doorframe, expectantly.

“I don’t think so” he answered, awkwardly. “Why?”

“I’ve gotta go to a business trip and I’d like a plus one” she explained, without beating around the bush.

Thomas was shocked to hear her response. “And you want it to be me?”

“I thought I should thank you for what you did the other day”

“Ah, no, I didn’t do it…” hurried to say Thomas, shaking his head.

“With more reason, then” she interrupted, not taking ‘no’ for an answer. “I’ll update you as soon as I am”

And she closed the door before he could keep objecting, a satisfied smile on her face.

She was only glad Alexander wouldn’t eat her ear off about her decision, especially because both shared that habit of returning favours to those who deserved it.

Chapter End Notes

"Not making the egg": No hacer ni el huevo. To do nothing at all.

Sursum corda!
Deeds of the father (P1)

Chapter Summary

Thomas has a bad idea.
Something from Aaron's past comes back to haunt him.
Laurens receives a very unexpected call.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour.
DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.
I've researched what kind of divorce laws the state of New York has, if I got something wrong, let me know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a bad idea. Thomas knew without needing to ask for somebody else’s opinion. He was aware that, if this ended badly, it could affect him in a negative way, because he didn’t have the security that the – sort of – peaceful deal Hamilton and he had come to develop lately was going to last forever. In fact, he was wondering when one of them would cut the ties off when the littlest of disagreements occurred. Thomas thought he’d be trespassing the line when he called during their holidays asking for help for his sister, but thank goodness, nothing happened. Somehow, the immigrant had managed to keep his infamous pride under control – and he’d done as much in return.

Yet again, though both never agreed on barley anything, truth was Thomas just wanted out of his current situation and – despite how hard it was to admit, even to himself – Hamilton was good at his job. Some days, to the point where he could even feel bad for the younger man not being able to practise properly as a lawyer for a mental condition. He stopped thinking about it before he could relate too much.

“Maria, do you know if Hamilton is having a good day?”

The receptionist looked at him, stopping her writing and arching one eyebrow at his question. He looked at the papers spread on her counter. The amount of them was starting to grow to worrisome levels, to be honest.

“Define ‘good day’” she replied, swinging on her chair out of pure habit.
“You know what I mean”

“Well, yeah, but there are different types depending on what you want from him” she explained. “Do you want to tell him a problem concerning the law firm? Or is it something about his office? Or is it a favour?”

“I’m not going to tell you my life…”

“The last one, then?” she guessed.

“Look, forget I asked anything…”

“I haven’t heard him in all day” she answered, anyway. “But I can’t know if the mood has changed since this morning”

“Alright, thank you”

“You’re welcome”

“Are you ever going to finish that?”

“Art takes its time”

“If you say so”

_____________________________________________________

The next person he bumped into as he walked to Hamilton’s office – the elevator wasn’t working yet – was Angelica. Thomas took it as a good sign, though he’d have preferred the youngest Schuyler sister. The chances were very low, Peggy must have been sleeping by this point.

“Angelica” he called.

“Morning, Thomas” Her eyes landed on what he had in his hands. “Are you going to ask Alex a favour?”

He simply nodded, not wanting to give too much information.

“He’s free now. I mean, he’s working on something, but it’s external to this, so I think he’s in a good mood” she explained. “That could vary depending on what type of favour you were going to ask him”

“I’ve prepared myself mentally”

“Good”
When Hamilton gave him permission to enter his office, he was met with the mental image he’d imagined at Angelica’s explanation. The immigrant’s desk was covered in sheets and he seemed to be redacting some document that took a bit of his attention before giving it completely to the standing man at his doorframe.

Just as his sister-in-law had done, his eyes drifted immediately to the container he was holding.

“You’ve learnt from your friend, I see” was his first commentary. Then, he met his glare. “What happened now?”

Awkwardly, Thomas decided to place the Tupperware on Hamilton’s desk. The immigrant looked at it with wary eyes, waiting for an explanation.

“Abi… Adams’ wife is divorcing him” he began, cautiously.

Hamilton nodded in agreement. “It’s normal. What a prize the woman had been enduring…”

“Yes… I was wondering if you had any experience in divorces?” he asked, his voice lowering automatically.

“For her, you’re asking?”

“No, she already… Adams can’t afford one, so…”

“No” Hamilton cut him off, not interested in the conversation anymore.

“You don’t have to go to the actual…”

“Wasn’t planning on doing it for anybody any time soon”

“It’d be just legal advice”

“No”

“Just one day, so he can explain…”

“I’m saying no”

“We can sort some payment out…”

That seemed to make the Caribbean angry. “Tell him to shove his money up his ass. The answer’s still no”

“I’m not even asking you to be his lawyer, just to give him some advice…”
“No, I don’t care. No” he talked above him, raising his voice considerably. “I don’t care about that man’s life. Didn’t he say I’m here for favourable treatment? Go and ask somebody who worked hard, unlike me”

“That was more than one year ago. And I’m the one asking…” tried Thomas one more time.

“I don’t care about the time, Thomas. No” insisted the immigrant, frustratedly.

“I’m asking the favour, not him…”

“No, don’t twist this to…”

“Just…”

“I don’t mind doing it for you or your sister, and you know it. But I don’t want to have anything to do with that man. No” he kept repeating.

“He’s going unprepared…”

“That’s his lazy ass’ problem”

“Abi’s still fuming…”

“I’d be too. He’s a lawyer too. He can defend himself”

“You know what you just said is…”

“No, Thomas” he cut the older man off once again, more brusquely than before. “I’m telling you I don’t want to be part of that, he brought it upon himself. Screw him. I don’t care. I won’t do it. No, when I say ‘no’ it’s ‘no’ till the ends of time”

“Adams”

Thomas saw the man lifting his head from the cushion, lying down on the couch. Nobody knew when did that man manage to move from his corner to the top of the couch, but he did. And it still pissed the taller man off, but decided to let it slide as long as he respected when other person wanted to watch TV.

“Huh?” he intelligently said.

“Hamilton will come today to talk with you about your issue, alright?” he explained.

“What issue?”

“… Your divorce, Adams. The one you must attend in a few months”
“Told you Abi won’t do it”

“…. John…”

“She doesn’t have it in her. She’s just playing tough”

“… Well, just in case, he’s coming to give you legal advice”

“But… But at what hour?”

“Later in the afternoon. Why?”

“I was gonna sleep my nap. Can’t he come after we eat dinner?”

“… Adams, he’s coming as a favour…”

“That’s not my problem”

“It actually is. It’s a favour to you” condemned Thomas, frowning in exasperation.

“And didn’t you have someone better to ask for it, tsk?” he complained, curling in on himself, pouting like a little child.

“If I had, I’d have called it for me, not for you” countered the Virginian. “And do the favour of changing into presentable clothes. That pyjamas can walk on its own”

Adams groaned loudly. “Ogh, man, stop bugging me around, it’s my time of the day” he complained, pointing at the TV with the remote.

“The whole day it’s your time of the day, Adams” pointed out Thomas, starting to get mad.

“All day ordering me around, as if I were a fucking maid or something…”

“I told you to change your clothes, I’m not even asking you to clean them yourself, alright?” snapped Thomas. “Which you should totally be doing”

“Oh, what else?” snickered the man.

“Adams, you wake up at 5 pm, I heat your food up only to receive complaints about how you would’ve preferred another thing…”

“Because we only eat mac and cheese in this shitty house”

“What I can afford, Adams. If you don’t like it, go buy something for yourself and cook it yourself, too”

“Always asking me for money… That’s the only thing you care about?”

“Honey, if I only cared about money, you wouldn’t have spent nine months living off of me…”

“Oooh, here comes the martyr!”

“No, don’t…”

“If you don’t want me here, tell me”

“I don’t want you here. I don’t stop telling you and you ignore me”
“Why can’t I live here but Dobby can?”

“Stop getting James in any conversation I have with you. Besides, he barely spends time here anymore. He does it at Dolley’s”

“You…”

“I was going to tell you to imitate him a bit, but knowing you, you’d go to live as a squatter in that poor woman’s house and say it was my idea…”

“Listen, the first one that doesn’t want to live here, standing your habits proper of an old man, is me”

“You need to have some nerve for complaining about me and saying you stand me, when this is my house” Thomas reminded him, narrowing his eyes at his ex-friend.

“Huh, more like the creole’s” countered Adams, quite evilly.

Thomas clicked his tongue in annoyance. “In that case, I hope you stand him when he comes. At whatever time he can” he told him, in a warning manner, before turning on his heels and leaving the man muttering curses.

When Thomas saw it’d been a quarter of an hour and things remained calm, he allowed himself to breathe and go back to work. At some time, his oldest daughter came into his office, in distress, a few flyers in her hands. It didn’t cost him much to turn his attention to Patsy, putting his book and writings aside.

It’d been something recurring lately. The more important the choice was, the more indecisive Patsy turned. When she thought she’d finally found a college she liked, she found a fault. And when she thought she could overcome some flaw, she then saw the other option wasn’t as bad as she’d initially believed. Thomas stood by her side, trying to make her see a wider perspective, but it felt like that made her more irresolute. The worst day was when Patsy couldn’t stand the pressure she’d put herself under and started crying, anxiety eating her alive.

Thomas frowned as he saw the signs of a reprise in the way his daughter writhed her hands or played with her hair nervously.

“Patsy, you still have the whole summer to make a decision” he said at one point, taking one of her hands to prevent her to keep on pulling on her hair.

“But I can’t wait until last hour” she argued, scowling at the flyers lying on her father’s desk.

“You’ve got time, princess” insisted Thomas.
He took the flyers away, succeeding in making Patsy finally look up at him. The tiredness in her eyes, which should be full of joy and life that came along with youth hit too close to home for Thomas, to the point where he felt guilty, thinking he was to blame for these traits in Patsy’s personality. The nervousness, the anxiety, how high critical she was with herself, how much pressure she threw her way, how many things she could be bottling up for not being able to express them or not knowing what they were…

Thomas took a deep breath, stopping that trail of thought, and made a great effort to remember Eliza’s advice from one of their therapies, tried with all his might to make her voice sound louder inside his head to be able to help his daughter.

“Listen, this doesn’t have to be definitive” he started, calmly. “If it is, better for you, but it doesn’t have to be. If, at some point, you feel like the college you chose is not your place, we’ll sort it out. I promise, okay?”

And it weighted. Because Thomas had unfulfilled so many promises, intentionally or not, that he couldn’t blame his daughter if she didn’t believe him. But, thank goodness, her features softened and she lowered her glare.

“Alright…”

It was soft, almost inaudible, but it was the most beautiful gift his daughters could ever give him. A second chance of trust.

Patsy had separated herself from the desk, scratching her head, still in deep confusion and doubt, and Thomas was about to tell her to call it a day and offer her to watch some movie with Polly, as they used to when both were younger.

A sudden and loud racket turned their attention to the hall, where accelerated footsteps could be heard along another pair of more annoyed ones. Thomas distinguished the voices of his ex-friend and lawyer immediately, facepalming himself while sighing out of frustration.

“It’d lasted too long” he lamented.

Patsy let out a slight gasp when they heard something falling and breaking. Thomas frowned and patted his daughter on the arm, telling her to go with her sister and walked out the workroom. He
found James at the end of the stairs, hearing the quarrel from the second entrance the kitchen had.

“I told you I want that door closed, so the house is not left stinking of food for the rest of the night” he scolded, going to close it himself.

James stepped out, but threw his friend a glare. “I don’t want to be at the other door, those two may look in my direction”

“What the hell is wrong now? I heard a wham”

“Adams hit a chair and it fell”

“Ah, nice” complained the taller Virginian, deciding to finally stride to the dining room.

The fallen chair was there, with Adams a few feet away, blaming himself in the act without realising. Hamilton was at the other side of the room, his back turned to the two friends, as he was explaining something to the unemployed man, as calmly as he could.

“But, Adams, understand that if I come here and the first thing you do is lying right in my face, I…”

Thomas and James winced at the look of pure hatred he threw the immigrant, who barely blink an eye.

“I said the truth” interrupted the man.

“That’s a lie” countered Alexander, still with that strange collected voice, but with his tone turning harsher.

“It’s the truth” insisted Adams, stubbornly.

“Lie” repeated Alexander, narrowing his eyes.

“Truth”

“Lie”

“Truth”

“Lie”

“Truth”

“Lie”
“Well, okay, whatever, then. Whatever you say is the ultimate truth” said Adams, crossing both arms across his chest, looking more like an entitled kid than a proper adult.

“…”

“Let’s see if by that you finally shut up for three months, at least”

“Mmmh, Adams…”

“The fucking annoying little bastard, all day bitter…”

“Excuse me, but I was happy, alright?” argued Alexander, raising his voice. “I came here…”

“Yes, yeees, I saw it” nodded Adams, sarcastically.

“…wanting to do things in a good mood”

“Absolutely, yes…”

“But when people lie to me in the face and then make a fuss…”

“I did not lie”

Alexander’s features darkened. “Are you going to keep going, mister?”

There was only silence from the other part. Alexander looked at the man up and down, with certain disdain.

“Look, you called me. I didn’t call you” he stated, bitterly.

“I didn’t either, it was Thomas” blamed the unemployed man.

“Whoever” spat Alexander, defensive. “The case is that I’m the one doing the favour here; not you doing it to me. Don’t get it wrong, honey”

“Yes, yes, yes, whatever…”

“This is fucking unbelievable…”

“All I’m saying is that I like my way of doing things, and that’s the way I’m gonna do things”

“Alright, I told you I respected that”

“Then?”

“Then, what?”

“Then, why all this?”

“I don’t know, you ran away, threw a chair to the floor and started screaming at me in the spare of two minutes”

“Because you’re not letting me do things as I know they have to be done”
“As they have to…? Your plan of lying in court is…?”

“I’m not lying”

There was a tense pause, in which Alexander scanned the man in front of him, in genuine shock, while the two friends at his back exchanged a concerned glare.

“Listen, Adams, I’m starting to feel bad about picking on you. I’m afraid you’re not well, man…”

Thomas bit his bottom lip when he saw James lowering his head, trying to control his laughter.

“What?” hissed the older man.

“You’re not fine, mister. You need help” stated Alexander, deadly serious. “And I’m not talking about legal help, precisely”

“Are you calling me crazy in my own house?”

“Now, it’s his” complained Thomas, under his breath.

“It’s not your house, but alright…” ceded Alexander. “And, yes, sort of. Because I see you live in a parallel reality”

“No, I live in this one”

“No, no. You live in your world of lies and you’re believing them, which is the most worrisome part”

“Not a world of lies. What happens is that I have my truth”

“But your truth is a lie”

“How’s that possible?”

“I don’t know. But you managed to do it”

“Just because I told you I don’t want to do things your way?”

“No, I don’t mind if you want me to do thing differently” insisted Alexander. “I don’t mind adapting to how you want things done. You’re the client here, I told you”

“You’re not, you’re not doing what I say”

“Because what you want me to do is to lie in…”

“No”

“… … Adams…”
“Fuck, I did not! I’m just telling you to tell my version!”

“But…”

“My wife already has her own attorney to tell her version!”

“Look, mister, in this case there’s not your version, her version” lectured Alexander, clearly reaching the limit of his patience. “There’s only the version, from what I saw. And the version says you married under the community property”

“Yeah, I know. But…”

“So, the divorce agreement has to follow that”

“I know, but…”

“And if almost everything’s under your wife’s name, then, the most probable thing is that those things would go to her”

“But that’s not fair”

“Is not fair that she keeps what’s hers?”

“No, we didn’t sign a separation property…”

“I know, but that doesn’t…”

“I thought that meant her things were mine”

“You could use that, yes, but with the evidence she has that she’s been the only one who contributed to pay the house and the car…”

“But the car is mine”

“If it’s yours, why’s it under her name too?”

“Because I didn’t want trouble with it”

“What?”

“If something’s wrong with is, she’s the one that’s called”

“Yeah… And the one who deserves that car now, too”

“… … … But it’s mine”

“It’s not yours, Adams, I’m telling you”

Adams sent a loathing glare in his direction, huffed with superiority and stepped into the kitchen, not wanting to keep going with the argument. Alexander clicked his tongue in annoyance at his reaction.

“Why am I here, damn it!!” he exclaimed, arms in akimbo and turned to the kitchen door, seeing
Adams opening the cabinets in search of food. “To tell you things!”

“To eat my ear right off” he corrected, taking out a bag of chips and walking back to the dining room, making a beeline for the couch. “Do that to Thomas, who allows it, but stop bugging me around” he continued, under his breath.

“Eh, careful with what you’re implying” said Thomas, squinting his eyes at the commentary.

“The dead ones and the fucking mother that bore us all*…”

“Are you telling me lying to the judge is the right thing to do? That’s how you did things?” confronted Alexander, jaw tensed.

“Not lying, just saying that I helped with the car maintenance…”

“I can’t do that” interrupted the lawyer, immovable in his morals. “I can pretend I know nothing about it, that you didn’t tell me about it. But I will not directly lie so you can have something that’s not yours and don’t need to use”

“Who says I don’t need it?” asked Adams, turning around to look daggers at the immigrant.

“These scenes” he answered, pointing at him. “These scenes that are the only thing you’ve done with your entire life”

“What is this all day to know…?”

“I’ve worked with you and listened to your reasons to not coming to work”

“That has nothing…”

“Adams, you don’t have the means to take care of a car” interjected Thomas, wanting to put an end to the discussion. “What do you want it for? To see it slowly deteriorate in the street?”

“No, in the garage”

“In the garage?” repeated the southerner, shocked.

“I’m not going to let it on the street!” exclaimed Adams, as if he’d been offended.

“And my car?”

“Figure it out, the hell I’ve gotta do with that”

“Fig… Figure it out?” repeated Thomas, affronted. “You’re going to hijack my garage too?”

“Where do I put my car?”

“It’s not your car, Adams…” insisted Alexander.

“If you get it, on the fucking street” warned Thomas, taking a couple of steps closer. “I don’t want…”

“But…”

“No, shut up, shut up” ordered the man. “If some kind of celestial deed is unfair and gives you that car, I don’t want to see it in my garage. Did I make myself clear?”
“I’m gonna park…”

“If I see the fucking car there, I’ll make sure to get rid of it myself”

“Excuse me?”

“You’ve been warned”

“He’s not gonna get it” assured Alexander.

Adams hit the cushion with rage. “Fuck, but how much does it cost you?!”

“A lot. We’re talking about my rep and my career here”

“What rep? You already sunk that all by yourself”

“… Well, I don’t want it any deeper because of you, got it?” snapped Alexander, voice raised. “I’m not going to lie. I don’t lie and I won’t for a client. No matter who they are. If you want that kind of stuff done, go look for somebody else, because you won’t get it from me”

“What? Are you going to act all moralist all of a sudden…?”

“I’m not a moralist. If I have to omit something or try to make you look a bit better to help you win, I will. That’s lawful”

“As a lawyer, he should know that” pointed out Madison.

“But I won’t plainly lie because you set your mind on a car that’s not yours, that you haven’t taken care of”

“But it’s mine”

“Listen, the important thi… IT’S NOT FUCKING YOURS, HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU?!” exploded Alexander, face red.

“Lower your tooone” warned Adams, eyes squinted.

“WE’VE BEEN STUCK IN THE SAME SHIT FOR AN HOUR, MAN, ACCEPT IT: IT’S NOT YOURS. IT’S YOUR WIFE’S. SHE TAKES CARE OF IT, PAYS IT, USES IT TO GO TO WORK!”

“Well, but don’t start screaming, it’s late. Calm down…” agreed James.

“I can’t fucking calm down! I’ve been explaining the same shit for an hour, goddamned it!” He walked directly to Adams, pointing at him with his finger, angry. “Listen, if you want things, work hard for them and put them under your name. Until then, put up with this shit. Got it?”

“But I need my car”

“To do what?”

“To get away from here”

“No, because you’re a capricious prick” defined Alexander.

“No. I’m stressed in here”
“Stressed how?” jumped in Thomas, bewildered. “What stresses you, honey? The fucking three hot meals we cook for you? The 10 hours of sleep? The remaining 14 you spend watching TV?”

“What a life” commented Alexander, rolling his eyes.

Adams looked back at Thomas with hatred. “I’m stressed of you bothering me about…”

“I don’t bother you. I barely talk to you”

“What about earlier?”

“What did I do earlier?” cut off Thomas, raising the voice himself. “Telling you to put your clothes in the laundry basket! I didn’t even make you clean it, despite you’re a capable grown-up man!”

“Your way of being is suffocating me and one day I’m going to snap” warned Adams, totally honest.

“Snap?” And that made Thomas, ironically, snap himself. “But can you have any less shame, man?! The one who’s about to snap is me! For not doing, you didn’t even care about contacting a lawyer that could help you solve this! This problem that you brought upon yourself! Who the hell flips their boss off and leaves their wife without checking things first?! That’s your problem, that you don’t check anything, you do nothing, you’ve spent your entire life letting others do your things! Put yourself together, man!”

Adams stammered at first. “Look, I do things…”

“You do things?” repeated Thomas, squinting his eyes in rage.

“Yeah…”

“What do you do?”

“I clean”

“You clean?”

“… … A bit”

“When?”

“… Sometimes”

“Never” responded Thomas almost at the same time. “The other day you dropped a pepperoni from your pizza and I spent three days telling you to open the window to air the room”

“But, man, I can’t open that window because I get cold and I’ll have to pee more often and the bathroom is in the second floor in this house…” excused Adams.

“Get up and go, like all adults do… What do you want now? A potty?” he suggested, faking a childish tone, as if he were talking with a little kid. “Maybe he wants to wear diapers again and to be changed too” he joked, making the other two men to contain their laughter.

Adams looked daggers at Thomas. “All this because I want my car?”

“You have no car, honey” insisted the Virginian, taking the mickey out of him. He looked to the side after smelling something from the kitchen. He walked there, talking now to Madison. “If you’re cooking, you’re cooking”
“Ah, sorry…” apologised the shortest man.

“I want my car” insisted Adams.

“Fuck, then I’m the stubborn one” complained Alexander, passing his two hands over his face.

“I’ll buy you a baby walker for next Christmas” mocked Thomas.

“I want my car” repeated Adams, louder and looking over the couch, to take a momentary glimpse of Thomas, who was now collecting the dishes for the diner.

“You’ll have no car” assured Thomas, as if it were an inevitable truth. “Not because Hamilton or Abi say so, but because I say so” He came out to set the table. “This is my house and what I say goes”

“Well, your house…” remarked Adams, cruelly.

Thomas nodded, very sure of himself. “Yes, my house. I pay the rent like an asshole. Ask this man…” He pointed at Hamilton. “Ask him for all the bills. For the rent I’ve been paying religiously all months. Pum, pum, pum, all months, from my pocket”

“Ask your bosom friend to help you out, then”

“I talked it out with James in its day and I told him not to, because he has to take care of paying other things” he defended Madison. “Besides, he’s helped me doing what I could not in all this time. You haven’t given me nothing more but trouble and responsibilities I shouldn’t be taking neither I want”

“Aaah, poor Thomas, all he’s had to endure” lamented Adams, dramatically.

“With you? Yes. Always. Since…”

“Let’s pray for his poor soul”

“Since day one of knowing you”

“Sure thing… If it hadn’t…”

“Writing him the essays and making him the diagrams to help him study for his exams when I was in college and even after I dropped out” recalled Thomas calmly, while he ate his mac and cheese.

“Listen, if it hadn’t been…”

“Your degree should be mine, if life were fair”

“My balls 33*”

“36 of my diagrams that helped you pass, actually”

“If it hadn’t been for me, you would’ve spent your college years alone”

“Well…”

“More alone than a fucking one, you asocial scum”

“Well, for having you and Jay, I’d rather be alone”

“Sure”
“One couldn’t help me in years with my case for the life of him and the other only used me. If that’s friendship, I’d rather die alone” concluded Thomas, as he kept eating, unmoved.

“That’s the way you’re gonna end like if you keep going like this…” commented Adams, quite darkly.

“So, be it. I’ll, at least, have somewhere to drop dead” he countered, containing a cruel laugh by the end of the sentence.

Adams looked at him from the couch, with a stern face. He got up with a clumsy jump, walked to the table, grabbed a dish and crashed it to the floor. Jefferson barely blinked an eye at his violent reaction, in juxtaposition of the other two men, who winced by instinct.

“For God’s sake, this man…” complained Thomas, with a heavy sigh.

“To hell” mumbled Adams, turning on his heels to get out of there.

“Look at the piece of art the floor now is!” lectured Thomas, now with voice raised. “Moron, you’re nothing more than a fucking moron! Now, your fucking mother will clean this crap!” he ended up screaming, fed up with the situation.

“Sweet Lord…” muttered Alexander, passing a hand through his neck in shock.

Madison sighed and threw a glare to Adams when he passed by them, making a beeline for the staircase.

“Damn this and the whole nation of the world!” swore Adams, hoofing over the steps.

“Imbecile, he’s nothing else but…” kept insulting Thomas, stopping James when his friend tried to clean the mess. “Don’t, he’s the one who’s gonna clean that!”

“In two fucking lifetimes” retorted Adams.

“You’re going to…”

“Go to hell” declared the unemployed man, locking himself up in the bathroom upstairs.

“For fuck’s sake…” sighed Alexander, irritated.

“Adams, come down” said Madison, trying to keep peace.

“Fucking backward. He’s gonna clean that shit, I swear it upon…” Thomas stopped himself, as if he’d thought about his wording better and regretted it although it didn’t reach his tongue. “Well, I don’t like to say those things, but he’s gonna clean that because I say so, and that’s it” he declared, less heatedly.

“He’s not going to clean it and the girls are going to hurt themselves” pointed out Madison.
“He’s not gonna clean it? I can assure you he will!” insisted Thomas, stubbornly, as he got up.

Madison sighed with tedium as he made his way upstairs, muttering curses. Alexander stood there, processing the reaction he’d witnessed. He turned his head to Thomas, who had gone into the kitchen, starting a tirade of complaints as he fetched a cloth and a dustpan. Alexander half-closed his eyes when the southerner knelt down and started to collect the broken pieces himself, cautiously but with his ire intact.

“Could this be possible? You can’t tell that man anything. He’s used to people clapping at him so he doesn’t get mad and he can’t accept that I’m fucking sick of it already” he complained, cleaning and swallowing how much he wanted to break something himself. “I called a lawyer because the only thing he’s done since he received the notice from his daughter was watching TV and eating and sleeping. That’s his life. That’s the only thing he’s ever done with it.

“He’s been like that since college. The thing I said before, about the diagrams? I’ve got around a thousand more like those. I don’t have anything else from him. That’s why I get angry, god damnit! I don’t get angry because I want to!” he ended up shouting.

“I haven’t said that” said Alexander, hands up in a surrender manner.

The front door was opened and the immigrant saw Libby coming in the house. She smiled at him when they locked eyes.

“Hi, Alex…” her happy expression flattered when she saw Thomas knelt on the floor and she rubbed her left arm, as if she could feel the bad vibes in the environment. “What happened now?”

“Nothing, I came to help Adams and things escalated… And he threw a dish to the floor” he explained, trying not to get into too much detail.

The girl sighed, just as exhausted as Madison had been moments before. “Every day a new thing…”

Thomas continued talking as he got up to throw the pieces to the trashcan, not having heard their interaction at all. “I get angry because I’m always the one who’s moving to keep the machine working. I can’t keep on doing it anymore, I’m not twenty anymore. He believes he’s still a teenager, but I’m not” He took a seat again once he was back, and grabbed his fork, listlessly. “We made food for him and he complains about it tastes bad or if it’s burnt… The one who’s burnt out in here is me”

Libby made a sound in the back of her throat and bit her bottom lip to prevent a smile to grow. Alexander suffered her same struggle and both tried not to look at each other to throw their tries through the window.

Their attention was turned to the sound of a small quarrel occurring upstairs, just when a door
was swung open and hit the wall in the process, from the vehemence used.

“Get going!” they heard Madison urging, clearly reaching the end of his patience.

Thomas turned to their direction too, thankfully not seeing the face of pure disgust Adams brought and that got worse once Alexander and he stared at each other.

“I can’t take this anymore” he whined, dramatically.

Madison threw him an irritated look. “You can’t with what? People helping you out for free?” he spat, giving him a little shove so he walked faster. “Get going, which is gerund*!”

Adams groaned under his breath. “If he has something to tell me, he can explain it to me, but I don’t… I don’t want him to… Hum-hum-hum-hum, I don’t want that in my ear all the time…”

Thomas shook his head, laughing sarcastically under his breath. “This guy is unbelievable…”

Alexander huffed. He grabbed Adams’ forearm, with mocking care. “Let’s see, sweetheart, what the heck do you want from me?” he asked, starting to be exasperated once again.

“I want you to tell me what…”

“No, no” interrupted the Caribbean, having already anticipated that answer. “What you want from me is that I stuck up to you and all the dumb things you say”

“No, I want…”

“Spoiler: that’s not gonna happen”

“Eeeeh…”

“With me, it’ll not”

“I don’t want to fight”

“Thank goodness” said Alexander, almost at the same time, clearly not believing him. “The broken dish almost fooled me”

“No, but that was because…”

“The worst part wasn’t that you broke it” continued Alexander, with a harsh tone. “The worst part is the other man barely blinked an eye. So, that means this is not the first time you’ve done that”

Libby nodded, sadly. “There are barely any dishes or glasses left. But most of the times it’s because they fell by accident”

“Well, another one to stone me publicly” snapped Adams. “Go to pretend to be studying”

Libby’s expression darkened. “I at least want to do something with my life. ¡Haragán! [You, lazy]!” she spat, before deciding to go upstairs, sulking.
“Aren’t you going to dine?” asked Madison.

“This asshole quenches anyone’s stomach with his attitude” commented Thomas.

Adams looked enraged at him. “This is what you wanted? Humiliate me? Crucify me? Is that why you brought the creole here?”

“I brought the creole… I mean, Hamilton, because he was the only one I could find to help you. Okay?” explained Thomas, for what seemed like the hundredth time.

Alexander turned to face him, offendedly. “Eh, careful with what you’re saying. I was not in need, nor looking for a job, defenceless in the streets…”

“I haven’t said that” hurried to say Thomas, getting up to put his barely eaten food back in place. “What I told him was that he’s in no position to complain about the lawyer that he gets” he explained better.

“I’ll complain if he ignores me and wants to do only what he says, like a little dictator” chimed in Adams.

“But, for Christ’s sake, I’m only informing you about how things must be done!” insisted Alexander.

“I’m not gonna get into that, I don’t want to give in, I won’t” argued Adams.

“But don’t take it out on him either, he hasn’t decided any of that” said Madison.

“He… Who… Who did, then?” he asked, voice already raspy.

“The Congress does, man!” answered Alexander, flabbergasted to be explaining that to another lawyer.

“I do, because it’s my life and my things!” contradicted Adams.

“No!”

“I do… What do you mean ‘no’?” he asked, eyes narrowed.

“No, even if you married under the community property, your wife has enough evidence to keep her things, alright?” explained the Caribbean, trying to keep a calm tone in desperation to reach an agreement with the older man.

Adams’ brief moment of silence gave everybody in the room some hope that he was finally going to cede and accept what the youngest had said. But then, a flash of stubbornness crossed his eyes and he shook his head again.

“No, Alexander, that sounds weird. It doesn’t convince me”

“… I don’t have to convince you, mister, it’s the way it is…” said Alexander, not believing this conversation was real.

“Well, you don’t convince me”
“I’m not trying to convince you” he repeated, about to lose his patience. “I’m explaining the law to you. A law you should know, you work as a lawyer” he added, slowly, as if talking with a little child.

“Right, I’m a lawyer, still practising, unlike others” snapped Adams.

“You’re unemployed and living off of a man that barely stands you” recalled Alexander, bitterly. “Get off your high horse”

“You get off your high horse and start doing things as the clients tell you” he countered.

Alexander was about to tell him off when Thomas beat him to it. “I’ve never had that problem with him, when he works for me” he informed. Before Adams could mutter a rebuttal, he added: “Are you going to say that’s because he’s my friend too? Like with this one?” he asked, pointing at Madison. “If he’s not doing it properly, it might be because of you”

The room fell silent. Adams nodded forcibly as he declared:

“Alright, I’m a piece of shit. I get it”

And then, he turned around again to go back upstairs.

“I’m not saying that either, John” argued Thomas.

“Yes, yes, I’m the fucking worst. I’m a piece of garbage. You made it very clear” nodded Adams, looking for a random room to lock himself in again.

“Adams, again?” complained Madison, frustratedly.

The man looked down at him, enraged. “Don’t come to me with ‘again’, man! I come down and the only thing they do is attacking me, attacking me!”

“Nobody’s attacking you, John” said Thomas, exhaustedly.

“The hell you’re not! I’ve not been there for one minute straight and you’ve done nothing but attacking, attacking, attacking” he insisted, kicking the floor each time he repeated the word.

“But stop acting like a little child!” said Madison, the only one who had his patience still in one piece.

“Look, lad” started Thomas, walking to be by the foot of the stairs too. “One thing is that the lawyer is not listening to you and another thing, that they do it because you’re in the wrong. Learn to cooperate and compromise. The one who’s at risk in here is you” he lectured, tiredly.

“I don’t want to compromise for that shit” stated Adams, crossing his arms upon his chest.

“You must” countered Thomas.
“I won’t”

“You will”

“No”

“And control yourself” he advised too.

“I can’t control when…”

“You must” repeated the southerner, as a matter-of-a-fact.

“I can’t!” exploded Adams, seeing himself cornered. “I’m 45 years old and I haven’t changed for anybody. Do you think I’m gonna do it for that guy?” he asked, pointing at the immigrant with disdain.

“You’re 45? Where?” spat Alexander, taking a step forward. “Because in front of me, I only see a five-year-old!”

“I’m glad”

“You’re glad?”

“Yeah, the younger I feel, the better for me!”

“… …” And that was enough for something inside Alexander’s brain to snap. “Eh, look, Adams” he decided, standing at the end of the staircase. “I’m done”

“Okay” replied the man, uninterested.

“I don’t care about what happens to you, how the trial ends like. I don’t fucking care”

“Sure, sure… We’ve seen you care very little…”

“About ungrateful people? At all, never” he assured, angrily. “But remember what I’m telling you: you’re gonna eat a shit when that day comes. And you will deserve it”

“Very good, then” replied Adams, crossing his arms and refusing to look at him, petulantly.

“All right, then” spat Alexander, turning to the front door to leave.

“Sorry for making you lose time” said Thomas, at last hour, receiving only a dismissive wave of hand from the immigrant. He sighed irritated and looked at Adams. “Get down here, go to the couch. Don’t lock yourself in any room” he ordered, bitterly.

Adams took his time to do as he was told. He lay down on the couch, put his blanket on the top of him and turned off the TV, throwing the remote to the corner of the room. Thomas looked through the window that connected the kitchen and the dining room and threw a hateful glare in the direction of the covered bump on his couch.
We all had our demons, and Aaron was no exception. He’d also spent nights remembering things he’d done wrong, things he could’ve said better, chances he’d lost for his stupid insecurities… But he also had good days. And today was one of those.

Work had gone smoothly, he’d finished everything he needed to cover his month, his clients were left satisfied with his services and things were going just as good with his family. Theo was doing good in school and had made some friends (he’d always been glad she took after her mother and not him), his wife was consolidating the relationship with her son and had started to work half-time, going back to the work field now that their daughter had started Elementary and Augustine was studying a course and could take care of her in the afternoons.

It might sound as a cliché, but that cheesy phrase of ‘smile and the world will smile with you’ seemed to fit him like a glove today. And he took advantage to it. Once he was home, he made the chores and, once he was finished, he’d gone out to do some shopping for cooking dinner, despite it wasn’t his turn that night.

He looked at his watch when he’d grabbed all he thought he’d need and then trotted to where the cashiers were. Theodosia would be home soon, and he wanted to be there before her to give her a surprise. Besides, although Augustine had proved to be a great babysitter and that he and Theo were getting along just fine, Aaron still didn’t like the idea of leaving the two alone too much time, less when it was about to be night time.

So, he accelerated the march, still with his eyes glued to the watch and his mind more focus on what he’d do once he was home. So immersed he was in his own world, that he stumbled with his own feet, showing the clumsiness he was born with. Aaron’s face almost met the floor, if it hadn’t been for the person who was in front of him in line. The collision made them to fall to their side, with a loud bump.

Aaron hissed in empathy when he saw the person crashing against the tiled floor, along with a series of cans that had been exposed for more than two months now and had earned no interest in the public whatsoever. Some of them fell on the top of the person, hitting them in the head, which made Aaron wince. He looked at the cashier, who had her whole face pale and her eyes wide, as if she’d seen a ghost. Some people are very sensitive, he decided.

“Sorry about that… Uh, here…” he said, taking out what his purchase cost and fifteen dollars more to compensate the damages. He’d rather give more than what those actually cost than wait there until the person he’d pushed unintentionally to the floor would be back to his feet to confront him about how klutzy he was. “To compensate…” he clarified, when the woman barely acknowledged the money on the counter.
Aaron walked out the store after waving goodbye to the lady, who seemed to have come back to the real world along with him once the man on the floor groaned in pain. Aaron didn’t think it twice before leaving, hoping the guy hadn’t seen his face in case he lived nearby.

He cocked an eyebrow at how fast the woman ran once she’d heard the groan, too. Aaron shrugged, feeling less awkward thanks to her, and went on with his day.

He could make it on time to start making dinner before his wife came back from work. Theodosia didn’t put up much of a fight once he saw him cooking, instead joining the kids in the living room, watching some TV.

Aaron smiled fondly each time he heard laughter erupting from the living room, happy to hear his family chatting amicably.

He barely noticed when a dead silence – even with the TV still on – fell on the house.

“Dinner’s ready!” he called, happily, admiring his hard work as he set the table. When he had that covered, he raised an eyebrow, seeing nobody coming. “Guys, dinner’s ready!” he repeated, louder.

“Aaron, come here!” called Theodosia, voice quivering.

The terror in her voice made him run to where they were. Aaron looked at the trio, sat on the couch and with the glare glued to the screen of the TV, where the news were. At first, Aaron didn’t understand the commotion or Theodosia’s pale face. The anchor was explaining a robbery attempt in the store nearby their house, and though the distance could be enough to scare them, Aaron was still lost. Theodosia wasn’t a monster, but she wasn’t that sensitive either, so he couldn’t comprehend why the news affected her that much.

Until he appeared on screen.

On the screen, Aaron saw what he’d lived a couple of hours prior, now in the point of view of a camera. He saw himself stumbling on his own feet, pushing a man to the ground. A man who’d been holding a gun and pointing at the poor woman he’d judged with so much glibness.
His blood turned into ice once he saw the man getting up and managing to run away before the police arrived or the cashier had time to restrain him somehow.

“My God, Aaron, are you alright? Why didn’t you tell me?” asked Theodosia, once the images were finished, going to hug him.

“I-I didn’t even know the guy had a gun!” he admitted, taking his time to reciprocate the gesture.

“All day living in your own world is gonna get you killed” commented Augustine, rolling his eyes with condescension.

Theo imitated his patronizing tone. “Like you were any more focused in life…”

He nudged her to the side, as if reminding her to keep quiet about something. None of their parents had the time to question them, as they heard the anchor-woman explaining how the thief was still on the run and the police officers were doing their best to catch him.

The teenager huffed again. “Huh, they’ll look for him today and then forget about him tomorrow”

“The only good thing is that they didn’t see Daddy’s face” pointed out Theo, seeing how worried the adults were and wanting to help somehow.

The mother nodded in agreement. “True, true. Thank goodness you left before he could follow you or-or I don’t know” she said, shaking her head as if to erase those theories from her mind.

“It’s okay, I’m okay” he reassured, giving her a tighter hug to calm her down. “Your daughter’s right. He’s… Sylas!?” he exclaimed, making his wife jump in startle.

“What?” she asked, turning back to the TV, seeing they were showing the photo of the suspect.

“Aaron, what…? Aaron!”

Theodosia stopped mid-sentence when she saw her husband’s eyes rolling to the back of his head, face white as a sheet. She managed to grab him in time when he collapse, preventing him to hit the floor.

By the time Aaron was up again, he ordered his daughter to turn off the TV in a quiet voice that sent chills down Theo’s spine. She obliged without asking much, which was odd from her.

Theodosia came back, glass of water in hand. “Aaron, are you alright? What happened? You fainted as soon as you saw that photo!” she asked, in concern.

Aaron accepted the glass, without locking eyes with her. “I know him” he muttered, after taking a
slow and long gulp of water.

“What?” she asked, in shock, wishing she’d heard wrong.

“I know him” he repeated, voice tiny.

Augustine groaned in frustration. “What doesn’t happen to this man, won’t happen to anyone” he complained, passing a hand through his face.

Theodosia Sr and Jr shushed him, rudely. “What do you mean you know him?” asked the adult.

Aaron still didn’t look at her, just watched the wall in front of him, memories forming in the front of his mind.

He’d started working for Skelton and though the man wasn’t the nicest, he barely spent time with them, so Aaron didn’t mind much. He focused on proving his value by working in the shadows, allowing his hard work being the loudest slap to those who doubted his skills.

A part of him understood them, he was very young, having started college before average, following his parents’ wishes. But that didn’t mean he hadn’t worked hard.

Each client he took left with a smile, talking wonders about him. Words spread fast and, from what seemed overnight, everyone’s opinion about him changed slowly. There were still a few who disliked him, but Aaron knew it was a fact of life and that there was little he could do about it, so he simply ignored them.

The only one he cared about liking him was his boss. The good things about him had reached Skelton’s ears, to the point where he’d come to his office one day to congratulate him in person. Aaron started to breathe more easily after the occurrence. Having the favour of your boss was always a good thing.

Join that to the peaceful environment the building was always in, and Aaron seemed to have found the perfect place to stay.

That day had gone by like any other. Aaron had that day mostly free apart from some paperwork and a couple of meetings with clients around the afternoon, and he’d decided to treat himself with a little break to charge the batteries.
The break room was almost empty, which always put him in a good mood when he wanted some time to himself without having to lock himself in a room. There was only the secretary there, who was having a little fight with the stack of papers spread on the table.

He felt slightly bad for him, and decided to change his route, going to talk to him.

“You okay, need any help?” he asked.

The young boy looked up at him, blushing from embarrassment. “I need to take all this to Monroe and Mr Skelton, but I don’t want them to mix and be in trouble”

Aaron nodded and pointed at one of the two piles of sheets. “Is that the one for Monroe?” he asked.

“Yes”

“I’ll take those to him”

“Really?”

“Yeah, you take care of Mr Skelton’s, surely those are way more important… And Monroe has a better temper than him” he added, succeeding in making his workmate laugh and calm down his nerves.

“Thanks, Burr!” he said, taking the remaining pile and walking out the room.

Aaron decided to leave the coffee machine running while he kept his word. He took the stack of papers and walked directly to where he knew Monroe’s office was. At last minute, he decided to go upstairs instead of taking the elevator. Some exercise always did good and he was in the mood.

Midway, his mind drifted away. It happened to him often and he’d learnt to live with it. He’d also managed to develop some automatic movements, so he could keep living while daydreaming. If only those skills could be more useful in the real world…

So, he wasn’t still fully aware of his surroundings when a couple of sheets fell from the stack. He simply knelt one knee on the floor and lowered his head to leaf through them, in case they had an order. He was pushed back to the real world literally when someone fell to the ground, having bumped into him with a force that let Aaron know they’d been running. Which wasn’t very unusual in their workplace if it were an important day (which wasn’t) or Skelton or some other head of the company required a meeting with some of them.

Still, what casted doubts inside Aaron’s mind was the turmoil of loud voices he finally managed to hear once he was completely back. He looked to the side, seeing the person that had
started it all, head in his hands as he groaned from pain.

Aaron winced, feeling terrible. “I’m sorry, sir. Did you hurt your…?”

His voice was drowned when Skelton came rushing to where they were, accompanied by two police officers that immediately get a hold on the man.

“Jesus, Burr, are you alright?” asked Monroe, coming running to him, a woman in toe.

“I-I… What happened?” he stuttered, being helped to his feet by his workmate.

“You son of a bitch” barked the man, looking heatedly in Aaron’s direction, who tremble under such a hateful glare. “I’ve committed your face to memory, asshole!” he threatened, being pushed roughly by the two officers.

“Well, sorry, I was just picking up papers” apologised the man, not understanding a thing.

“My God, I’m so sorry” said the woman, looking him from head to toe. “I… The divorce didn’t sit right with him” she explained, weakly.

“Yes, I kind of saw that” commented Aaron, laughing it off.

“Are you okay?” asked Monroe, hesitating in touching him or not. “Jesus, at least she didn’t bring him here. You could’ve get yourself killed!” he scolded, slightly.

“What?” he asked, confused. He felt the air more difficult to breathe in when his boss gave him a slap on the back.

“Gosh, Burr, from what I heard of you, I knew you had vocation to get justice” he started, with a proud smile. “But I never thought you would actually stop an armed guy from escaping the building”

“… What?” he asked, feeling all colours draining from his face. He looked at the woman. “But didn’t you say you were divorcing?”

Monroe nudged him slightly while the girl looked down in shame. “She already had it rough to come to the decision to leave him!” he scolded.

“Well, took her long enough to divorce a man with so many criminal records” huffed Skelton, quite insensitive. “He only needs a murder record to have the collection complete” he laughed, as if the situation were a joke.

The girl cried a bit after the comments. “Well, we all make mistakes, let me live already!” she complained.

In the meanwhile, Aaron had felt his vision going from blurry to completely black. The others were surprised when he fell to the floor, not having been paying enough attention to his paleness. Monroe went to his aide immediately while the woman gasped and knelt on the other side, making
Sure he was alright. Skelton simply looked down at him.

“Oh, drop in blood sugar” he guessed, as if he was in the right without any proof. “That’s why I always take little breaks to get some coffee and a snack” He hummed as he looked at his watch. “And it’s already my time to do so”

With that, he left, leaving the other two to deal with the fainted man.

“And now, my face is on the TV and he’ll recognise me, because he’s on the run, and I’m done” he finished, anxiously.

“Calm down, honey, he committed your face to memory, not your address” reassured Theodosia, wanting to be supportive.

“What I said, so much daydreaming will kill you one day” complained Augustine.

“One must have some rotten luck…” muttered Theo, annoyed at her father, too.

“It was an accident” proclaimed Aaron, overwhelmed. “Had I known, I would’ve let him go!”

“The world lost such a good policeman…” mocked Augustine.

“He’s gonna find me, I know he will” said Aaron, shaking his head, nervous. “We need to leave for a bit, I don’t want you to get in between” he decided, getting to his feet.

“Don’t worry about me, dear. As long as I have my pepper spray, I’m safe” assured Theodosia, quite smugly.

“What spray? That’s your cologne” said the teenager.

The woman looked back at him, indignant. “Excuse me, but if I spray that in your eyes, you’ll know what true pain is!”

“Dad, he’s also on the news” said Theo. “I’m sure they’ll catch him soon”

Aaron shook his head and went straight to his room, muttering curses. “What a mess. What a fucking mess!”

They frowned when they heard the door slamming shut and then muffled sobs.

“I miss the boarding school” said Augustine, saddened.
“Shut up before I start to miss it too” threatened Theodosia.

“John, did you take my chips again?!”

“Learn to share, man! Your selfishness is the reason nobody likes you!”

“Oh, because always taking the bag of chips and leaving them there so nobody can eat them is the complete opposite of selfishness!”

“They’re still there! You can take them and eat them, I don’t care!”

“I won’t eat that crap that slept opened on the floor! When was the last time you cleaned?”

“Oooooh, man, get off my case!”

“John, you’re coexisting with more people, okay?”

“This is my room. I’ll clean it when I feel up to it!”

“You never do!”

“Because you take all my vital energy!”

“And this isn’t even your room! You’re here as a fucking leech because you don’t pay shit!”

“There! Keep mentally abusing me, remembering I have nowhere to go! You soulless ass!”

“You’ve been nine years already living off of me, get a fucking house and live like a pig in there!”

“One day, I’m gonna grab the door and leave to never return!”

“I want that promise signed by you and in the presence of a public notary!”

“LAAAAAF!”

As soon as he heard his boyfriend and friend screaming his name at the same time, Lafayette trotted from the kitchen to the living and then stepped out, to the balcony, closing the glass doors behind him, letting out a tired sigh. He rested both arms on the handrail, wanting the sight of the street at night to calm him and give him enough strength to back there without losing his composure too.

A loud and entitled ‘tts’ called his attention and he looked down, locking eyes with his downstairs neighbour.
“Good night, Mr Garret” he greeted, managing a polite smile despite all.

The old man ignored the formalities and went straight to the point. “Get that illegal mental asylum under control or I’ll go up there to do it myself. And you won’t like it”

And with that, he went back to his house, closing his door with a thump. Lafayette sighed.

“I might like it, actually” he muttered.

The phone rang suddenly, the only thing able to silence his two flatmates for a brief moment.

“Someone pick that damned thing!” screamed Laurens, voice cracking, letting clear that he’d started to cry.

“Do it yourself. And stop with the crocodile tears” spat Hercules, hoofing over the floor grumpily to the couch.

“Just because you’re an emotionless beast means we all are the same!”

“Bah!”

Resigned, Lafayette stepped in again. He took the phone before Hercules could have a chance.

“With that mood, you’ll scare even the telemarketing away” he said, answering the phone and pressing it against his ear.

“Like that is something bad” huffed Hercules.

Lafayette rolled his eyes and greeted whoever was on the other side of the line. It took him a bit to recognise the voice, but after the man explained the reason why he was calling, Lafayette’s eyes widened. His heart dropping when he was given the news. Hercules shot him a questioning glare he ignored, as he had someone else to talk first.

“Yes, of course, I’ll… I’ll talk to him right now” he promised, walking out the living room and going directly to Laurens’ room. “Johnny…” he called, weakly.

The man in question waved one hand, dismissive, as he put a pair of jeans on. Any trace of
the tears he’d claimed to have cried a couple of minutes prior, totally untraceable.

“Not now, I don’t want to hear it” he said, fed up. “I’m going out before I murder that ogre you
decided to date”

And with that, he passed by the Frenchman, who frowned at him in concern.

“No, Johnny. The phone… It’s your father” he said, grabbing his arm to stop him to leave and
passed him the item.

Laurens watched it with a mix of repressed anger and bitterness. “The last person I need to talk to
right now. You should know” he said, freeing his left arm, forcibly.

“No, Jackie, it’s important. You must…”

“Why?” he interrupted, making a beeline for the front door. “Is he dead?” he asked, jokingly.
Though, he didn’t know for sure.

“No, John, your mother…” The Frenchman swallowed, feeling horrible for being the one to explain
the situation to his friend. “Your mother is” he admitted, thinking there was not a good way to inform
anybody of such a thing.

“What?” asked the freckled man, all bravado and ire gone. Hercules got up from the couch as soon
as he heard the news, looking worriedly at his friend, too.

“Here” said passing the phone to him. “Your father wants to talk to you”

Laurens eyed the item for a moment, hesitant and slightly afraid. Eventually, he picked it up,
feeling it heavier than it actually was, and pressed it against his ear, anxiety eating him alive. He
looked up, seeing his two friends were there, with no intention of leaving him unless he told them so.
Laurens wanted nothing of that. With an insecure voice, he finally talked through the mic.

“Dad?”

Chapter End Notes

"The dead ones" (Los muertos) and "the mother that bore you" (la madre que te parió):
These are expressions to show irritation, exhaustion or being totally fed up about
something/someone. The second one can change depending on how many people
you’re referring; you can even use it against you. "La madre que me parió, macho" (The
mother that bore me, man...). And can also add "puta/fucking" before mother if too
angry.
"My balls 33" (Mis cojones 33): I think the most similar adaptation in English would be: "the fuck that's gonna be true". From what I know, nobody knows for sure where the expression comes from.

Get going, which is gerund! (¡Andando, que es gerundio!): A very common expression in Spanish, especially when the speaker is at the verge of their patience.

It's finally here! .... Oh, well, the first part is. I know I usually wait until the whole episode is done and I update it divided within two-four parts, but I thought this took me long enough...

Which left me wondering: do you prefer if I update like this or like I used to, getting into account most of the episodes are taking longer than usual? Let me know.

Also, thanks for the subs and kudos this story's been getting while in kind-of-hiatus! Sursum corda!
Deeds of the father (P2)

Chapter Summary

Theodosia receives help from whom she least expected it. Henry Laurens is trying Libby's good deeds destabilizing a house that wasn't very stable to begin with. Dolley and Eliza finally meet.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Swearing, dark humour. DISCLAIMER: The musical belongs to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Would you believe me if I said I spent months without updating and I wrote this chapter in the last two days? XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The law firm was quieter than usually. Or just quiet, which was so uncommon Thomas almost forgot that was how a law firm (and any other serious business worth its salt) had to be.

Maria was more focused than ever writing her book; Washington had only been seen at first hour in the morning to get some coffee and ask him to make a few calls; Madison had disappeared from sight since they started the workday (which was unusual, but Thomas decided everybody needed space, especially when they lived together); Isa did visit him a couple of times, an aura of procrastination following her.

Apart from that, nothing. He didn’t hear the usual chattering in the break room, or incessant footsteps going back and forth. The only good thing about having the elevator broken, Thomas concluded in its day, was that he didn’t have to hear the annoying thing going down and up all day.

All in all, a relative relaxing day that allowed him to do the tasks Washington had asked him for and make sure he had everything in order before the end of the month. Soon after he was unbusy, the of the lack of noise weighted on his shoulders, making him very uncomfortable.

Deciding he had more reason than anyone in there to spend the rest of the day doing nothing (or going back home before he had to, but he didn’t want to risk it in case his boss would need him again), Thomas walked to the break room, finding it surprisingly vacant. That made him more unease
than hearing nothing at all. The only soul there was Angelica, cup of coffee in both hands, as she looked at the wall with a pensive expression.

She barely acknowledged him at first, sipping at her beverage from time to time, her mind kilometres away from the room. Thomas was tempted to drink the same as her, but decided against it at last minute, and opted for some tea in case the peace would cease soon. Which’d surely happen, knowing his workplace as he did.

“Ah, Thomas” spoke the woman, startling him and making him almost drop his cup. “I needed to talk to you”

The man turned around, seeing her taking her purse from the floor and rummaging in it. “I’ve been in my office all day” he pointed out.

“I know, I’ve heard you tapping and talking to clients” she responded, unmoved.

“It’s literally the first door you bump into when you walk out of here” he continued, almost in a scolding tone.

“I knew it was a matter of time you’d appear” she dismissed, shrugging one shoulder.

“I came here by a stroke of luck, honestly…”

“They all ended up coming here in due course” she insisted. With a triumphal smile, she handed him a stack of papers. “Alex told me to give you this. Said you asked him for it or something like that… I wasn’t fully listening” she admitted, as he took the papers to read them. “I’ve trained my brain to take the basic words each time he approaches me with papers, because God knows what he’s up to that day…” she explained, moving her remaining coffee in circles with a teaspoon.

Thomas frowned when he recognised what Angelica had given him as documents to help Adams’ case. As far as he’d read, Hamilton had written as much as he was told yesterday and had managed to form some kind of tactic so it’d end as favourable as possible for Adams. The Virginian swallowed, a bitter taste in his mouth.

“It’s not for me, it’s for Adams’ case” he explained. He wouldn’t have admitted it had it been any other person, but Angelica had that sense of security, of ‘you can tell me anything because I won’t tell’. To Thomas’ great regret, Hamilton shared that trait with his sister-in-law, too.

She made a face at the information. “Gosh, what has he done now?”

“Angering Abby till the point of divorce” he summed up.

“Bah, can’t blame her. I saw that coming a long time ago”

“They were a perfect match in its day, honestly” commented Thomas, taking a seat beside her. “But I don’t know what happened to this man. He’s turned dumb”

“Or too lazy” She eyed the papers Thomas was holding. “Did you convince Alex to work for him?
What kind of fruit do you give him?” she joked.

“I only asked him to give him some advice”

“He gave him quite a bit” she remarked.

Thomas frowned his lips and put the papers aside. “I wasn’t expecting him to do it, especially after how Adams reacted yesterday” he said, sincerely. After a bit of thought, he admitted: “I never thought he could be this way”

Angelica nodded. “He’s always been like that; it’s just that now you’re bothering to know him” she teased, with a hint of scolding in her tone.

“I guess” he ceded.

She glared at him for a moment before speaking again. “And what’s your deal?”

“What?” he asked, cocking an eyebrow at her, as he sipped from his cup.

“What happened with you two?”

Thomas shrugged. “If he hadn’t told you, I guess I won’t either” he decided.

She grimaced. “I just want to know if this is an armed peace”

He huffed out a laugh. “Don’t worry, I think we’re still fine, if these papers are any indication”

“Communication at its best…” she rolled her eyes. “Is Adams going to be his own lawyer?”

“Al… Hamilton can’t do it” he corrected himself on time.

“I know” she said, a bit saddened.

“Not that he’d have, considering Adams’ attitude”

“Why don’t you do it?” she suggested.

“Because I’m not a lawyer” he responded, with a mocking smirk on his face.

She groaned at it. “You know more about law than him” she argued. “And if I didn’t understand why you didn’t have a degree before that trip you accompanied me to, I surely do not get it now”

He moved uncomfortably in his chair. “I actually resuming my studies. But it’s nothing sure” he dismissed, when he saw Angelica’s eyes lighting up.

“With more reason, then!” she insisted, placing a hand on his forearm. “If you knew a lot before, now you’re gonna be one of the best lawyers in NYC” she praised.

“I dropped out for a reason. I’m not good at talking in front of people” he countered, focusing his attention on the papers. “And it’s not definitive. I don’t have that much free time”

“Sure, that’s why you’re losing time here with me” she teased once again.

“I just could finish my paperwork. The building is oddly quiet”

“That’s because Alex isn’t here today” she chuckled. “He had to go with Jackie to South Carolina for personal reasons. And the rest of the group followed” she explained, ambiguously.
Thomas nodded. “With good reason I haven’t seen Jemmy in all day. The poor guy must be working whatever Hamilton would’ve been asked for today” He made a mental note to pay his friend a visit to give him some company and lending a helping hand if needed later.

“And Burr hasn’t come either” she continued, absent-mindedly.


“The wife called saying he was indisposed…”

“Who knows what happens to him now”

“I only want to know when it’s finished, because that way I can’t be part of that”

“A toast for that” laughed Thomas, as both clinked their cups together.

Theodosia tapped her foot impatiently, placing the tea-bag in the cup, seeing as the liquid turned darker, as expected. She hummed restlessly under her breath, gnawing at her bottom lip. She made a beeline for her shared room, frowning at finding the door still closed. Her husband had locked himself up there right after telling them the story he shared with the criminal that appeared on the news, and had refused to open or get out. The ache in her back intensified, a reminder of her horrible night on the couch.

“Aaron?” she called, knocking softly. “Honey, come out. I made you some tea” She frowned when she received only silence. She sighed, desperately. “Aaron, please, this is absurd”

The door by her side opened, revealing her teenage son.

“Is he still being overdramatic?”

As an acted performance one would see at the theatre, Theo Jr opened her door right on cue, to answer her half-sibling.

“Dad’s not overdramatic. A dangerous man is out, looking for him” she defended her father.

Augustine huffed. “Ts, yeah… That was centuries ago. I’m sure he doesn’t remember Aaron”

“Don’t call him old, he has enough self-esteem problems”

“Kids, if you’re not going to help, go to your rooms” hissed Theodosia, narrowing her eyes in ire.
“Break the door down and tell him to snap out of it” advised Augustine.

“You have very little shame. He was very understanding with you when you came to live here!” the youngest threw to his face, kicking the floor in frustration.

“He threatened to give me a beating in front of witnesses!” retorted the guy.

“He apologised! Besides, it was your fault. Only looking for trouble!”

He turned to face his mother, who had placed a hand on her forehead, really ticked off at the discussion. “Is this the way you raise this girl?”

“I’m gonna raise you both by slapping you until I can’t feel my hands if you keep bugging around” declared the adult.

That was enough to silence her two children.

“Aaron” she called, more sternly. “Get out of there. I’m not going to repeat myself”

“Listen to her, Dad, I can see the vein in her neck beating” warned the girl.

“I’m not getting out” answered Aaron, voice muffled.

“He hears us about to kill each other and he doesn’t care” commented Augustine. “It’s amazing”

“What the heck did I just say?” spat his mother.

“I’m just commenting!”

“Shut up!”

“I can’t talk in this house…”

“Aaron, come on. I made you a tea. Don’t make it go to waste” she warned, tone turning harsher.

“Slip it under the door”

“How I’m going to slip the fucking cup of tea under the door, Aaron?! Are you fucking stupid or what?!” she snapped.

The doorbell rang and Augustine ran to go get it, afraid of the face of pure anger that his mother now possessed. The two females looked down when they heard shuffling from the other side. A straw made its way under the door.

“There. Solved” replied Aaron, unmoved.

That just made Theodosia angrier, while their daughter contained her laughter. “What the hell am I supposed to do with that?! A dropper?!”
“I’m not opening the door. That’s all I can give”

“Oh, starve yourself! Just look how much I care, you coward!” she screamed, turning on her heels to throw the tea away.

“I’ve got supplies” revealed Aaron, cockily.

She turned again, eyebrow raised. “Supplies? Since when?”

“How many people have you made mad, Dad?” asked Theo, in surprise.

Theodosia clicked her tongue at another silent response. “I’m sick of this crafty guy”

“Well, you still married him” a voice criticised at her backs.

The woman swallowed a groan of vexation. She looked daggers at her son, standing awkwardly beside the man that had talked. “What’s he doing here?”

“He called me” answered Prevost, arms crossed in defiance.

Theodosia kept looking at her son, ignoring the other adult in the hallway. “Then, you don’t understand why I slap you in the back of the head”

“Very educational” appraised the man, squinting his eyes.

“I have no more remedy. He’s all you” she spat, making way to enter the kitchen.

Prevost threw a glare at the closed door, with the straw still in place and the little girl that watched their interaction with a frown of caution in her features. He huffed at her, making her take a step back.

“Problems in paradise?” he asked, mockingly.

Theodosia placed the cup with a little more of force than necessary on the counter. “Why’re you here, Marcus?”

The man grimaced at the name. “I told you not to call me that. It sounds like a car model and it annoys me”

“That’s why I do it. Why’re you here?” she asked again, turning to face him.

“You tell me, the kid told me you wanted to talk with me” answered the man, confusedly.

“The hell I’m going to want to talk to you. Do you know why people divorce, Jacques?” She threw a glare to her son, who went rigid under it. “Care to explain?”

“I might’ve lied to Dad a bit…” he admitted, demurely. “But I did it because he wouldn’t have come otherwise”

“Where’s the bad part in that?”

“Mum” called Augustine, with the same tone she’d used previously with Aaron. “Your husband’s
locked up in his bedroom and wouldn’t come out. He has the luck of the whole Kennedy family. If there’s a small percentage of Sylas finding him, it’ll happen”

“Who’s Sylas?” asked Prevost, scratching the back of his head at whatever his son was explaining. “Another cheated on husband?”

“We never did anything until you signed the divorce” defended Theodosia, proudly.

“He’s a guy that was getting divorced from his wife long ago, got in the law firm Aaron used to work at with a gun and when he was trying to make a run for it, he bumped into Aaron, who barely knew what was happening”

The man looked at his son up and down for a moment, then, shook his head at his ex-wife. “Such a good taste in men you have”

“You’ve insulted yourself too with that statement” she retorted.

“And now Aaron’s paranoid and doesn’t want to get out” continued Augustine.

“But this guy wasn’t going around the globe all cocky and thug-like?” asked Prevost, with rancour. “How much did that last?”

“My husband’s not a thug. It’s just that you put anyone on their nerves” defended Theodosia.

“Sure…”

“And I was thinking” kept going Augustine, exhaustedly. “that Dad wouldn’t mind lending us his bunker for a couple of days, until all this calms down”

“What bunker, Augustine? You’re…”

Prevost interrupted her, getting riled up immediately. “Eh, eh, that guy’s not getting near my bunker”

Theodosia blinked perplexedly at him. “Excuse me? Since when you have a bunker?”

“Since World War III became imminent. Don’t you watch TV?”

She placed both hands at the sides of her head. “But what kind of men I married, sweet Lord?” she lamented, under her breath.

“Laugh at me. Laugh at me like everybody else. When push comes to shove and you’re awoken by a flash of light, that’d be followed by the destruction of everything and everyone you ever loved, while you spent your last seconds on this Earth screaming from agony as your skin melts, and everything else that’s left of you is consumed by the merciless flames of war, I’ll be safe in my bunker watching HBO and laughing last”

“…”

“For God’s sake, Dad, what’s wrong with you?” asked Augustine, with tiny voice.

“Well, I’ll have nightmares for a week now” commented Theo, from the door.

“Kid, what’re you doing there?” asked Prevost, feeling slightly bad for her hearing that.

“In that case, Augustine shouldn’t be here…”
“Girl, remember I’m in charge when our parents are gone and you shouldn’t get on my bad side”

“Don’t threaten your sister!” scolded Theodosia.

“Besides, it’s not like Dad’s gonna get out anytime soon” added the kid.

“He will, little one, don’t worry” assured Prevost, patting her on the head and earning a deadly glare from her in return.

“Are you going to let us in your house, just like that?” asked Theodosia, cocking one eyebrow in suspicion.

“Despite what you might think of me, Theodosia, I’ve got a heart. And a little kid shouldn’t pay because their parent has a hero complex” he elaborated, cocky.

“He did it by accident” retorted the woman.

“You’re not making him look any better” said the little girl.

“Come on, let’s give your father the news” he told Theo, with a gentle tone, before heading to the hallway.

The child looked up at her half-brother, with a smug smile plastered on her face. “I’ve got your father in my pocket. My cuteness is invincible”

“Fucking kid…” muttered the teenager.

They walked to the hallway, with Theodosia eyeing his ex with boredom.

“He won’t open. He didn’t even do it for me” she recalled, with a bit of superiority.

“I wasn’t going to ask”

And right after stating that, Prevost kicked the door a couple of times until it was finally knocked down. The kids exclaimed in awe, almost laughing at the scene, while the woman gasped, clasping a hand over her mouth.

“What’re you doing?! The door! You’re gonna pay that!”

“Yeah, in a thousand years” he dismissed, with a laugh at the end.

“If you have money for a bunker, you have it for my door!” she argued, going directly to him.

They stepped in the room, seeing Aaron in one corner, holding a couple of cans in his hands and with a terrified expression.
“Back off! I’m not afraid of using these!” he proclaimed.

“Aaron, stop being stupid. Jacques invites us over his house until you get your sanity back” explained Theodosia, as she kept walking with Prevost.

They held each of Aaron’s arms, who let go of the cans and they proceeded to drag him out of the room, while he tried to let go.

“Get your hands off me! I don’t know which one of these two guys is worse!” he fought, pointing at Prevost with the chin.

“Hey, I’m helping you despite you came to threaten me at my workplace!” complained the man.

“Get off me I said!” insisted the lawyer, being completely ignored by the pair.

“Kids, make the bags, we’re leaving” ordered Theodosia, with normality.

“Heeeelp!” screamed Aaron, pushing backwards to make the dragging more difficult. “Heelp! Express kidnap!”

“Don’t yell that, the neighbours are gonna think weird things!” said Prevost, afraid of stepping out of the house like this.

Theodosia waved one hand, dismissive. “Nah, they’re used to this kind of crap from us”

“I don’t know how you haven’t been sued yet” commented the man, though impressed at the information.

Libby took a look at her watch, seeing it was about to be lunchtime. She could only hope Thomas and Adams had come to terms. Which, in their case, meant doing as if nothing had happened and fell on their routine of ignoring each other as much as possible. When Libby left that morning, she found the house in complete silence. And not in the quiet, comfortable way.

She never thought she could love a change in her schedule from afternoon to morning period, but here she was. She yawned, planning a nap as soon as she was home. A huge noise made her jump in spot and refine her senses, tightening the grip on her bag out of instinct.

Her fear turned into compassion when she saw the whole thing had been a group of teenagers that’d bumped into an old man, throwing him and his suitcase to the pavement. And by the laughter they were sharing, she suspected it wasn’t an accident, precisely.
“Be careful where you’re going, boys” scolded the man, gently, as he got up by himself.

“Oh, fuck off, swindler” one snapped at him, rolling his eyes.

“Are you late to brainwash people back at your sect or what?” added another.

Libby balled her fists, feeling her blood boiling at the scene.

“Would you leave the poor man alone?” she confronted them, trotting to be face to face with the whole group. “Are you proud of yourselves? Four against one? You’re a bunch of bullies!” she scolded, firmly, managing to make half of them to look down in shame and the other half to avoid her glare. “If you’re not going to help him, don’t make yourselves look even worse by talking” she continued, walking through them to pick up the suitcase, still lying on the floor.

“Um, but…” one tried to say.

“There’s no excuse to treat a person that way!” she interrupted, stubbornly. “Keep walking and spend your time studying instead of picking on people. It’ll do you good in the long run” The group mumbled a few things but then decided to keep walking, some with cheeks tainted in red. Once they were far enough, she turned around and handed the suitcase to the man, smiling at him.

“Here you go, sir” 

The priest grabbed his suitcase, grateful. “Thank you so much, miss. It’s good to see there are still good people out there” 

“Don’t mind them too much, I’m sure they learnt” she assured, hopeful.

“If it’d been only them” began the man, shaking his head in sadness. “But since I came here I’ve received only disdainful looks and bad commentaries. Why’s the world so full of hatred?” 

“Wish I knew” said the girl, sincerely. She frowned in worry. “You don’t have anywhere to go, sir?” 

“I’m new here. I’m trying to start from scratch but…” 

“You can come with me if you want” she proposed, before thinking it through. 

“Ah, no, sweetheart, I wouldn’t want to be a bother” he refused.

“Nonsense! I’m sure my flatmates won’t mind!”

At least, she hoped they wouldn’t if she explained…
“Come on, Father, I’ll show you the way. I’m sure you must be hungry!” she said, looping an arm with him and guiding him to her current house.

The funeral was concise, intimate and wrapped in a heavy silence, occasionally broken by quiet murmurs or sobs. They received a few glares they ignored for their friend’s sake, who was in no state to notice such a thing. Laurens had clung to Alexander as soon as the ceremony started, breaking down when the Father started his speech. The freckled man could feel his father’s eyes on him, but ignored him right away, not wanting to have any more interaction.

That was why, once the mass was over and they were allowed inside the house, Laurens made a beeline for his old bedroom, slamming the door shut. His group of friends left behind, seeing the scene with sadness. Only them were allowed to enter by the young man’s petition. Alexander especially. The couple understood their friend perfectly and let the Caribbean do, knowing that if someone could calm and comprehend Laurens that’d be Alexander. So, they put up with a few glares, ignoring the rudeness successfully and going to talk with the direct family of his friend. They seemed to have gotten better after the fateful event.

The patriarch seemed the more affected by it. Neither Hercules nor Lafayette could blame the man. He’d been married to Eleanor for almost forty years and he was only human, after all. He thanked them for coming and being there for his son, which surprised the couple in the good way, and, in return, they tried to assure him Laurens was just going through grief in his own way and should be left alone by now. Again, shockingly, the man understood and proceeded to attend the rest of family members.

In the meantime, Alexander was sat with Laurens on the bed, the latter face down, face pressed against the pillow. The immigrant was trying to comfort his friend by stroking his hair and rubbing circles on his back from time to time, all the oratory he was known for completely vanished in the worst of moments. He guessed there was nothing good enough to say in these situations.

He was given a cue, though, when Laurens turned his crying into a one of rage while he remembered his father’s attitude through the years compared to know.

“John, you need to talk to him eventually” he admitted, softly. “He’s lost someone important too”

“But he was here with her” he retorted, wiping at his tears with anger. “Why didn’t he call me? Try to contact me? No, only when there was nothing to do”
Alexander hesitated at first before acting as the devil’s advocate. “Maybe he couldn’t find enough courage to do so until the blow came. It’s more common than you’d believe” he added, bitterly.

“I don’t care. I was told she was sick, but not this bad. I wasn’t contacted overnight and thought everything went fine but it was the total opposite. Then, he dared to throw in my face that I hide things?” he sniffed, passing a hand through his aching forehead. “I, at least, did it with good reason. Do you remember how he went ballistic when I came out? Now, what does he want from me?”

“To make amends, Jack” insisted Alexander.

“I don’t want to”

“John, he’s the only remaining parent you have”

And Alexander flinched at his wording. He surely was the personification of sensitiveness.

“And who’s to blame?” hissed Laurens, teeth gritted.

“No one” assured the financier. “Jack, your mother fell ill. It was nobody’s fault”

“He should’ve done things differently” kept arguing the southerner.

“Well, but he didn’t” concluded Alexander. “We all have things we should’ve done differently but we can’t change that. We can try to make things better now, and your father clearly wants to, Jack. What wouldn’t I’ve given for my father to have done that in its day” he admitted, a tad of resent covering his words.

Laurens looked to the side at his declaration, frowning in guilt. “Sorry…”

Alexander sighed. “I didn’t mean that, I meant that your father’s trying and that’s a lot after what happened between you two”

“I guess…”

“I’m not saying you have to forgive him or listen to him right now” he ceded. “But you’ll have to eventually, alright?”

“Alright” gave in Laurens.

“Do you want to talk to Betsey?”

“Peggy” he corrected. “Eliza couldn’t come for work, I’m not going to bother her, then…”

“You wouldn’t” assured Alexander, fishing his phone out his pocket and pressing his sister-in-law contact. “There, I’m going to grab you some food, okay, dear?”

“I’m not hungry” he mumbled, pressing the mobile against his ear.

“You have to eat something, sweetheart. I’ll pick something light, okay?” he promised, patting him on the arm and getting up.
The first thing Alexander did was going to tell Hercules and Lafayette the state their friend was in. They relaxed slightly when they were told he’d left him talking to Peggy, though. As he had his back turned to the man, Alexander was the last one to notice Henry had walked to him.

“Alexander?” he called, startling the young man.

They hadn’t had the best kinship in the past. Especially after being introduced face to face for the first time after the huge fight Laurens had with his father about him. Still and despite the poor empathy he had, compared to his wife, Alexander could understand the situation the man was in and how it was harder with the current and fragile state the relationship with his son was in. So, he decided to go easy on him and see for himself if his advice of giving him a second chance was as good as it sounded.

“Ah, hello, Mr Laurens” he nodded, politely.

“How’s my son?” asked the man, standing disheartened, close to him.

Alexander frowned his lips at how opposite that image was from the one he remembered from his youth, where the presence of this same man put him on the verge of anxiety. He guessed years passed for everybody. And for some it was sanatory and for others, destructive.

“He’s coping” he decided to say, shrugging one shoulder. He turned his attention back to the little plate where he put what his instinct told him to. He knew this wasn’t a moment to analyse everything.

“Does he want to be seen by anyone from the family?” asked the man, lowering his tone.

Alexander could hear the true question behind his words: Does he want to talk to me? He gave the man a sympathetic smile. “Sorry, sir, he’s now talking with a common friend” Lies hurt less when there was some truth in them. He learnt that long ago. “But maybe he’s up to that later. Let’s give him some space, he’s more sensitive than what he lets see”

Henry nodded at his explanation, clearly more deflated than before. “I understand”

“Good, then” he breathed out, about to walk away. Alexander couldn’t help but get rigid under the grip on his forearm from the older man. Henry let him go immediately, after sensing his discomfort.

“Listen, Alex” he started, and the nickname coming from him was so strange it put him at unease at first. “I know you and I never got along and I’m to blame for that”

“Well, calling the college to spread distrust about how I got my scholarship was not the best way of starting on the right foot” he recalled, laughing softly to lighten the mood, if just a tiny bit.

“Yeah, sorry about that” he apologised, making a face at the memory.

“Don’t worry” he rushed to say.
“No, I want to apologise for everything” insisted the old man. “I misjudged you. Or prejudged you, would be accurate”

“It’s alright, really. No hard feelings on my part” he assured, though not meeting the man’s glare.

“You’ve helped my kid a lot” continued Henry. “Not only when you were younger, but now as well. I know he’s difficult, but he’s a good boy”

“I know” nodded Alexander, smiling slightly at the way the man was talking about his son.

“Now that I see you both in retrospective, you kind of remind me of my wife and I” he recalled, voice breaking a bit at the end. “I also have a parent-in-law that despises me no matter what I do” he admitted.

“Ah”

“She’s been living here since Eleanor got worse and it’s been a nightmare” he explained, eyes watering. Alexander was starting to feel less bad for the man after that. Henry turned to the counter, where an old lady in a wheelchair was leaning on to grab one of the bottles of wine. “She’s… Ma’am, stop with the wine!” he reprimanded, going to put the wine inside the high cabinets.

“It’s cool” was her excuse.

“I don’t want to be that to you” continued to say Henry, as if nothing had happened.

“Don’t worry about that, sir, we’re not dating anymore”

“Oh, you’re not?” asked the man, perplexed.

“No, we… We work better as friends” he ended up saying, not trusting his poor filter.

“Well, that only made what I told you before truthier”

“I guess… I’m going to give him some food” he explained, showing the dish to him and about to turn around.

“Alexander, I know I have no right to ask you for anything. But can you try to, please, convince him to talk to me? I just want to make peace” he assured.

The financer sighed, feeling bad for the man once again. “I promise I’m trying, sir”

And with that, he bid farewell to his friends and marched to Laurens’ bedroom once again. Lafayette looked at the man with pity.

“Don’t worry, Jackie’s stubborn but Alex’s a lot more. He’ll come around” he comforted, with a shy smile.

The old lady made way through with her wheelchair, looking up at her son-in-law with disapproval. “How many times did I tell you and my daughter to stop caring about horseshit and enjoy your child’s company when you still had the time, huh?” she said, poking her bony finger in his forearm. “Huh, how many?”
“Plenty, ma’am, plenty” answered the man, squinting his eyes in annoyance.

“I’m sure you’re happy with yourself” she continued, vindictively. “Now, the family is broken in two because you couldn’t be a man in its day”

“Ma’am, the poor guy’s in pain. Don’t throw salt to an open wound” said Hercules, awkwardly.

The lady ignored his attempt of peace and kept insisting. “All day worrying about bullshit… At the end of the day, look how much it mattered!” She finally acknowledged the couple to say: “When you reach my age, you’ll get to see there are more important things than what one do within the walls of their home. But nobody listens”

“I agree, ma’am” nodded Lafayette, looking tenderly at the lady.

“If that guy forgives you” she said, addressing Henry once again. “Consider yourself very lucky”

“I will, ma’am” he promised, now looking crestfallen.

“Good. Now, help me, I want to go to the toilet”

Henry groaned at the declaration, while the couple pretended to have not heard it at all.

Madison made sure he had everything in his handbag before heading out the door. He threw a glare to Adams, lying on the couch with an expression more proper of a kicked puppy than a grown-up man. He was about to keep going his way, but stopped and threw a sigh to the air.

“Adams” he called, calmly. “This is absurd, just say you’re sorry”

“I’d rather die than say sorry to the creole” he spat, pridefully.

“I was talking about Thomas”

“I don’t know that man”

Thomas heard him, as he’d been walking downstairs, and rolled his eyes at the commentary. “In that case, pack your bags. It’s dangerous to live under a stranger’s roof” he spat.

“Thomas, don’t make it worse” said Madison.

“I’m sick of this man. I told you” he retorted. Looking directly at the lying form on the couch, he declared. “You better start to earn your beans*, because I’m done with you”

“Hm”

“Did you hear me?”
“Yes, stop being a tiresome!” snapped the man, curling on himself.

“Keep scoring points” advised the Virginian, venomously.

“Well, nobody can say I didn’t try” said Madison, going back to his initial plan of leaving.

“Nobody asked you to” grumbled Adams.

“Show him some respect, it’s because of him I didn’t kick you out since day zero” informed Thomas, from the kitchen.

“And where are you going now?” asked the unemployed man, with distrust.

“I’m going out with Dolley” he answered, packing a jacket too, just in case.

“You only spend time with her”

“Well, she’s my girlfriend for a reason”

“There, keep reminding me I’m a single loser!”

“But if I just answered you!”

“Thomas, Dobby barely spends time here anymore. Can I have his room?”

“You’re so vindictive. Really, you bore me” said Madison, deciding to wait for Dolley at the porch.

“Stop calling him Dobby, or I’ll slap you across the face” warned Thomas, collected.

“But my back’s starting to hurt! This couch is a shit…” he complained, being completely ignored by his ex-friend. He made a whimpering sound when the man came out the kitchen with a dish of just heated food in one hand. “How much does it cost you to do the same for me? It’s just one dish more” he whined.

“I can’t, I’m not a cook to cook for strangers” he snapped, smiling at the sound of protest he received from the man.

The door was opened a bit after, and in walked Libby with the priest, chatting jovially. Adams craned his neck and narrowed his eyes at the unfamiliar face.

“Who’s that? Did you finally get a boyfriend in that useless course you’re doing?”

The girl pursed her lips. “It’s not useless, thank you very much. And how is he going to be my boyfriend? He could be my father!” she exclaimed, offendedly.

“Maybe you have the Oedipus complex”

“Electra, you uncultured red-neck” corrected Thomas, coming back downstairs, now with Polly in tow.

“True, for mummy’s issues we already have you” he retorted, bitterly.

“Who’s your friend, Libby?” asked the girl, tilting her head to the side.
“And why does he bring a suitcase?” asked Thomas, warily.

“He’s Bartholomew. The poor man is new to the city and has nowhere to go” she explained.

“I can give you the address to the nearest hotel” concluded Thomas, barely moved by the story.

“Thomas, he couldn’t go there because he hasn’t enough money!” reprimanded Libby.

“A motel, then”

“Thomas!”

“Listen, if I’m bothering, I can always…” started to say the priest, backing up.

“No, no, he’s just…” tried to excuse the girl.

“Libby, we don’t have enough room for another person” said Thomas, sternly.

“That’s nonsense” insisted the Mexican, starting to get mad. “I’ve seen more people on a… Um… Eh… En una patera! [On a dinghy]”

“He can try his luck on one, then” decided the man, walking in the dining room and holding his daughter’s hand so she went with him.

“Thomas!” gasped Libby, eyes wide, following them.

“Libby, we don’t have room and…” he stopped when he saw Bartholomew at the doorframe, watching their interaction. “Do you mind? I’m talking with her in private” he spat.

“Oh, sorry, as it was about me…” he excused.

“Leave!” he ordered, making him run to the door.

Libby talked again when the man was out of sight. “It’d be a couple of days”

“That suitcase doesn’t have the weight nor the size of a couple of days” he dismissed, indicating his daughter to get in the kitchen to grab her food.

“He doesn’t know anybody in here, Thomas, please” she begged, voice tiny.

“That’s not my problem, he was the one who decided to come to a city where he knew nobody”

“Maybe he didn’t have a choice!” argued Libby, getting angry once again. “I didn’t get to choose where to start either, and you helped me out!”

“You were different. I don’t know him”

“You didn’t know me either, I could’ve been a serial killer for all you knew!”

“The other day you cried like a Magdalene because Adams killed a bee”

“The poor one did nothing but fly!”

“I’m allergic!” Adams defended himself.

“You could’ve let it to me, you monster!” screamed Libby, hurt.
“Dedicate yourself to apiculture and leave me be, woman!” complained Adams, waving his hand in a dismissive way.

“Libby” called Thomas, calmly, returning her attention back to him. “I can’t have him here. I’m sorry”

“Just a couple of days, I’ll help him get a job in the church I attend” she promised, grabbing his hands in a begging manner. “Please, it’s not fair”

“We don’t have rooms” he continued, vacillating a bit.

“I can sleep on the couch, I don’t mind” said the priest.

Their attention turned to the front door, where Bartholomew was eavesdropping now, accompanied by Dolley and Madison.

Thomas half-closed his eyes. “What part of ‘private’ you don’t get?”

“Ttts, eeeeh” exclaimed Adams, sitting up. “No one is going to touch my couch” he warned.

“It’s not your couch, Adams. And if I say so, you’ll go back to sleep on the corner” lectured Thomas.

“So, he can stay?” asked Libby, happily. Without giving him time to retract, she hugged him.

“Thank you, I promise you I take responsibility for him!” She ran to the man and made him enter the house. “I’ll show you around!”

“Thank you, son” said the priest, smiling at Libby’s enthusiasm. “May God pay you”

“May God pay me because you won’t contribute with a sad penny, right?” snapped Thomas, ill-temperedly.

“Don’t start!” hissed Libby.

“Sweet Lord, good business, Thomas” laughed Dolley, whole-heartedly, being slightly pushed by her boyfriend.

“Weren’t you going out? Hurry, then” he urged, turning on his heels to have lunch with his daughter. “You don’t even get closer to him. And tell the same to your sister” he told her, to which Polly nodded, not minding much.

“You’ve just taken the only thing I had left away from me” proclaimed Adams, dramatically. “I will not forget this”

“Good for you” dismissed Thomas.
“What a show you have over there, Jemmy” commented Dolley, as they made their way down the road.

“I just hope things are calmed by the time I’m back”

“No, no, in that case, what will you record for me?”

Madison threw her a glare. “I will not record anything. I don’t want to have anything to do with that craziness”

“Pity, that seemed more entertaining than any film on the billboard” she pouted, earning an eye-roll from the man. She glued her shoes to the pavement once her sight caught something. “What’s this??”

She let go of her boyfriend’s arm and went to see the variety of boxes and things that occupied the garden by Thomas’ house. Dolley looked inside a few boxes, seeing games, books and clothes whose only owners could be children. Her curiosity was piqued by this and she grabbed one notebook with strangely too little pages for average. Opening it, she saw some pages had been torn out, but so meticulously that she barely noticed at first.

“Dolley” called Madison quietly, but she didn’t pay him much attention as she turned to see what else she could find there.

“Hello?” said another voice that finally made her look up. The woman that had talked to her finished to tie her low ponytail and threw her a kind smile. “Were you looking for something?”

“Hm… I was just looking” she admitted, now feeling a bit embarrassed. “What’s all this?”

“Some things my kids don’t want or don’t need anymore, or that my sisters and I are unable to keep using” she joked a bit at the end, earning a laugh from her. “Eliza” she introduced, shaking her hand.

“Dolley” she said, returned the gesture.

“Ah, I finally meet you!” she exclaimed, smiling wider. She looked at Madison, who stood awkwardly, waiting for the interaction to be over. “You’re a couple, right?”

“Yeah” she said, throwing a questioning look to her partner.

“Alexander’s wife” he replied.

“Ah… If you’re planning to sell all this, I know a second-hand store that…”

“Ah, no, no” she corrected, politely. “I work at a foster home and thought it’d be nice to bring some of these there and give them some use” she explained, looking at the inside of the boxes with tenderness. “But if you’re interested in anything, I don’t mind selling it for a flexible price”

“No, I was just curious” she replied, though not letting go of the notebook. “You surely are vocational”

Eliza blushed at the praise. “Well, I think if we all provide something, things would get easier” she elaborated.

“And are you going to take all this to where you work all by yourself?”
“I’ll go by car. And there I’ll be helped unpacking” she discarded her worry.

“Let us help” she decided, throwing the notebook back where she took it from and picking up the box herself.

“Ah, no, no, it’s not…” Eliza tried to dissuade.

“Let her” advised Madison. “You won’t convince her”

“I’m as stubborn as an old mule” she admitted with pride, smiling at her.

“Well, if you’re sure about it…” she doubted, going to open the car so the woman wouldn’t be like that much longer.

“This is still better than the billboard” joked Dolley, winking at her partner.

Madison smiled fondly at her as he got down to work, too. “I knew you’d say that”

Chapter End Notes

Barbara (the old lady) is an original character. Her name means 'outsider', as far as I know, in case you're interested.

*To earn your beans: Ganarse las habichuelas. Our version of 'to earn your keep, make a living'.

Sursum corda!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!