stay alive

by Sanna_Black_Slytherin

Summary

Alexander first realized that something was wrong when Thomas stopped mid-word.

or, the aftermath of the assassination.

(The final installment in the Royal Jamilton AU.)

Notes

Tags that were also considered:
#Angst And Sadness Abound
#Cause of Death: Hospital Research
#There Will Come a Day Where We Don't Hurt Our Characters
#But Today is Not That Day
#(tomorrow isn't looking so good either)

and

#I'm sorry

Coming up: In which Hamilton is bad at waiting, questions are answered, and cliffhangers are resolved (creating more cliffhangers in the process)

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

Alexander first realised that something was wrong when Thomas stopped mid-word. He couldn't pinpoint precisely what was happening, but there was a sinking feeling in his stomach that told him that it wouldn't—couldn't—end well. The feeling was only exacerbated by the way everyone else’s attention suddenly focused on the two of them, as if they were all in on some great secret only Alexander had not been privy to.

When asked afterwards, Alexander would say that he had suspected that something would happen, because the evening had been going far too smoothly, but the truth of the matter was that he had had no idea, not until Thomas began clawing at his throat.

That seemed to have gained everyone else’s attention. Everyone's heads turned in their direction, curious onlookers just itching for a spectacle. Alexander wanted to strangle them. Couldn't they see that something was wrong so very wrong wrong wrong?

Alexander tried to catch him, but his reaction was too slow by almost a second. When Thomas' body hit the floor, everyone sprang into action.

“Is there a doctor?” someone yelled—Alexander couldn't tell who. He didn't particularly care, either, as long as Thomas got help. He glanced around angrily. Why was nobody doing anything? Couldn't anyone see that Thomas—

Someone pushed their way through the crowd, falling to their knees next to Thomas’ unsettlingly prone form. Even amidst the chaos, Alexander recognized him as Edward Stevens, one of the court physicians, the other being an ancient man by the name of Robley Dunglison. “Your Highness,” Stevens said without looking up, “I'm going to need you to step away from the patient.”

The patient. Thomas was a patient now. Alexander's stomach churned unpleasantly.

He swallowed, watching as Stevens too Thomas’ pulse and frowned. “Sorry, no can do. He's my husband; I'm not abandoning him—”

“I'm not asking you to abandon Mr Jefferson,” Stevens snapped. “I'm asking you to give me some space to work. With every second that you spend arguing with me, my chances of saving his life are decreasing exponentially.”

Alexander closed his eyes, before nodding and taking a step back. Stevens was already doing… something to Thomas’ body, although Alexander couldn’t, for the life of him, understand what insight could be gained poking around Thomas’ frothing mouth. All poisons had similar effects when ingested, so what was the use? There was no doubt whatsoever in Alexander's mind that it was a poison they were dealing with. He wasn't an idiot, despite how Thomas liked to taunt him. Which brought his thoughts back to his husband's still form laying before him like some cheap remake of a Shakespearian tragedy and nope, he wasn't going to go down that particular train of thought.

Alexander startled as he felt someone's send wrap themselves around him, pulling him away from the scene with surprising strength. “We need to go,” Burr murmured will quietly into his ear.

“No, Burr!” Alexander screamed into his ear, unaware of the fact that he was drawing a lot of attention to the two of them. “Let me through! He’s my husband!”
“And there’s nothing you can do for him right now,” Burr’s voice was steady; calm. Alexander couldn’t imagine how he could be so blasé about the whole thing, the cold bastard. “You’re drawing attention to yourself, and that’s the last thing we need right now. This was clearly an assassination attempt on your life. Didn’t Thomas drink from your cup?” he asked rhetorically, already aware of what the answer was going to be.

Alexander froze as the implications of Burr’s words sunk in. Oh God. He had done this to Thomas. He was the one who was to blame. Thomas would still be healthy and breathing and alive if Alexander hadn’t insisted on this stupid wedding. Alexander turned away from Thomas, burrowing his head into Burr’s chest, feeling like he might cry at any moment. He needed some place safe, a place where he could fully process the events and his emotions and the fact that this was a nightmare and it was actually happening.

“The assassin might still be here,” Burr went on. “And then both you and Jefferson will end up dead.”

Alexander whipped around his head to glare at Burr. “Thomas isn't dead,” he hissed. “He's going to be just fine.” Even as he said those words, however, a sense of dread settled over him. Who was he trying to convince? Thomas wasn't going to be fine. Even in the best-case scenario, there would be extensive physical damage that he would have to deal with for a long time. In the worst-case scenario, Thomas would—

Well. There was no use contemplating that. Alexander would cross that bridge when he got to it.

He heard a sigh behind him, followed by a shift on posture. “Let’s go,” Burr repeated. He carefully guided Alexander through the crowd, keeping himself as a barrier between the prince and the ever-increasing crowd of spectators, and dammit, where was security when they were needed?

Just before he left, he met his father’s sharp eyes; they softened when landing on Alexander, becoming pitying, almost as though his father was trying to offer his condolences already. Alexander glanced away, tears forming in his eyes, which he abortively tried to wipe away. Fuck dad. Fuck this whole wedding. Fuck it all to hell. Why had it to have been Thomas, out of all people?

˚✧₊⁎

Alexander was pacing furiously around his office. He knew he was pacing, and was aware of much much it irritated Burr, though the man would never admit to it. Alexander couldn’t help but resent Burr for having pulled him out of the ballroom against his will, no matter how well-founded his reasons. He had torn him away from his place at Thomas’ side, the only place that mattered right now (ever, actually, he realized, and wasn’t it funny how these sorts of situations made one re-evaluate one's priorities?); the least he could do was bear the brunt of Alexander's anger.

He hadn’t noticed that he was biting his lip until Burr snapped at him to stop doing that before he would draw blood. He glanced down. Biting his lip was a nervous tick of his, one that Thomas seemed to find adorable. And he was back to Thomas. Fuck this.

The waiting was the worst; the not knowing how Thomas was doing, the not being allowed anywhere near him because his mere presence could endanger him even more than it already had (Alexander pretended that the reminder didn’t pack a staggering punch to his guts), the wait wait wait. He wasn’t bloody Burr—he didn’t like to wait, and he wasn’t good at it by any measure.

The helplessness of this situation was slowly suffocating him. He steadied himself against a table, hands pressing against the cool surface, and took several deep breaths. They didn't help as much as he had hoped they would.
It seemed like an indeterminable amount of time before the door swung open. Alexander twitched, his back snapping ramrod straight, while Burr didn't even blink.

Alexander crossed the room in two long strides. “What's going on?” he demanded before Patsy even had the time to open her mouth. “How is Thomas? Is—is he going to survive this?”

Patsy instinctively took a step back, raising her palms as if to defend herself from Alexander's ire. She composed herself, a stark contrast to the wild frenzy in Alexander's eyes. “They have taken him to the hospital.” She did not beat around the bush. “He’s in the ICU; they’re still flushing his digestive system with activated charcoal.”

Under normal circumstances, Alexander would question her on why activated charcoal could act as a suppressant to a poison that, to Alexander's not inconsiderable knowledge, lacked an antitoxin, but those were far from normal circumstances. “And?” he asked expectantly. “Is he going to be okay? What are his chances? Do they have an idea of what they’re dealing with? What kind of injuries are usually sustained through a poisoning? Can they give an estimate on—”

“Alexander, please let me get a word in edgewise,” Patsy snapped, effectively silencing her stepbrother.

Alexander crossed his arms. “Well?” he asked pointedly, a frown appearing on his face. “How is he? How is my husband?”

Patsy cleared her throat, but, when she tried to speak, no words came out. Alexander’s frown deepened. “The doctors said—” Patsy stumbled over her words. “Uh, they said that—”

“Yes?” Alexander prompted impatiently.

Patsy took a deep breath. “The doctors said that there might be substantial psychological damage.”

The pool of dread was turning into a well of terror. Alexander put a hand over his mouth, attempting to calm his increasingly erratic breathing because this was really not the time for a panic attack; dammit, he hated his messed-up brain sometimes. Why couldn’t it just work? “What are you saying?” Alexander finally asked, his words coming out harsher than intended.

Patsy looked down at the fluffy carpet, before abruptly looking up and meeting Alexander’s eyes. “He might not even remember anything,” she said bluntly. “He might wake up and not know who he is, or he might know who he is but not recognize us, or he might forget other things, or his thought process might become disrupted.” Patsy shrugged helplessly. “There’s really no way to know until—if he wakes up,” she added.

“Until,” Alexander corrected her.

Patsy shook her head. “No, Alexander, we’re looking at an ‘if’ scenario. They aren’t even sure he’ll survive the night, let alone the week; and if he, by some miracle, does, Doctor Dunglison predicts that we’re looking at a coma. Nobody survives a poisoning without any damage, and Thomas isn’t an exception.”

Alexander growled. He clenched his fists, just barely constraining himself from punching a nearby wall. He hadn’t felt this utterly and completely worthless in a very long time, not since he had watched from the sidelines as his little sister Frances withered away before his eyes despite every worldly means at their disposal to try and save her.

He met Patsy’s eyes, brimming with agony and rage and compassion, unrestrained compassion and sympathy and love, so like her mother’s. Suddenly, it felt as though a switch had been flipped within
his brain. He sagged against the desk, all of the righteous energy seeping out of him. It was useless anyway; Alexander couldn’t change anything. For all that he had all this power, he could never seem to make a change when it truly mattered. He didn’t feel at all like the crown prince he supposedly was.

His breath caught in his throat as his thoughts went back to Thomas, stark lighting shining down at him, lying deathly still in a hospital bed, a mockery of his former self.

“Can I see him?” he asked quietly.

If Patsy or Burr were startled by his sudden mood shift, neither commented on it.

“That’s not up to me,” Patsy said.

“Then who is it up to?” Alexander asked, even as his brain already provided the answer.

Patsy jerked her head in Burr’s direction. “Him. He’s your head of security.”

Alexander turned to Burr, eyes pleading. “Please, Aaron. I need to see him. The uncertainty is literally killing me,” he insisted.

“Your Highness,” Burr said in a tone that indicated that he was questioning Alexander's sanity, “with all due respect, there’s just been an assassination attempt on your life. I’m not about to let you wander off by yourself when you could still be in danger.”

“I’m always in danger,” Alexander retorted sharply.

“You need to stay here,” Burr shot back.

“No, the only place where I need to be is at my husband’s bedside,” Alexander snarled. He huffed. “Well, I don’t care about your opinions, non-existent as they are. I am going to pay my husband a visit, and I’d like to see you try to stop me.” His eyes were all but daring Burr to try. On some level, he supposed that he was blaming Burr for Thomas' condition. The man was supposed to keep them safe, for God’s sake, not let them slowly wither away from poison. Alexander would be lying if he said that he wasn’t trying to pick a fight with Burr. “You can either waste your energy on trying to hinder me from leaving—an enterprise done to failure, I can assure you—or you can accompany me and actually do your fucking job.”

Patsy's eyes darted between the two of them. “It’s your call,” she repeated aside to Burr, shrugging as if to recuse herself from taking responsibility for any consequences that might arise.

Burr sighed. “I’m probably going to regret this, but very well.”

Alexander’s eyes shone up with happiness, and it was all he could do to keep from hugging Burr. “Let’s go.”

Before allowing Alexander into the hospital, Burr ran a thorough check on the building itself, as well as its personnel, from every angle imaginable—not that Alexander had noticed, caught up as he had been in his own thoughts. Patsy was looking down at her phone, occasionally looking up to stare at Alexander, as if trying to glean some insight into his soul by staring at him for long enough.

Once inside, Alexander wasted no time on making small talk with the personnel. With three quick strides, he was at the reception desk. “Where is Thomas Jefferson?” he hissed. He could only
imagine what he looked like—dishevelled fiery hair sticking out in directions that probably defied the laws of physics, his suit rumpled from the constant pacing he had done, and a slightly deranged look in his eyes as he clenched his fingers into fists.

A frightened-looking young receptionist quickly rattled off the room number. By the time she realized that she wasn’t supposed to tell strangers confidential information, Alexander was already halfway to Thomas’ room, Burr alternating between trailing after him and surreptitiously running interference in front of him.

Patsy stopped by the receptionist’s desk, exchanging a commiserating look with the poor creature. “I apologize on Alexander’s behalf,” she said. “I know he can be a little… unsettling,” she said diplomatically.

“Who are you both?” the receptionist asked, frowning. “You can’t just *barge* into our hospital and demand to know where everybody is.”

“My name is Martha Custis,” Patsy introduced herself, “and that man was Alexander Hamilton.”

“The prince?” the receptionist blurted out, flabbergasted despite herself.

Patsy nodded, checking her watch absentmindedly. “Mr Jefferson is his husband,” she confirmed curtly.

“He was the one poisoned at their wedding, right?” the receptionist went on, heedless of Patsy’s growing impatience.

“Yes,” Patsy said. “Now, is there anything I need to fill out before I follow His Highness?” she asked pointedly, beginning to question whether Alexander’s method of taking the hospital by storm would not have been more effective, or at the very least more time efficient. Granted, the paperwork would have been a headache for the both of them, but she would not have had to speak with the woman in front of her, who was, to be entirely frank, an inconsiderate *idiot*.

The receptionist seemed to realize what she was doing. Her face flushed a deep crimson, and she became a flurry of motion, reaching for one paper after another. “Oh, sorry, ma’am! Here, just sign this—it’s a standard form for visitors, nothing to worry about, really, and if you could give Mr Hamilton—I mean His Highness—his form, that would be much appreciated,” she attempted a weak smile.

Patsy’s lips drew into a thin line, carefully not displaying any emotions. “I will,” she said coldly. “Which room is Mr Jefferson’s?”

“Room 1826,” the receptionist provided promptly.

Patsy nodded again before setting off to find the room, leaving behind one flustered adolescent.

Alexander wrenched open the door to Thomas’ room. He froze mid-step when he laid his eyes on Thomas.

He was so unnaturally still. It was unsettling—almost foreboding, though about what, Alexander couldn’t say.

He swallowed, looking away from Thomas before he would find himself unable to. He took a step back and turned around, running smack into Burr, who stiffened. Alexander let out an ‘Oomph!’ at
the collision, stumbling back. Burr automatically reached out to stop Alexander from falling, but Alexander recoiled from his touch. He just—he couldn’t. He couldn’t bear to have Burr reach out to him, not when he hadn’t reached out to Thomas to save his life. Burr let his hand fall away, though not before ascertaining that Alexander was no longer going to hurt himself by walking into other people or falling prey to the inevitable force that was gravity.

“Your Highn—” Burr began.

“Where can I find a doctor?” Alexander interrupted tersely.

Burr stared into Alexander’s eyes for another moment, seemingly searching for something, before his look abruptly shifted, his usual mask of indifference falling into place. “Follow me,” he said, his voice the very epitome of professionalism. He strode in front of Alexander in a direction only known to him. In the throes of his single-minded focus, Alexander hadn’t registered which way he had entered, and he wouldn’t have been able to find his way back if his life depended on it.

They came to a stop in front of a cluster of doctors. Burr cleared his throat. “Are any of you Doctor Hancock?”

There was a curious murmur, before one of the men stepped forward, his hands clasped behind his back, which made his unbuttoned lab coat look like a cape more than proper medical attire.

“I am George Hancock,” the man said, voice businesslike. “How may I help you, sir?”

“Are you the person in charge of Thomas Jefferson’s case?” Alexander asked bluntly before Burr had any chance to speak.

The doctor turned around. “Who are you?” he asked, a mask identical in place to Burr’s.

“I’m Thomas’ husband,” Alexander blurted out.

The doctor quirked an eyebrow. He excused himself from the group of doctors, leading Alexander and Burr away a short distance away, giving them the illusion of privacy. “That’s odd,” he commented. “There is nothing in Mr Jefferson’s file about any current marriage.”

“That’s because we got married today,” Alexander elaborated, already starting to lose his patience with this doctor.

“Do you have any proof, sir?” the doctor asked idly. “Because I don’t care if you’re the bloody king, I’m not going to let strangers invade my patients’ privacy.”

“No. I’m his son, Alexander,” Alexander snapped, his patience having run out. “And turn on the telly. There’s all the proof you’ll ever need. Thomas was poisoned at our wedding.”

The doctor’s eyes widened almost imperceptibly. Good. It was clear that he had had no idea just who his patient was when he accepted him into his care. A switch of doctors might be in order, actually.

“Your Highness.” He made a hasty half-bow, pausing awkwardly, probably wondering whether he hadn’t overstepped himself, and it was all Alexander could do to keep from scoffing mockingly, even as the majority of his brain was busy worrying about Thomas, thoughts racing past one another in an attempt to conjure worse and worse scenarios. Honestly, did everyone think that there was some secret intricate ritual that everyone born into nobility demanded of everyone else every time they met?

Based on the somewhat meagre testing population—consisting, so far, of all of three maids, five
teachers, one doctor, and one architect—it did seem so.

Alexander tapped his fingers against his hip in a show of impatience. “I want an update on his status. How is he? Do you know what poison had been used?”

“Yes, right.” The doctor cleared his throat. “Where did I—ah, yes.” He grabbed an innocuous-looking paper lying on the desk. He glanced at them for a second, before looking up at Alexander again. “What do you want to know?”

“What can you tell me about this?” Alexander gestured at Thomas’ prone form.

The doctor sighed. He shuffled his papers. Alexander gritted his teeth. Why was everyone set on stalling today, when all he wanted was some bloody news about husband’s life? Was that too fucking much to ask?

“I’m afraid that we do not have much information thus far,” the doctor eventually began. “I have already told Miss Custis that we cannot yet rule out any lasting physical or psychological damage, but it’s frankly impossible to make a more accurate guess than that based on so little evidence. The particulars vary a great deal on a case-to-case basis.”

Unseen, Patsy slipped into the room, shutting the door behind her silently. Burr glanced at her, his instincts on overdrive, then turned to study the people milling around the corridor, having assessed the doctor as non-threatening.

“In general, then,” Alexander pressed. “Are there any tendencies in these sorts of… cases?” he stumbled on the last word. It felt bitter on his tongue.

The doctor held up one of his palms defensively. “Again, Your Highness, I can’t extrapolate anything of substance from the meagre data that we have. It could be anything, in terms of physical damage, from occasional seizures or a temporary loss of movement, to a organ failure, or a partial or total permanent paralysis. Psychologically speaking, the patient could recover fully healthy, but that is, frankly, unlikely, if you’ll allow me to be so blunt. The more probable possibility is that there will be damage of some sort.”

Alexander swallowed, feeling his throat clam up. “What sort of damage are we talking about?” he managed.

The doctor frowned in irritation. “Once again, I dare not make any estimations, because they would be based on artificial presumptions.”

Alexander crossed his arms angrily. “Whatever it is you’re thinking, I can handle it.” Why couldn’t the doctor simply cave and tell him what Alexander needed to expect? Was it so bloody hard?

The doctor glanced at Thomas briefly, before meeting Alexander’s eyes. “I can’t tell you exactly,” he added in a warning tone. “It can be anything from selective memory loss or the loss of particular skills, whether physical or mental, to a slower thought process, or even extensive amnesia. There’s no way to tell until the patient is awake.”

Alexander stilled. A slower thought process. Amnesia. These things would break them. Thomas’ brain was one of the things Alexander adored and admired about Thomas; he would not allow it to go to waste without a fight. It couldn’t go to waste.

“That is, if he survives,” the doctor added in a warning tone. “We have pinpointed the exact poison that Mr Jefferson had consumed.”
“That’s good news,” Alexander said in relief. If they knew what kind of poison it had been, there was a high chance of finding a cure. Involuntarily, his lips curled up into a faint smile. Thomas would make a full recovery—not that he had doubted it for a second. “Right?”

The doctor shook his head. “I would not be so hasty in my judgement,” he advised. “I have not yet told you the poison used.”

Alexander did not like the tone of his voice. “What is it?” Dread crept up into his voice.

“Ricin,” the doctor intoned, his voice heavy.

Alexander blinked. He vaguely recognized the name, but was unsure of whether that was good or bad. “So?”

“At this time, there is no cure for ricin,” the doctor said. “Simply put, nobody has as of yet been able to construct an antitoxin that successfully binds to ricin’s binding site, changing its shape and causing it to be ineffective.”

Alexander’s stomach did a double flip.

*There is no cure for ricin.* The words reverberated in his head, a mockery of an echo.

Well, *fuck.*

“I am sorry to inform you, Your Highness,” the doctor went on, “but ricin poisoning has a high mortality rate. You need to be prepared for the worst.”

Alexander took a deep breath, then let it out. It was fine, he told himself. Thomas was going to be fine. He was the strongest person Alexander knew; he would survive this.

“Anything can happen,” the doctor concluded blithely. “Poisons are predictably unpredictable this way.”

_Don’t expect for him to be the same person you knew_, Alexander read between the lines. _He might not even remember you._ And wasn’t *that* another punch to the guts—living in the knowledge that even as his husband, his sworn other half, was lying in a hospital bed, having drunk a poison intended for Alexander, and was not expected to survive (Alexander wasn’t stupid; he knew the reason for why the doctor kept saying ‘if’ instead of ‘until’), if he did, by some miracle, survive, he might not even recognize Alexander.

Alexander smothered the anxiety that threatened to overwhelm him. He couldn’t afford to lose control, not now when Thomas needed him the most.

_Actually_, his brain reminded him crudely, _Thomas doesn’t need you. He’d be much better off without you._

*Go to hell,* Alexander snapped, fully aware of the fact that he was arguing with himself, and losing spectacularly, to boot. *You’re a freak of nature; you don’t get to speak._

“What are you doing to help him?” Alexander pressed.

The doctor straightened his back. “First aid procedure is largely based on flushing the victim’s stomach with activated charcoal, since the ricin has been very recently ingested. It creates a temporary bond with a receptor at adenine’s binding site, thereby preventing the ricin molecules from binding to an active site in adenine and causing denaturation, which would, in turn, trigger cell death.
“As for long term—assuming that Mr Jefferson lives that long—we will, depending on how he reacts to the first treatment, be giving him the appropriate medicine,” the doctor said diplomatically, his words so vague that Alexander was tempted to suggest a change of career for him. He was clearly wasted on medicine.

“Such as…?” Alexander prompted pointedly.

The doctor cleared his throat. “Assuming that Mr Jefferson does not wake up in the interim, intravenous fluids are not out of the question.”

Alexander took a step towards the doctor, who reflectively backed away. Alexander’s eyes were glinting with fury bordering on madness. “You know that that’s not what—”

Patsy stepped closer, putting a hand on Alexander’s shoulder, a warning sign. It grounded him, and he reigned in his anger. As much as he hated to admit it, Thomas’ condition hadn’t been the doctor’s fault; he was simply doing his job, telling it as it was, and didn’t Alexander always encourage people to tell the truth, no matter what? Especially Thomas—

“Since there is no antitoxin specifically against ricin, he best we can do is hope that the dose Mr Jefferson ingested can be in part countered by the activated charcoal. Statistically speaking, in a case of ricin poisoning,” the doctor went on impassively, “death comes between thirty-six and seventy-two hours after ingesting ricin. Within several days, the patient’s liver, spleen and kidneys stop working, and they die.”

Alexander had never hated anything as much as he despised the doctor’s neutral voice in that moment.

“Do we know when he’ll wake up?” Patsy asked in Alexander’s stead, her hand still on his shoulder.

The doctor sighed. “If the person affected is still alive after 5 days, it’s highly likely they’ll recover from the poisoning. It usually serves as a good indication of whether the patient will recover, but it is by no means a guarantee,” he warned.

“So if he survives until—“Alexander did a quick count“—Wednesday, he'll be fine?” Alexander couldn't quell the hopefulness in his voice.

The doctor shook his head. “Not necessarily, Your Highness. There are also prefer aspects to take into account.” The doctor paused. “I am not in the habit of outright lying to my patients’ relatives. I would not like for you to get your hopes up, Your Highness. I know that it’s easier said than done, but I would caution your family against too putting much faith in his recovery. Ricin cases are infamous for their irregularity.”

Alexander didn't have any good response to that. What could he say? That he wouldn't hope that Thomas would recover? What kind of husband would that make him?

“Does Mr Jefferson have any biological relatives that should be informed of his condition?” the doctor asked matter-of-factly.

“No,” Alexander replied distractedly. “None that matter, at any rate. They disowned him when they found out he was dating me though.” At his words, Burr shot Alexander a discreet look, as if trying to warn him against revealing too much. “There's only his best friend, but he already knows; he was at our wedding.”

Doctor Hancock nodded in consideration. He scribbled something Alexander couldn’t read down in his papers.
“Unless you have other questions, Your Highness, I have other patients to attend to,” the doctor said offhandedly, his mind already miles away from Alexander.

Alexander waved a hand dismissively. “No, there’s nothing. I’ll just… stay here,” he said awkwardly, glancing at Thomas.

The doctor left with another hasty bow, leaving Alexander alone with Burr. Alexander felt the eyes of the remaining doctors on him. He couldn’t meet their eyes, instead swirling on the spot and all but running back to the patient room as fast as he could without being obvious about it.

Burr held the door open for Alexander. It closed behind him with a silent thud. Alexander leaned against a nearby wall, suddenly feeling like he couldn’t breathe. He scrunched his eyes, drawing in several sharp breaths in quick succession but was still getting no oxygen. Why was he getting no oxygen? Why couldn’t he fucking breathe?

He felt a hand press down on his shoulder. “Alexander, breathe,” said a calm voice. Alexander heard the words as though through a fog, oddly muffled. Burr. Even through his anger, he took comfort in the familiarity that Burr’s presence provided. “Listen to my voice. Breathe in. One, two, three. Breathe out. Four, five, six.”

Alexander focused on the voice, using it to ground himself in reality. He let out a shaky breath, curling in on himself, clutching his forearms protectively. He felt awkward arms wrap themselves around his shoulder, and buried his face into Burr’s neck.

The only sounds that broke the silence were his sharp breaths and the beepings from the machines Thomas was connected to. The sounds were maddening on a level Alexander hadn’t been able to imagine, but the only thing worse was the permeating silence.

He hadn’t noticed that he had crumbled to the floor until he opened his eyes, taking in the position he and Burr had found themselves in—him slumped against the wall, Burr’s arms around him like a clingy octopus, his body not unlike a physical shield around Alexander. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled into Burr’s collar.

Burr patted his hair awkwardly. “It’s okay,” he offered. He carefully undid Alexander’s messy ponytail—or what was left of it, at any rate. Alexander couldn’t imagine that there had been a lot of it to salvage.

“No, it’s not. My husband is lying over there on a bed on the brink of death, and here I am, breaking down like a child. How fucking pathetic is that?” he spat.

“It’s not pathetic,” Burr protested immediately. Alexander would have been more convinced if Burr hadn’t sounded so incredibly unsure of himself.

“Not helping, Aaron.”

Burr’s shoulder sagged. “I don’t know what to tell you,” he said honestly, at a loss for words.

“Then talk less,” Alexander told him. “Smile more, Burr.”

Slowly, he disentangled himself from Burr’s arms. He stood up, dusting off his rumpled suit. Taking a deep breath, he turned around, his eyes falling on Thomas’ still form. The Virginian looked unimaginably frail, dark skin a stark contrast against the white of the hospital sheets. He had a tube leading down to his throat, helping him breathe. He needed a fucking tube just so that he could breathe. There were also numerous smaller tubes leading to various parts of his body, though most of them were centered on his arms. Thomas needed intravenous fluids just to be able to survive. He
needed fucking machines to sustain his existence. Alexander’s mind conjured up an image of one of these incessantly beeping machines malfunctioning. Thomas would be dead.

And Alexander would have no one to blame but himself.

The quiet whoosh of an opening door was the only thing that indicated the arrival of a new guest. Alexander didn’t look up, and he did not have to—Angelica Schuyler had a very distinct way of walking which made her footsteps oh-so-easy to recognize. They were unique, not unlike the rest of her.

Patsy had returned to Buckingham an indeterminate time ago—Alexander could not be bothered to remember exactly when—and Burr had decided that his skillset could be utilized just as well standing guard outside of the, apart for Alexander and his unconscious husband, empty hospital room. Alexander was grateful for the privacy Burr gave him.

(On the other hand, his traitorous brain whispered, if he had just done his goddamn job, he would not have needed to give Alexander and Thomas privacy in a hospital room.)

Clearly, Burr had deemed Angelica safe enough to allow in Alexander’s presence without his relentless surveillance. Alexander wondered how close a call it had been. His lips twisted into an acerbic smile. His expression was luckily obscured by the hair that he hadn’t bothered to put up after his ponytail had met a slow death at Burr’s hands.

Angelica coughed politely in order to alert Alexander to her presence. Alexander snorted, smothering a snarl that threatened to erupt from his throat. “I know you’re here, Angelica. I could hear you. I’m not completely deaf yet, you know,” he deadpanned.

He heard a sigh behind him. “I’m sorry for your loss,” Angelica offered eventually. She had meant in consolingly, but Alexander could not see how her words could be taken as anything but condescending.

Angelica seemed taken aback by his crude bluntness, bordering on savage. To her credit, she stood her ground, clasping her hands behind her back. “It’s not a question of whether he’s strong enough; it’s a question of how much ricin he consumed. Not even Chuck Norris could survive ricin poisoning if he ate a sufficiently-large dose.”

Alexander huffed. The action made a drop of snot dangle dangerously on his nose. He wiped it away on the cuff of his suit jacket, foregoing the handkerchief he was carrying with him. The suit was headed straight for disposal anyway, with what it had undergone, so why not take advantage of perfectly good fabric? Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Angelica grimace in disgust at his movement. “It’s a good thing, then, that Thomas is more resilient than Chuck Norris,” he drawled patronizingly.

Angelica sighed. She opened her mouth as if to argue, then thought better of it. Her lips pursed into a thin line. She eyed the chair on the other side of Thomas’ bed before changing her mind. “Have you eaten anything since breakfast?” Angelica changed the subject.

Alexander snorted, not deigning to reply. His last meal had been the breakfast he had hurriedly eaten
at the library. After that, there had been a rush to get everything ready, and there was one thing after another to be fixed or approved or tended to—always something that had needed his attention. He had hoped that he would get a chance to eat at the reception, but he was all too aware of how that had turned out.

Alexander’s silence spoke volumes.

Angelica sighed. Her disapproval was all but oozing out of her. A small part of Alexander’s mind could not help but be impressed at how much Angelica was able to convey through her tone alone. “Hamilton, you need to eat. We can’t have you falling apart as well—especially not now, not when you are so desperately needed to provide a strong front in front of the public.”

Alexander laughed bitterly. “Of course it was going to come back to PR.” He deliberately ignored the fact that, on a good day, he very much enjoyed working with the public relations department, furthering the public’s trust in the monarchy and in him in particular. That seemed to pale, somehow, when compared to the man lying on the bed next to Alexander.

One of Alexander’s hands clutched Thomas’ hand, fingers intertwining. He squeezed his hand, suppressing a shiver at how cold Thomas’ hands already felt. Was it an ominous sign, Alexander could not help but wonder, an omen of things to come, maybe?

No, he dismissed the idea. Of course not. He might believe in a higher power, but such blatant embodiments of Providence were simply not possible. Besides, the future was not set in stone. He was in control of his actions, and he was fully capable of changing his future. His future, as well as that of his nearest kin, he was acutely reminded when he glanced down at Thomas.

“We need to make a public statement,” Angelica said matter of factly.

Alexander’s eyes snapped up to meet hers. “I’m not in the fucking mood,” he barked.

“And you aren’t going to be for a long time,” Angelica parried calmly, “but a statement condemning this needs to be made. By you,” she emphasized, as if that hadn’t been clear enough from her words.

The growl that came from Alexander’s throat was positively savage. “Isn’t it clear enough already that I condemn a bloody assassination attempt on my husband’s life?!”

“I’m not the one you need to say this to. The nation is.”

“Fuck the nation,” Alexander said, and, for the first time in his life, realized that he had meant every word. In that moment, he didn’t care what happened to the country, as long as Thomas would be okay. Objectively, he was aware of the fact that it wasn’t a healthy attitude for any person, especially a leader, and, had he not been so absorbed in Thomas’ well-being, he would have spent a good portion of an hour reflecting on the choices he had made that led to this monumental change in his personality and the things he attached the most value to, but, as it was, his mindset was far from optimal for philosophical musings.

It was terrifying, in the distant sort of way, how far he had strayed from the person he used to be. How much Thomas had changed him in the short time they have known each other.

Angelica crossed her arms; the paper in her hand crinkled. Alexander didn’t pay either any heed, glancing back down at Thomas’ motionless figure.

His heart broke a little every time he looked at Thomas. Closing his eyes didn’t help; he had the image seared into his mind. It appeared in his thoughts and behind his eyelids, never leaving him. Alexander’s stomach churned just from thinking about it.
He raked a hand through Thomas’ fluffy hair, currently tied up over his head. Alexander couldn’t help but be grateful that they had not shaved his head, at least. It seemed like yet another part of Thomas he could have lost. It was trivial, he admitted, but he felt as though he was losing more of what made Thomas Thomas with every second that he wasn’t waking up.

Sighing, Alexander brushed aside the stray locks from Thomas’ forehead, the movement mirroring one that he had felt Thomas do a thousand times, before reaching for a wet wipe and setting about cleaning Thomas’ eyes. This way, at least, he didn’t feel utterly useless.

“Alexander?” Angelica asked carefully. “Are you—?”

“I’m going to give that speech,” Alexander said, more out of a desire to get Angelica out of the room than because he genuinely wanted to expose himself to the public, lifting his innermost private emotions up for anyone to see. What was there to condemn that his actions haven’t already done? “Could you give me a little space?” he said. It came out harsher than he had intended.

Angelica stilled, detecting something in Alexander’s voice that he hadn’t planned for her to. Whatever it was, she nodded sharply, quickly gathering her things and leaving Alexander alone with Thomas. Burr, his faithful watchdog, was still standing guard outside.

Alexander stared down Thomas’ face with immense concentration, as if he could save Thomas simply by looking at him intensely enough. “Please, Thomas,” Alexander whispered desperately, “just wake up, you asshole. That’s literally all I’m asking of you. You deserve so much better than”—his voice hitched on the word—“than being confined to this bed by something so barbarous,” he spat. “I’d give anything for you to wake up.”

Alexander hadn’t noticed when he had fallen asleep. He was startled awake by a door opening to reveal a harried-looking James Madison, his face pale and drained of any vibrancy. His eyes were bloodshot—not unlike Alexander’s own, if he had bothered to look at himself in a mirror.

“What’s—” Alexander began drowsily, silently cursing himself for his physiological need of sleep. His fingers curled even tighter around Thomas’.

“How is he?” James cut him off brusquely, not beating around the bush.

Alexander drew in a sharp breath. He didn’t know how to tell the senator that his best friend was tip-toeing the thin line between life and death, all because of Alexander.

“Answer me,” James demanded, his eyes flashing threateningly.

Alexander didn’t speak. He glanced down at the covers he was unconsciously clutching with his left hand.

“I’m not fragile. Tell me,” James repeated. He took another step towards Thomas, then stopped, hesitant. It seemed that, with every step he took, the sight before him became more real.

“Fine.” Alexander would have exploded, but he could not muster enough energy to feel properly outraged. An all-too-familiar feeling of emptiness washed over him. Empty was a nice change from the clusterfuck of hopelessnessanguishragefurydespair that had raged inside him for the past however many hours. It was beginning to tear him apart. “Don’t say I hadn’t warned you. It was ricin. There’s no cure for it.” He paused for a second to let that sink in before continuing. “They don’t know what’s going to happen, or if he’s even going to make it.” Alexander’s voice broke on the last word. He swallowed. “They said that if he survives the first five days, there’s a high
chance that he’ll recover, but there’s a myriad of things that could go wrong. They don’t even know what state he’ll be in if—no, when,” he said insistently, emphasizing the last word, “he wakes up. He might not even remember who he is. Remember any of this. Us. You. Me. His past.” He wiped away the tear that involuntarily ran down his cheek. His sniff echoed like the resounding crack of a gun in the silent room. “Fuck. It’s all my fault.”

James did not reply. When Alexander chanced a look up at him, he saw nothing but devastation and resigned acceptance in his eyes. Alexander quickly looked away. It would have been easier to deal with if James had been angry at Alexander, if he had blamed Alexander for what had happened—God knew that Alexander already did that plenty. Resignation, however, he did not know what to do with.

James lifted up his hand as if trying to reach out for Thomas, but halted mid-movement. Alexander could hear James’ elevated heart rate even from across the room. Unwittingly, James took a step back, stumbling, as if physically struck—whether by the news or by whatever realization he must have have gotten, Alexander could not tell. James let his arm fall back down to his side, an action that could only be described as apathetic. Alexander empathized with James. He was envious of Thomas, in a way. His condition affected everyone but him. He certainly wasn’t the one going through emotions like sifting through a pile of socks, trying to find one that matched, or the one who couldn’t even fucking function as a human being. Everyone but him was grieving.

James took the chair Angelica had been eyeing earlier. He reached for Thomas’ other hand, his own trembling ever-so-slightly. They sank into an uncomfortable silence, broken only by the sounds coming from Thomas’ machine.

for all that all three were living, the room felt like a funeral home.

˚✧₊⁎

At some point—Alexander was clearly losing his grip on reality if he couldn’t even keep track of something as banal as time, but somehow, he couldn’t bring himself to care—James had left, and someone brought Alexander a change of things, his laptop, his notebook, and a set of quills in a conspicuous attempt to distract him from staring at his husband and worrying over things he no longer had any control over. Under any other circumstances, it would have been effective, too, and Alexander had no doubt that he would eventually pour his heart and soul into his work because he had enough clarity of mind to recognize that he was not doing anything useful while holding vigil at Thomas’ bedside, but at the moment, he could not bear to tear himself away from him. He felt as though it would be a betrayal to Thomas’ memory to try and take his mind off his suffering. Thomas would probably not have wanted him to waste away alongside him, but he would never know now, would he? Because Thomas couldn’t have an opinion right now, and there was a chance that he never would again.

Damn it all to hell.

There was a bottle of pills resting on Thomas’ table. It was medicine, but not for Thomas—for Alexander. Alexander scoffed. As if he was going to take them. His meds had never helped, and it was about time he admitted that fact out loud.

“Alexander? Son?” said a voice from the doorway. Alexander tilted his head slightly, taking in the sight of his father standing awkwardly in the doorway, looking distinctly out of place in such a clinical environment.

“Hello, father,” Alexander said dully.
His dad frowned, and not without just cause, either. Alexander only called George ‘father’ under the most extreme of moods. He retrieved the chair from the other side of the bed, drawing it up to Alexander’s side. “Alexander, I offer my sincere condolences for what you’re going through. I can’t imagine what it—”

“You’re right; you can’t.” Alexander snapped. “Mum died quickly. You didn’t have to sit by her side and watch her wither away to a grey shell of what she used to be, and know that you are powerless to stop it. You hardly even knew her! You remarried literally three years after her death! What does that say about you?

“And as for your fucking ‘condolences’,” Alexander imitated George’s voice, “I’m not the one you need to offer them to; Thomas is the one lying in a bloody hospital room.” He was aware that he was lashing out at the wrong person, but, as security has proven exceptionally incompetent at discovering which of their wedding guests poisoned the fucking groom, George was the closest to ‘responsible’ he could currently find—apart from Burr, but Burr had already watched one of his breakdowns, and Alexander wasn’t about to repeat that particular spectacle.

“Language, Alexander,” George chided half-heartedly.

Alexander snorted. “Is that the only thing you have to say? That my language sucks? Well, newsflash: I don’t give a flying shit’s fuck about language! I want my husband back. I want him to recover, and to be safe and sound, and not to have to live the rest of his life in fear of another assassination just because he happened to marry one of the most controversial public figures in modern history. That’s what matters. Not my language.”

George did not deign that with a reply. He shot an inquisitive look at the full bottle of pills. “Are you taking your meds?” he asked pointedly. Alexander hesitated. That was all the answer his father needed. “Alexander!” he said in exasperation and no small amount of anger. “You need to take them. They’re good for you; you know that. Stop acting like a child.” God, it felt like he was a toddler, about to be scolded by George for stealing his first edition of Principia Mathematica.

“I’m not a child. Stop treating me like I am,” Alexander hissed. “I’m not taking them because they don’t work.”

“I am going to stop treating you like a child when you stop acting like one,” George exploded. “Maybe if you’d give them a chance, you’d see that they do work! You can’t judge a bottle by a one-time dosage of one pill. That’s not how it works. These things help you in the long term, but you have to give it a little time.”

By the time he finished his speech, they were both out of air, their breaths coming in sharp, laborious puffs. Alexander glared at his father. “Are you done?”

George schooled his features into a neutral expression before he continued. “As a matter of fact, I had initially come here with the intention of seeing how you were handling yourself. Angelica assured me that, at least physically, you were fine, but I know you. It seems that I was right to worry.” His tone was bordering on rebuking. “When was the last time you ate?”

Alexander groaned. He rubbed his temples in an attempt to stave off the headache he could feel was coming on. “Don’t begin,” he said coldly. “I got enough of that from Angelica.”

“She has a point. You need to eat, or you’re going to end up like Thomas, and you can’t afford that right now.”

“Well, have you considered that I might want that? That it’s my choice to make?” Alexander
snapped.

George’s movements stilled. “Answer me honestly, Alexander,” he said with surprising heat, “are you planning to starve yourself?”

“No!” Alexander replied immediately. “But if I had, it’s my own choice to make.”

“It’s not. Your life is not your own. You have no right to end it.”

“So what?” Alexander laughed hollowly. “Do I have to ask for a fucking suicide permit now?”

“No. You don’t commit suicide, period,” George snapped. Lightning quick, so fast that Alexander hadn’t even registered his movement until after it was done, he wrapped his fingers around Alexander’s wrist in a tight embrace. “Alex, please promise me something—if you begin considering suicide as a way out, talk to me. Or to Martha, or Lafayette, or even Burr. Talk to someone. I can’t bear to lose you. I don’t think you understand how dear you are to me.” There were unshed tears glistening in George’s eyes.

Alexander averted his eyes from the sight, not able to look his father in the eye. “Sure. I mean, of course.” He wasn’t suicidal. It just wasn’t the worst way to end a problem, all things considered.

George studied Alexander’s downturned eyes, seemingly searching for something. He leaned back with a sigh. Alexander didn’t know if he had found it, as his face didn’t change a muscle even as he stood up, dusting off imaginary speckles from his impeccable suit. George was a very private person, sometimes coming off as aloof or detached, when he was in reality simply an introvert to the nth degree. “In that case, I have matters to attend to at the palace,” he said formally. “Oh, and Alexander?” he said in a sort of farewell. “Angelica also wanted me to remind you that you promised to make a statement about this,” he waved a hand, gesturing at Thomas.

Alexander didn’t bother stifling a groan. “Tell her I’m busy.”

George pointedly raised an eyebrow. “With keeping vigil over your comatose husband?”

“He’s not comatose,” Alexander retorted weakly. “He’s—” he grasped for words, only to find that they simply weren’t there.

George did not reply, but his expression said enough.

“Fine,” Alexander snapped. “When do you—” He looked down at Thomas, running his fingers through his curly hair.

“Tomorrow, at two in the afternoon,” George recited. He looked almost relieved to have relayed Angelica’s orders, reminding Alexander none-so-gently about the force of nature that was Angelica Schuyler.

George cleared his throat. He opened his mouth, as if to speak, then closed it again. He squared his shoulders. “I need to leave,” he said abruptly.

Alexander watched his father leave with unfocused eyes, his brain barely registering the departure. His thoughts were returning to the man next to him.

*Thomas, just—*

*Just stay alive. That would be enough.*
Thomas,

How do I even begin to describe the fuck-up that was supposed to be our wedding? I hardly think that I can find the right words to sufficiently express how much I regret it—not marrying you, never marrying you, but putting you in a position where you were so exposed to danger. You took the proverbial bullet that had been meant for me.

I don’t know whether you will forgive me; part of me hopes that you don’t. God knows that I haven’t forgiven myself, and I don’t think that I ever will.

The doctors said that there’s a high chance that you won’t survive. Well, they didn’t say it, but I could see it in their eyes. I hate weddings. Specifically, I hate our wedding. (Is that weird? I think it’s weird.)

What am I supposed to do?

Ever yours,

Alexander

The evening shift did its best to convince him to leave for the day, citing opening hours, patient privacy, and ‘the risks to Alexander's health’. Alexander laughed in their faces. They would have had better luck winning a game of poker against the devil than convincing Alexander to leave Thomas’ bedside.

(He derived no small amount of enjoyment from pulling the ‘future king of the British Commonwealth’ card, for all that he knew that Thomas would have been disgusted at such a blatant display of aristocratic privilege. Never let it be said that Alexander Hamilton wasn’t vindictive.)

The hospital staff left him alone after that.

James returned the next day, and the day after, and the day after that. His visits were as filled with silence as Alexander’s lonely days at Thomas’ bedside.

The crack in Alexander’s heart widened with every update he received each day. The news wasn’t heartening. Thomas’ condition was deteriorating, and deteriorating rapidly. During the second night, his body temperature rose quickly, and by morning, he had a spiking fever; Alexander could see in the doctors’ and nurses’ eyes that their mental estimate of Thomas’ chances of survival were dropping by the minute.

He tried to distract himself by tending to Thomas—wiping away the sweat, cleaning his eyes, keeping his hair from falling into decrepitude and disarray, shifting his pillows every so often to make him more comfortable. He was fairly certain that, by the end of Thomas’ hospitalization, he would know Thomas’ body better than he knew his own.

Eventually, urged on the restless energy that had been gradually building up inside of him, Alexander shifted his attention to a more productive endeavour: he was dead set on discovering who
was responsible for depriving his husband of a good chunk of his life. He wanted *revenge*, for both himself and for Thomas. A small part of his brain told him that Thomas wouldn’t have wanted senseless vengeance; the larger part laughed derisively and pointed out that Thomas could be a downright petty asshole when he wanted to be. He had sought revenge after Alexander had replaced his lavender shampoo (“A felony the likes of which have never been seen in the history of viscous liquids,” Alexander had said) with pineapple (“A crime against humanity,” Thomas had in turn insisted). There was no way he wouldn’t have been pissed about being hospitalized by some sullen arse.

He had the first outlines of a draft sorting the guest list into harmless, questionable, and heavily suspicious. He was remembering every conversation he had had, every pleasantries he had exchanged with people he would normally not give the time of the day to, every glance he had noticed, every whisper he overheard. His brain was running on overdrive as it was analyzing it, going over every detail, picking apart every element and every peculiarity, however small, jumping from one idea to the other at a speed that left most people gaping with awe.

Ink was beginning to stain his hands. He didn’t notice, didn’t care. All that mattered was finishing the list. It was the *only* thing that mattered, really.

Alexander gripped his pen tighter, his fingers deftly making loops and hoops and lines, quickly filling up the page, then another, and another. His writing sped up as he worked, the words coming to him and threading together seemingly seamlessly into lengthy paragraphs, as stunning with their insight as they were eloquent. He was trying to keep up with his thoughts, which had a tendency to run ahead of him. It was a futile exercise, but he couldn’t *not* try.

He needed to write; he needed to make his voice heard—to express his ideas, formulate them into words and write them down before he couldn’t, because life was too short to keep silent. He only had one chance, one shot; he wasn’t going to throw it away for the sake of appeasing people of questionable consequence he had never met and frankly didn't give a shit about. What if he didn't have the time to express all of his ideas? What if they went to waste? What if all of him would be forgotten? What would be his legacy then? What will the posterity think of Alexander Hamilton?

He couldn't shake off the feeling that his time was running out, like sand trickling through his fingers. He was trying to keep up with it, but it was as though even his own mind was forsaking him, frustrated with the way its physical counterpart was limiting its potential.

He hadn't realized how frantically he had been writing until the pen in his hand broke in half with a loud snap, spilling ink all over his fingers. He glared at his stained fingers, feeling oddly as though they had betrayed him.

Burr, his timing impeccable, peered into the room. He blinked. “What are you—”

“I’m compiling a list,” Alexander cut him off curtly.

“Of…?” Burr trailed off suggestively.

“Of every guest at the wedding. I’m trying to create a list of most likely suspects, based in large part on their age, gender, race, origins, political leanings, and personal paradigms. Which I wouldn’t even have had to do if security had done its *damn job,*” Alexander’s voice was infused with enough venom to make the immovable Burr shudder.

Burr tilted his head. He threw a quick look behind him before turning his attention back to Alexander. “You *are* aware, I hope, that the guests were not the only people attending the wedding, Your Highness,” His sentence had a lilt at the end, bordering between question and statement.
Alexander threw up his arms in irritation. “Excellent, simply marvellous!” he said, meaning anything but. “Let me just add every staffer we are currently employing—oh wait, I can’t, because even I can’t work my way through two thousand people I have no knowledge about nor personal experience with whatsoever.”

Burr stood his ground. “I did not say that it would be easy,” he replied. “I am simply pointing out that your list will be incomplete so long as you exclude half of the suspects.” He was silent for a moment, letting Alexander stew in the new knowledge. “I do, however, have access to a list detailing who worked that evening,” he continued neutrally. “Believe me, Your Highness, we are already working this angle, among others. Let us do our jobs,” he said placatingly.

“Well, you’re not particularly good at it, are you?” Alexander snapped, premeditated malice permeating his words. “Pardon me if I want someone competent searching for Thomas’ would-be killer.”

Alexander had not truly thought his words through before he had spoken them aloud, but, as he watched Burr's face shift rapidly through a myriad of emotions before finally settling on carefully crafted indifference, he found that he didn't regret them.

Burr’s face closed off at Alexander’s words, becoming as blank as Alexander had ever seen it. He inclined his head. “Your wish is my command, Your Highness,” he said blandly.

Alexander pretended that he didn’t see the hurt Burr had almost managed to conceal. The part of him that blamed Burr for his inability to save Thomas snickered in delight; the rest of him stayed oddly silent.

Thomas,

I have begun compiling a list of who could have done it. I will make them pay for what they have done to you, what they have deprived us of. Burr tried to butt in, and I may or may not have been a little harsh with him. I think that I hurt him, but I don’t care. Does that make me a bad person?

Please, just wake up.

Ever yours,

Alexander

It has been five days since their wedding—since the day that would have been the happiest in Alexander's life turned into the stuff of nightmares.

The good news was that Thomas was still alive.

The bad news was that he had slipped into a coma, and the medical staff neither could nor dared to take him out of it. On top of that, his fever still hasn’t broken. Doctor Hancock said that they were keeping him in the ICU until further notice. Alexander couldn’t help but think that ‘until further notice’ was medical slang for ‘prior to demise’. It wasn’t exactly encouraging.
Thomas,

You made it through the week.

Hancock—the doctor in charge of your case—says that the likelihood of recovery increases after that. I hope that you wake up soon, because I have slept maybe a total of five hours since you were admitted, because of you, you utter twat, and I think I’m beginning to hallucinate stuff.

Your fever hasn’t broken yet. You have always been one for dramatics, haven’t you, Jefferson? Always so willing to demonstrate that you’re a little bit Extra. Well, you can stop now. We are all aware of how extraordinary you are; you don’t need to set a new record for lengthiest fever just to prove yourself.

Goddammit, Jefferson, stop being like this. Is that too much to ask for?

Ever yours,

Alexander

The days were beginning to blend in Alexander's mind. Everything was a little fuzzy. His mind had begun to divide things into Before Wedding and After Wedding. It was a little weird to think that there was a time before this.

At one point—by Alexander’s estimation, it couldn’t have been more than two weeks, but apparently, Alexander’s time measurement has been shot seven ways to hell—James had to return to the States, because apparently the Senate and James’ constituents did not really care about the fact that James’ oldest and closest friend was hospitalized with no signs of recovery in sight.

“They’re saying that it shouldn’t matter,” James told Alexander bitterly one evening. “That he’s ‘only my friend’, and all that. ‘Only’.” He snorted. “As though that reduces my feelings towards him. Just because I have no desire to kiss him within an inch of his life or sleep with him doesn’t invalidate my feelings.” James sighed. “There are moments when I hate politics with a passion. Don’t get me wrong—I love most of what my party stands for. I truly believe that we should be free to do as we want in our daily lives, but I could really do without the infighting that passes for in-party negotiations, or some of the propaganda my fellow Republicans insist on spreading. Some of the things they say behind closed doors—” James shook his head. “I don’t understand them, and I wish I never will.”

Alexander was too tired, too drained, too horrified by the very real possibility that he would never speak to Thomas again, never again see his sharp wit in action, or the utterly captivating way his hair glinted in the sun, to point out that, for all the hassle the Republicans made about wanting to lead lives independent of outside interference, they sure were more than willing to interfere in other people’s lives and tell them how they should feel and act and think, until everyone fit their impeccable ideal of an absolute human being. It would only lead to more arguments, but what would be the point? Thomas would still be lying where he was, and nothing would really change, politically speaking. It seemed that everything he did was counterproductive these days.

His phone rang. He considered ignoring it. He didn't know why he had not. Maybe idle curiosity, maybe the boredom he could no longer deny experiencing, maybe a need to focus on something substantial. Besides, only nine people in the planet had his private number, and two of them were in the hospital with him, with another not talking to him, courtesy of Alexander himself.
“Hello?” he said as he lifted up his phone to his ear.

“Hi, Alex. It's me,” said a soft voice.

Alexander would recognize that voice anywhere. He closed his eyes, feeling his world shatter for the second time in as many weeks.

“John,” he managed. His voice seemed to be breaking. Why did it feel like his heart was constricting to impossible sizes?

“I just—” John said haltingly. “I just wanted to make sure you were alright.”

Alexander swallowed. “You haven’t spoken to me since I left you. Why now?”

“I thought you didn’t want to talk to me,” John replied in bewilderment. “Why haven’t you—”


Alexander heard a sharp intake of breath at the other end of the line. “You don’t, Alex,” John said softly, his voice reassuringly certain. “Never think that, please, darling.”

Darling. Thomas’ word for Alexander. He choked on his breath, squeezing his eyes shut as if through shutting out the world, he was able to reject reality. A quiet sob shook through his body.

“How are you doing?” John asked in consternation. Alexander could almost imagine the endearing frown line he got whenever he scrunched his eyebrows.

Alexander exhaled loudly. “Not good,” he admitted. For some reason, John felt like the only remaining person he could admit this to, that he could make himself vulnerable in front of and bare his heart to. Alexander chalked it up to the bond, ever so hard to break, that still existed between them despite negligence on Alexander’s part.

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

Alexander shook his head, then remembered that John couldn’t see him. “No,” he replied honestly. “Unless you can turn back time or miraculously bring my husband to life—consciousness, to consciousness, he’s not dead or anything—”

“Alex, you’re rambling,” John said with amusement. “Relax, mon ange.”

“I am relaxed,” Alexander replied. “You haven’t seen me wound up yet, if you think that this is my unrela—”

“Take a deep breath,” John ordered, cutting Alexander off mid-rant. “Let it out. Let your body catch up with your brain; I know you don’t like it, but you do have physical restrictions just like the rest of us. You need to respect that.”

Alexander closed his eyes, taking deep breaths while listening to the soothing rhythm of John’s voice. “I hate this,” he muttered, more to himself than to John.

“I know you do. So would I, were I in your position.” A beat. “Do you want me to keep you company?”

“Yes, please,” Alexander quickly said, feeling relief wash over him. He was touched by John’s offer, and wouldn’t decline it. John was, despite everything that’s happened since, still a person very
Alexander heard a sudden intake of breath on the other end of the loudspeaker. He frowned. Was it really so surprising to John that Alexander still treasured and took comfort in John’s company? His self-confidence must have been shot to pieces in the time that they have been apart. (Ten months, fifteen days, and eight hours. Not that Alexander was keeping track.)

Then again, Alexander wasn’t the best person to lecture people on maintaining good self-esteem; a quick glance down at his husband’s eerily still form was all it took for him to feel like a human failure.

“I—well—” John floundered for a moment, before finally formulating what he wanted to say. “Where are you?”

Alexander rattled off the name of the hospital. He could envision with perfect clarity the way John would absentmindedly nod as he processed the information, doing a quick Google search here and there, and put together a plan.

“I’ll be there in six hours,” John finally told Alexander. “Try not to alienate the staff before I get there, okay?”

“Too late,” Alexander replied, giddy despite the seriousness of the situation, because holy shit John was coming.

On the other end, John chuckled. “That doesn’t surprise me in the slightest,” he said fondly. “I’ll see you in six hours, Alex.”

“See you,” Alexander replied to the sound of a disconnected beep, indicating that John had already hung up.

For the first time since Thomas had collapsed, frothing saliva coming from his mouth, a genuine smile graced Alexander’s features. John was coming. He was going to see John again.

---

Thomas,

I spoke with John Laurens today. I think I’ve mentioned him before? He said that he’s coming to visit. I would have loved for the two of you to meet. You are both incredible people.

Ever yours,

Alexander

---

Alexander heard the door open behind him with a soft swish. He turned his head expectantly. His face shone up when he registered who had entered.

“John!” he exclaimed in delight.

His friend smiled. He dropped his bag—fully packed, Alexander noticed absentmindedly, making a note to ask John whether he had anywhere to stay, because there was no way in hell he was going to commute between Amsterdam and London—and crossed the room, enveloping Alexander in a half
hug. “Alex,” he murmured, his words muffled by Alexander’s hair.

Alexander took comfort in John’s presence, steadfastly there, anchoring him in the now. “John,” he replied quietly.

John smiled into Alexander’s red hair. “Monosyllabic, are we?”

“Pot, kettle,” was all Alexander said in response.

John’s hands began threading through Alexander’s hair. “I hope you haven’t destroyed anything in the six hours it took me to get here,” he said, tone bordering on admonishing.

Alexander snorted. “It would have taken you less than two if you had just flown,” he replied teasingly.

John tried to glare at Alexander, but there was no heat to it. “You know that I’m acrophobic. I don’t do airplanes.”

“I know, I know,” Alexander reassured him. He rubbed John’s arms. “Sorry. I’m just being an asshole.”

John snorted. He twirled stray locks of Alexander’s hair around his fingers. “I could tell.” He breathed in Alexander’s scent again before taking a step back. His hand lingered on Alexander’s shoulder. Squeezing Alexander’s acromion, John finally turned around, taking in the still body on the bed. “Is that…” he trailed off, not knowing how to phrase it.

“Yes,” Alexander confirmed. A small smile made its way to Alexander’s face as he, too, turned to view Thomas. “John, meet Thomas Jefferson, asshole extraordinaire and, as of”—he frowned, running a quick calculation—“ten days ago, my husband.” There was no mistaking the proud tone in his voice or the loving glimmer in his eyes when he looked at Thomas.

“You really love him, don’t you?” There was an odd lilt to John’s voice. When Alexander turned to him with inquisitive eyes, he had a sour expression on his face. Alexander was mystified by this turn of events.

“Yeah, I do,” Alexander replied honestly. “I wouldn’t have married the guy if I hadn’t.”

“I see,” John’s voice was indecipherable. He withdrew his hand, letting it fall limply to his side.

“Do you have anywhere to stay?” Alexander changed the subject, suddenly all business-like.

John furrowed his brows. “I can book a hotel room, but I was kind of hoping you'd have room for me?” he said sheepishly.

Alexander made a dismissive gesture. “Feel free to stay at the palace; it’s not like we don’t have more than enough free guest rooms, right?” he joked.

John shrugged. “I suppose,” he said, returning Alexander’s grin with one of his own.

Alexander scoffed. “There is nothing to suppose here. There are over forty-five—”

“You’re showing off again,” John said, the fondness in his voice belying his words.

Alexander smiled, enjoying the brief silence. One could have imagined that it would have been oppressive, but it wasn’t; quite the opposite, in fact: it was comforting in its lull.
John’s fingers twitched briefly, seemingly of their own volition, as though wanting to reach out to Alexander again. John clenched his hands into fists, an odd look crossing his face, disappearing just as fast as it had surfaced.

Alexander frowned. He took a step forward, furrowing his brows in confusion, absentmindedly nibbling his lower lip as he did so. His eyes narrowed. “What are you…”

Almost as if operating on impulse, John took a step back, tilting his head to the side apprehensively.

Alexander’s mouth fell open when he finally realized what the expression on John’s face had been: heartbreak. He drew in a sharp breath. “John,” he said slowly, “I can’t—I can’t do this. I won’t do this. I love Thomas, and I owe him this modicum of dignity.”

“I wouldn’t ask you to do anything like that,” John assured him, his words coming out rushed and sloppy.

“But you want it,” Alexander accused him.

John suddenly swirled on his heels, fixating Alexander with an angry look. “Of course I do! I fucking love you, Alex!”

The silence that followed his statement felt suffocating—as though all the air had been sucked out of the room.

“John, don’t think that I don’t love you,” Alexander finally offered. It felt oddly like a consolation prize. “I just—“

“You just love Thomas more,” John replied despondently. He swept Alexander’s words with but a wave of his hand. “Don’t try to deny it; I can see it on you; the way you shine up whenever his name comes up, the way your eyes look like the mirror of hell whenever you are reminded of this.” He gestured at Thomas. “Trust me, I know. I think I’ve known since we’ve spoken on the phone. I just…” he swallowed. “I wanted to see how you were. I wanted to see you.”

“John—”

“No, Alex. I get it. You’re happy. That—that’s all I’ve ever wanted for you. Be it from me, or from anyone else, I—I just… I hope you’re happy.”

“I am,” Alexander reassured John, before sighing. “Or rather, I was, before all of this.” He gestured at Thomas.

“Hey, he’s going to recover, alright?” John said with false enthusiasm. Alexander wasn’t convinced, but he appreciated John’s effort all the same.

“He will,” he said softly, hating the way his words sounded unsure even to himself. If he, Thomas’ husband, was beginning to doubt that Thomas would recover, how could he expect anyone else to believe it?

Thomas,

John came by. We spoke. I told him about you. I think it helped, actually talking about it. It was terrifying, sure—it made it more real, more substantial—but I think that it helped me process a lot of what I was trying to deny, which was doing me more good
Lafayette’s first visit to the hospital was an emotional roller-coaster, to say the least.

“You talked to John Laurens,” Lafayette said without preamble as soon as the door closed behind him.

Alexander did not reply. He made no movement that would indicate that he had even heard Lafayette, hunched as he was over the table, his hand moving over the paper with impossible speed, the quill creating letters that looped and curled and coiled around each other.

Lafayette cleared his throat pointedly. Alexander’s head snapped up. “Oh, Gilbert,” he said in relief. “I thought that it might have been—”

“John Laurens?” Lafayette filled in darkly. “I’ve heard about your little visitor.”

Alexander frowned. “What’s your problem with John?” he asked in bewilderment. “The last time you saw each other, you were the best of friends.”

“That was while you were dating him, not married to another guy!” Lafayette threw up his hands in apparent frustration. “Look, I don’t support your choice to marry the obtuse American, but since you have, at least make an effort to act like your vows were more than just empty words!” he exploded.

Alexander’s eyes flashed in anger. With a sweep of his hand, the quill in his hand crashed against a wall, and ink spilled onto the paper he had been working on. Alexander took no notice, however, which, in itself, was a strong indication of his state of mind.

“Give me the benefit of the doubt, will you?” Alexander snapped. “I haven’t gone and cheated behind Thomas’ back the moment an opportunity arose.”

“So you do admit that there had been an opportunity,” Lafayette noted in satisfaction.

“There’s always a chance, isn’t there?” Alexander shot back. “But I didn’t cheat on Thomas.”

“There’s something called emotional infidelity as well,” Lafayette scowled. “Just because you didn’t —”

“Would you just stop?! You aren’t helping here, Lafayette!” Alexander’s hands were clenched into fists. “I can technically stand up this second and kiss you. Granted, it would be like kissing myself, but it could be done.” Lafayette made a disgusted face at Alexander’s words. Alexander ignored him. “But I don’t, because I love my husband to bits and pieces; because I don’t want to put a stain of this sort on our relationship; because I value Thomas too much to betray him so callously; and, frankly, because I’m not in the fucking mood,” Alexander’s voice was bordering on hissing at the end of his impromptu short tirade.

Lafayette blinked. “Wow,” he murmured. “That was… I had not been expecting that.”

“You think?” Alexander deadpanned. They launched into an awkward silence.

“So you are sure nothing developed between you and Mr. Laurens?” Lafayette asked awkwardly.
“Of course I'm fucking sure! Thomas is my husband! I love him! If I could trade his life for mine? He'd be standing here, right now, and I would be the one in that bed, so don't you for a moment dare to disrespect him—disrespect us—by implying and presuming that I would throw him away for anything,” Alexander snarled. His face was hot, and he could feel tears getting caught in his throat. He swallowed them down. “And, for Christ's sake, enough with that ‘Mr. Laurens’ shit,” he snapped. “Call him John. He's your friend too, you know.”

Lafayette swallowed. “I have not been the greatest friend to him,” he admitted. “Or—” he glanced briefly at Alexander, then at Thomas, before looking away. “Or to you. I have been blatantly insulting your husband in front of you.”

Alexander sat down again. “Yes, you have,” he agreed mildly, not seeing a point in denying Lafayette’s words. He picked up the ink-stained paper, and reached for a bit of dry tissue in an attempt to get it to soak up the remaining ink. He grimaced, then smudged the rest of the ink. His hands came off spattered with green blotches here and there.

Lafayette bowed his head. “For that, I sincerely apologize.”

Alexander drummed his fingers against the tabletop, leaving green smears where the fingers had touched the surface. “Did you have an actual point to coming here, or did you simply come here to accuse me of infidelity?” he asked idly.

Lafayette flinched almost imperceptibly. Alexander bit his lip. He considered apologizing, but it would be empty words—Lafayette knew as well as Alexander that the prince meant every word he said, and Alexander saw no point in pretending that Lafayette wasn’t aware of that fact. Alexander’s brain-to-mouth filter was next to non-existent, so whenever he spoke, what came out was what he actually thought about any given subject. Life was too short for vagueness and lying and backtracking. Alexander would leave behind a legacy worth remembering if that was the last thing he did; if Abraham Lincoln could be remembered for his honesty, so could Alexander. (This had been the reason for several minor scandals involving Alexander and minor politicians, who, unfathomably, took offense to Alexander’s extensive candor.)

“Alex?” Lafayette waved a hand in front of Alexander’s face. “You have zoned out again, mon ami. ”

Alexander started. He spread out his fingers, waving dismissively. “I’m fine,” he said as he rubbed the bridge of his nose absentmindedly.

Lafayette bit his lip to keep from smiling. “Alexander,” he said slowly, “you have a green stain on your nose.”

Alexander scratched his nose in confusion, which only exacerbated the problem at hand. Lafayette shook his head. “Never mind,” he said quickly. “Just—look at yourself in the mirror when you get the chance, alright?”

Alexander shrugged dispassionately. It was as close to a promise as Lafayette was going to get, and he knew it.

“Is John already at Buckingham?” Alexander asked all of a sudden.

Lafayette blinked, nonplussed at Alexander’s abruptness. “Yes,” he told him. “He has been installed into one of the guest bedrooms on the second floor. Angelica was giving him odd looks the whole way,” he remembered with not a little glee.
Alexander shrugged. “Probably wondering whether I’ve finally lost what little sanity I had.”

“Well?” Lafayette asked, raising an eyebrow expectantly. “Have you?”

“What do you think?” Alexander shot back.

Lafayette smirked. “Not out of the question.”

“Thank you for the trust you are placing in me,” Alexander drawled sarcastically.

“What are friends for?”

“Maybe trusting each other?” Alexander deadpanned.

“Or making sure that your friend’s father doesn’t murder your friend’s ex,” Lafayette deadpanned.

The colour drained from Alexander’s face. “Do you think…” he trailed off, not daring to finish his sentence.

“Again: not entirely out of the question,” Lafayette repeated.

“Well? Why aren’t you at Buckingham then?” Alexander demanded. When Lafayette didn’t reply, he made a motioning gesture with his hands. “Shoo! Go! Make yourself useful.”

“Nice to see you too, Gilbert,” Lafayette parroted. “Thank you for making sure my father doesn’t kill John Laurens, Gilbert. You’re such a wonderful person, Gilbert.”

“Yes, yes,” Alexander said impatiently. “Now go.”

“Oh, one more thing,” Lafayette paused by the doorway. “You have ink all over your eyebrows, mon petit lion.” He quickly ducked away from the crumpled paper ball that followed.

˚✧₊⁎

Thomas,

Your fever broke today. I’m hoping that you will wake up. Hancock doesn’t think that you will. Frankly, I am beginning to have my doubts as well.

Your absence looms over me like a dark cloud. What would I do without you? I am scared sick of losing you, and yet, with every day, the possibility becomes more and more real.

Ever yours,

Alexander

˚✧₊⁎

Another week went by. John kept Alexander company, though their conversation was somewhat strained by the tension between them. Alexander wished that things would return to the way they were before, before Alexander had fled to America to escape something that he should have been proud of, then felt guilty for even thinking that. If he hadn’t gone to America, he wouldn’t have met Thomas, and never would have fallen in love with the stubborn Virginian, and wouldn’t have experienced what were some of the happiest moments in his life.
Then again, his traitorous brain whispered, if he hadn’t met Thomas, he wouldn’t be going through the literal hell that were the past two weeks—or was it three? Alexander couldn’t remember.

*(That was a lie. Three weeks, one day, four hours, and—Alexander checked his watch—thirty-nine minutes.)*

Lafayette came and went as Lafayette was wont to do. The doctors ignored Alexander, for the most part, except for one specific doctor, who had taken to periodically bringing him meals and asking, with a smile on her face, whether he was feeling alright, Your Highness, really, it wouldn’t be any trouble at all to bring him more blankets.

At first, Burr had tried to glare her into submission, but, upon the realization that she seemed impervious—whether by courage or obliviousness, neither man could tell—to his intimidation attempts, he resigned himself to acting as Alexander’s provisional food taster.

John left five days into his stay. He had cited pressing workload, but it had been a flimsy excuse if Alexander had ever heard one. He could see the pain in John’s eyes, the longing he couldn’t quite hide whenever he looked at Alexander. Alexander didn’t blame him for leaving, even if it had sent a little burst of pain through his chest.

˚

**Thomas,**

*John has left. He had been staying at Buckingham for five days, and I don’t even know why I’m telling you that. It’s not like it matters how long he has been here.***

*Ever yours,*

Alexander

˚

Alexander’s record with unexpected phone calls was far from stellar, so when his phone rang, the only thing stopping him from ignoring it entirely was the fact that it had been his official number.

“Crown Prince Alexander speaking,” he said curtly, teeth all but gritting, into the microphone.

“Hello, Your Highness,” said a vaguely familiar voice. “This is Hillary Clinton.”

Alexander’s breath hitched. “Madam President,” he said courteously, because it just wouldn’t do to alienate the leader of, arguably, the most powerful country in the world. Not to mention, she was Thomas’ president. “To what do I owe this honour?”

“I heard about the unfortunate accident at your wedding,” Clinton said diplomatically.

“An *accident* would imply that the perpetrator had not meant for it to occur. This was an assassination, plain and simple,” Alexander bit out. “Cold-blooded murder, planned and rehearsed unto perfection.”

There was a short pause, before Clinton spoke again. “Forgive me for my mistake.” She took a deep breath. “I cannot put into words the feelings you must be experiencing, and I will not insult you by trying and reducing your feelings to anything but what they are,” the president said frankly. “Nevertheless, my thoughts go out to you and your husband.”
Alexander swallowed. “Thank you, ma’am,” he said thickly. It felt oddly like making small talk with the parents of one’s prom date.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” the president asked softly. “I have a professional team of medics on hand if anything—”

“Thomas is already receiving the best care possible,” Alexander interrupted her brusquely. “Doctor Hancock says that there is nothing more that can be done from a medical point of view, and frankly, I don’t see how an additional pair of hands could help. Your gesture is appreciated, if unnecessary.”

“Very well.” If Clinton was offended by Alexander’s words, she didn’t let it show. “Still, if Your Highness thinks of anything that I can help with, please don’t hesitate to call.”

“I will keep that in mind, ma’am,” Alexander said absentmindedly, intending to do no such thing.

He listened to the quiet beep in his loudspeaker long after the call had been disconnected, staring blankly into the distance. What was he doing?

A month.

It has been a month since one small sip had changed Alexander's life irrevocably.

A month since Alexander has lost his husband in every way that mattered.

A month since Alexander had last seen Thomas’ eyes shine up with excitement when he got started on a subject he was really passionate about, or heard the way he stuttered whenever he was under the scrutiny of a foreign diplomat, or had had Thomas’ hand run through his hair. He hadn’t known just how much he would miss it until it was gone. Remembering the way John had unintentionally mirrored the movement only added to the yearning brewing in Alexander’s stomach until he thought that he might be ill. Alexander wouldn’t wish it even on the most despicable of people, because nobody should have to feel like they lost their lifeline, their anchor, the reason for their existence.

Slowly losing the single most important person in one’s life, the one person that caused one to feel special, was horrible. Thomas could light up Alexander’s day by just being there.

The monotony was beginning to grate on Alexander’s nerves, try as he might to suppress it.

Thomas,

A month. It’s been a month since we last spoke. I think of you constantly. I think of our last moments—how I hate the phrase!—and of how little appreciation I had shown to you. I want to do better. I need to do better.

Come back to us. Come back to me. I need you like I need air to breathe.

Ever yours,

Alexander

Alexander didn’t even notice Martha’s visits.
Thirty-three days in, the monotony of the routine broke as there was a loud knock on the door.

The door opened and in stepped two strangers. One was holding a duffel bag, while the other had a backpack slung over her shoulder.

Alexander blinked. “Hello,” he said pointedly. “Who are you?”

One of the women stepped forward. “My name’s Jane Jefferson.” She offered her hand, which Alexander shook tentatively. “That’s Mary, my sister. Thomas is our younger brother.”

The other woman, Mary, crossed her arms. “I suppose that you’re Thomas’ husband, then?” Her voice was practically dripping with disdain.

Alexander’s eyes narrowed. “As you would have known, had you actually attended our wedding,” he said, almost accusingly. “You come here and you pretend as if you have a right to know everything about us after completely spurning any and all invitations Thomas had sent—which I know he did, because I was the one to write them!” he said, the reproach in his voice virtually tangible.

Mary glared. “Unlike you, not everyone’s born with a literal silver spoon in their asses,” she snapped balefully.

Alexander very pointedly did not recoil. “I was wondering where Thomas got his attitude from. I think that about answers it.”

"I can see why you're from Europe—Europiece of shit," Mary shot back.

Alexander open his mouth, then closed it again. "I can't even argue with that," he admitted. “Takes one to know one, love.”

Mary opened her mouth to reply, but a sharp shove from Jane quelled her. She settled for glowering at her sister in silent protest.

Jane cleared her throat. “This wasn’t how I had imagined our first meeting would go,” she said mildly. “Mr Hamilton, I would like to have an update on my brother’s status,” she said formally.

Alexander glanced between her and Mary. Mary quirked an eyebrow. “Well?” she said, eyeing Alexander expectantly.

Alexander told them.

When Alexander finished, nobody spoke for a long moment as Jane and Mary processed the information. With an abruptness that startled both Alexander and Jane, Mary suddenly let out a frustrated growl. “I hate this,” she declared emphatically, gesturing at Thomas’ limp form. “This—”

“Sense of helplessness?” Alexander filled in for her. “Trust me, I know.”

Mary swivelled on the spot, fixing Alexander with another glare. “And you!” she cried. “You’re the whole fucking reason—”

“Language,” Jane scolded Mary, little heat in her voice.

“—he’s like this! It’s all your fault! If he hadn’t met you, he would still be alright and breathing and alive!”
Alexander flinched with every word she spoke. He didn’t offer any defense of himself, knowing there was none to be had because she was essentially right, instead letting her accusations wash over him like cold water. This only seemed to incense Mary all the more. “Well?” she taunted, a fanatic look in her eyes. “No retort? No clever witticism? Tell me something, Your Highness: do you even care?” she spat.

Alexander’s head snapped up as a fire was kindled in his eyes. “Don’t you ever,” he hissed, “ever imply that I am anything but utterly devoted to Thomas. Do not question my feelings towards him.”

Mary smirked, almost as if she had won some great victory. “So you do care,” she said triumphantly. “I had my doubts.”

Alexander seethed. “You are the most presumptuous, irritating, insuff—”

“Let’s not start insulting each other right off the bat,” Jane cut in before the argument could spiral out of control. She put her hands on her hips, regarding Alexander thoughtfully. “Do you know who did it?” Her eyes, as sharp as Thomas’, told Alexander that, should the answer be anything but an unequivocal ‘yes’, there would be hell to pay.

Alexander looked away. He bit his lip. “No,” he admitted.

“How can that be possible?!” Mary all but shrieked in outrage. “You have the best security in the world—how can you not know who tried to murder the consort of the crown prince?”

“He's known him for ten months! I've known him his whole life!”

“Then where have you been?!” Alexander finally shouted. “If you care so much, why are you just now here? Why weren't you at our wedding? Why did you let Thomas believe that no one in his family gave a bloody damn?! It's been a month, dammit, and not one of you have deigned to bloody show up!”

“Do you think we're made of money?” Mary hissed. “Don’t you think our siblings didn’t want to come wi—”

Alexander threw up his hands. “Yes! Yes, as a matter of fact, I think you have more than enough money to visit your dying and comatose brother! This could be your last chance! For all we know, his life could give out tomorrow!” By the time he was finished, his breathing was erratic, as though he had run a marathon, and he and Mary were glaring at each other.

Fearing an outright physical fight, Jane stepped in between them, acting as a human shield. “Stop it!” she barked. “Will you listen to yourselves? You sound like squabbling children, arguing over petty matters while Thomas is dying!”

The silence that fell could as well be for with a knife. Alexander and Mary couldn’t meet Jane’s eyes, as cold so they were inscrutable.

“Thank you,” Jane said when it became clear that neither would speak. “Now, does anyone else have anything of actual import to contribute?”
“You—uh, you can stay at Buckingham, if you want,” Alexander suddenly blurted out. When the two women looked at him questioningly, he continued, a slight flush on his face. “Sleeping arrangements, I mean. I don’t think you’ve had the time to set up—”

“As a matter of fact, we have,” Mary said sharply, glaring at Alexander, “so don’t just come in here and pretend to play the hero when you’re—”

“But we would be very honoured to be your guests,” Jane said smoothly, stomping on Mary’s foot, resulting on a pained ‘oomph!’.

Alexander scowled at the younger Jefferson. “Pardon me,” he said, “but what the fuck is your problem?”

Mary took a step closer, and Alexander suddenly wished Aaron was in the room.

“Our brother runs off to New York, stops talking to us, and the next thing we know he’s turned gay and eloped with the fucking prince of England—the embodiment of everything he professed to hate! Then, we have to learn that he’s dying from godforsaken Fox News because no thought to call and tell us!” Mary shouted.

“You were invited!” Alexander snapped, gesticulating wildly.

“You make it sound like it’d be so much better to see it happen live!”

“I don’t see what you want from me! One second, you’re complaining about the fact that you weren’t present, and the second, you tell me you wish you weren’t! What’s your—”

“The fact that it had to happen in the first place!” Mary slammed her hand into the table adjacent to Thomas’ bed. “And there’s no one to blame for that but you! If he hadn’t met you—”

“You’re repeating yourself,” Jane said sharply. “And it’s hardly only Prince Alexander’s fault—the assassin deserves a fair share of the blame as well.”

Mary turned on Jane. “Stop taking his side!” she hissed. “You’re supposed to be on mine!”

“I’m on the side I view as the most reasonable, and right now?” Jane shook her head. “That’s not you.”

“You don’t know what it feels like”—Mary didn’t seem to care about the fact that she was shouting—“to lose your favourite sibling—the person you’ve cared for your entire life! Thomas was my world! Can you even try to imagine what it would feel like?! He’s my baby brother, and he’s almost dead!”

“Yes, actually, I can imagine it,” Jane snapped for the first time during the conversation. ”Remember when you were two and you fell into that well and we couldn't get you out for hours? No, probably not; you were just a baby back then. That's how I felt like back then—powerless and completely terrified. You are my Thomas.” By the time she was finished, there were tears in her eyes, glistening in the sharp white light.

Alexander’s stomach sunk. This was definitely not a conversation he wanted to be a part of—it was far too private, too intimate. Even now, he oddly felt like he was intruding. These words were never meant for anyone’s ears but the two Jefferson sisters’. What's more, he couldn't help but empathize with Jane—with both of the sisters, actually, even though Mary made it a hell of a lot harder than it should be—because he knew. He knew exactly what it felt like to fear for life of one’s sibling; he knew exactly the kind of anguish and self-loathing that came with it.
“Frances,” he blurted out suddenly. “My sister’s name was Frances.” He didn’t know why he had said it, but the moment the words were out of his mouth, he knew that it had been the right thing to say. Jane and Mary deserved to know, even if the knowledge wouldn’t bring them any comfort. Well, maybe ‘deserved’ wasn’t the right word. They simply should know. They needed to.

“No. I mean, yes. I mean, no. I mean, yes. I mean...” Alexander tried to search for the right words to say. “I had a sister. Her name was Frances. She—she died in her infancy.” Alexander took a deep breath. “She died before she turned one. Heart problems, or something like that. We had the best healthcare in Europe, and it accomplished precisely nothing. It wasn’t sudden, either. It took a long time, and I just—I just watched. I was six, and just standing like you’re standing right now, watching as life drained out of her, knowing that there was nothing I could do to save my little sister. I wished I could have taken away her pain, even at my expense; I wished I had been lying there in her place. But”—he breathed—“I couldn’t. And you can’t right now. And that sucks.”

Nobody had a good reply to that. What was there to say? Loathe as Mary was to admit it, Alexander was right. She processed her words. “You know,” she said finally, “in perspective, fights aren’t really worth much. They’re—”

“You mean he will want us to get along. He—he’s not dead,” Alexander said, his throat constricting around the last word.

“I know he’s not,” Jane said soothingly. “My sister misspoke. Excuse her.”

Mary opened her mouth, but one look from Jane was enough to change her mind. “Yes, sorry. I didn’t mean—I mean, I hope Thomas is—I know Thomas is going to live.”

“So do I.” Alexander clasped his hands behind his back, back ramrod straight. “Now let’s just convince everyone else.”

Thomas,

Merry fucking Christmas to us both. This should have been our first Christmas together, you know. It was taken from us, and I swear that I won’t stop until I’ve found who did this to you and make them pay.

In other news, your sisters dropped by. The elder ones Jane and Mary. They weren’t what I had expected. Mary is bloody insane—just like you. Jane is surprisingly nice—not like you also like you. It’s odd to see them here. I hadn’t expected company, but it’s better than to sit alone with my thoughts. They are dark enough, love. It sometimes hurts to be near them, especially Mary—she reminds me of you too much. She’s also peering over my shoulder, so I assume that you learned your manners from her.
I love you, you utter shithead. Wake the fuck up. Please.

Ever yours,

Alexander

Thomas’ condition is stable but not improving, the doctors say.

At this time, they say, a lack of deterioration or improvement is a deterioration unto itself.

The longer the patient remains in a coma, one explains, the harder it is for them to recover.

It’s been eight weeks, Your Highness; I suggest that you begin re-evaluating your expectations, Doctor Hancock finally says, a defeated look in his eyes.

You try not to listen, but it’s really damn hard not to when your husband might as well be a flower for all the joie de vivre he exhibits.

Even with the Jefferson sisters’ company, the mood is hardly one worth celebrating. You feel the world continuously crumble around you, and you are powerless to stop it—the more you try to hold on to it, the more it slips through your fingers like sand.

You want to curl up and cry and rage and scream until it all ends please let it end please let it be over soon because you don’t think you can do much more of this and it’s torture plain and simple and you have begun to—

Instead, you pick up a pen, and you write. You write like you’re running out of time—for all you know, you very well might be. Thomas certainly is.

Thomas,

You’ve been in a coma for two months, asshole. Wake the hell up.

Ever yours,

Alexander

“We need to examine the possibility that Mr Jefferson will not wake up, period,” Doctor Hancock voiced the thought creeping up into the recesses of Alexander’s mind.

Alexander bit his lip. “No,” he said decisively. “No bloody way.”

Mary swallowed. “What is your estimate of Thomas’ chance of recovery?”

“After nine weeks in a coma, I would say no higher than three percent,” the doctor said frankly, not mincing his words.

Alexander closed his eyes, as if by doing that, he would be able to shut out the reality around him. This could not be happening.
“What is your recommendation?” Jane asked when it became clear that neither her sister nor her brother-in-law would speak.

The doctor pursed his lips. “I can’t speak for what you should do as Mr Jefferson’s relatives, because from your perspective, things are a world different than they are to me as his attending physician. But as his doctor, I would begin to consider taking him off life support. The chances of a patient waking up from a coma longer than three months are so slim as to be practically non-existent.”

Alexander took a step back involuntarily, as though punched in the guts. Beside Jane, Mary wasn’t doing much better if the sickened expression on her face was any indication. “No,” Mary hissed. “We aren’t taking my brother off life support.”

“Listen,” the doctor said, obviously aiming at placating Alexander, “Mr Jefferson has sustained permanent damage in his lungs. That only exacerbates his chances.”

Alexander inhaled sharply. “Let’s wait until those three months are up, okay?” he suggested. He wasn’t going to be the one to give the order to terminate his husband’s life, dammit.

Mary visibly sagged with relief. “Yes, let’s do that.” It seemed that she wasn’t up for it, either.

They both looked back at Jane, who shook her head. “Very well,” she said in resignation, “but I don’t think that anything will change. Mind, I want, more than anything in the world, to see Thomas up and about, but I have to be realistic—that’s not going to happen, not after over two months of this hell.” She gestured at Thomas’ still body.

“Fuck realistic. He’s going to live,” Alexander declared, but even as he spoke those words, he couldn’t quite bring himself to believe them—as if there was something inherently false to them. Who was he even trying to convince?

Thomas,

They have begun to talk about taking you off life support. I can’t stand the thought. Would you have preferred to die, or to live, sustained by a machine? I don’t know, because we have never had this conversation, and now I can’t ask you. I don’t know, and that frightens me. What frightens me even more is that I’m beginning to seriously contemplate the idea.

I love you, I love you more than even my words could possibly say, but is it right for me to keep you alive, keep you in constant pain, just so that I won’t have to deal with the finality of your death? What does it say about me?

Ever yours,

Alexander

Chapter End Notes

If you made it this far, kudos! You didn't die of angst exposure. While you're at it, can you take a second to leave a comment and tell me what you thought? I'm always grateful for any feedback.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Thomas wakes up.

Chapter Notes

So I was going to do the whole 'update weekly on Fridays' thing, but then studies and chem got in the way, so now I'm aiming for the 'whenever not swamped by studies' tactic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It took more effort to open his eyes than it by any rate should.

He was greeted to the sight of Alexander Hamilton peering down at him in concern. He said something ineligible, but all Thomas could distinguish was his own name.

Thomas opened his mouth, but no words came out. He frowned. He tried to speak again, but all that came out was a rasping sound.

He heard a movement beside him, and his eyes snapped to where his husband was standing, staring at Thomas with nothing short of awe in his eyes Thomas’ brows furrowed. What happened? He remembered—something. A party, or was it a dinner? There were a lot of flowers, and people, and conversations. Alexander was there. He remembered laughing at something Alexander had said, then —

Nothing.

He opened his mouth, but no words came out when he tried to speak. He frowned and tried again, with much the same result.

Alexander watched his husband try to speak, communicate, anything, his dread growing. He put his hands on Thomas in an attempt to calm him down. Alexander spoke quickly, probably in an attempt to reassure him. To be entirely honest, Thomas couldn’t understand what he was saying, but that had been known to happen whenever Alexander got too excited and his words blurred into one another, so he wasn’t overly concerned. What he was concerned with was why he suddenly couldn’t speak.

Thomas watched his husband swallow visibly. He recognized the mood Alexander was in: he tried to put on a mask to protect Thomas—tried to be gentle and understanding—but what he really needed was to get out out, create some distance between himself and Thomas, and just process. Thomas nodded, and Alexander was out of the room like Lafayette was chasing him with a pitchfork in each hand (a story he had heard from Martha during one of their afternoon teas, and which had brought tears to Thomas’ eyes).

Thomas blinked. He looked down at his hands; he tried to lift his right hand, but it was as though he
was moving in the mud—his every movement hurt like hell, and it took all of his energy just to lift his hand. He dropped it on the sheets again, closing his eyes in frustration.

Alexander returned a few moments later with a man in a white lab coat in tow. The doctor—for it had to be a doctor, dressed as he was—peered down at Thomas. He said something, but, try as he might, Thomas couldn’t understand him.

Thomas frowned. He hear the man speak, but he couldn’t understand what he was saying. What was happening to him?

Alexander turned to explain something to the doctor in that rapid speed of his. Thomas smiled reflexively.

The doctor nodded. He scribbled something in his journal before turning back to Thomas. He spoke again. Thomas blinked. He tried to convey incomprehension as best he could. Alexander furrowed his brows. “Thomas?” he asked carefully.

Thomas nodded eagerly. That was one word he had understood.

Alexander smiled. He squeezed his hand, then turned back to face the doctor. He said something else, shrugging helplessly. The doctor replied in a harsher voice. Thomas attempted to follow their dialogue, but, try as he might, he didn’t understand a word of what was being said. He remembered understanding, though. Why couldn’t he understand now?

Alexander turned back to Thomas. He said something else. Thomas shook his head, indicating confusion. Alexander frowned, before his face shone up, the way it usually did when he was struck by an idea that seemed far too far-fetched but proved to be brilliant. In his current situation, feeling as though he was locked inside his own body with no means of communication with the outside world, Thomas could really use ‘far-fetched’. “Let me try something,” Alexander said, and Thomas sighed in relief, because he could understand him. “Thomas, can you understand me?”

Thomas nodded vigorously. He squeezed Alexander’s hand in the same fashion that the redhead had only moments earlier.

Alexander swallowed. He turned back to the doctor, his mouth again going off a thousand words a minute (one-hundred and eighty-seven, to be exact; Thomas had once counted). The doctor closed his eyes, nodding in comprehension.

“Well?” Thomas tried to ask, but the only sound that came out was, once again, an incomprehensible grunt.

Alexander glanced down at Thomas, his eyes pained. “Thomas, love,” he said slowly, a stark contrast to the way he had been speaking with the doctor, “you understand French. As in, you only understand French. You can’t understand English.”

What.

“Don’t worry,” Alexander smiled forcibly. “I’m going to help you. You’re going to get better.” His every word sounded more forced than the last, his voice forced.

The doctor asked Alexander something. He snapped back a quick reply, before focusing on Thomas again.

Thomas could feel the fear and anxiety building up in his throat like it was something tangible. He couldn’t understand English. He couldn’t understand his native language. If anyone, anyone, besides
Alexander and Lafayette tried to speak to him, he wouldn't understand a word. Did James speak French? Thomas couldn't remember. Why couldn't he remember? Why couldn't he remember whether his best friend spoke French? He couldn't remember, he couldn't understand, and every passing moment made it harder to even think and everything was swirling out of control and slipping through his fingers and he just wanted to scream but he couldn't and the doctor was saying something and Thomas couldn't understand—

“Thomas?”

Alexander.

“Thomas, love, look at me, alright? I need you to look at me. I know you're scared, but it'll be alright. You'll be alright,” Alexander said, the hand that wasn't holding Thomas’ own running gently through his hair.

That was the last straw. This was absurd. Thomas was dreaming; that was the only explanation for this insanity that was suddenly Thomas’ life.

The sound that came out of Thomas’ throat, the first real sound since he woke up, was a hysterical laughter.

Out of the corner of his eye, Thomas saw Alexander exchange a bewildered look with the doctor. The hand in his hair moved down to his back, rubbing circles in a motion that was probably supposed to be calming, but only exacerbated Thomas’ laughing fit. It wasn’t funny, dammit, but if he didn’t laugh, he would break down and cry.

He drew in several sharp breaths, but it was as though he could never get enough air no matter how hard he tried. What was going on? He squeezed his eyes shut, hoping that it might calm him down.

He sensed movement beside him, and heard a whisper, before Alexander’s voice murmured into his ear, “Hey, relax. Everything is going to be alright”—except it wasn’t, dammit; it was never going to be alright again—”but just breathe.”

Thomas felt something be pressed around his nose and mouth.

“It’s a mask, designed to help you breathe,” Alexander answered the unspoken question. “Your lungs are—well, they're fucked up. Not beyond recognition, but close enough. The doctors said that there might be permanent damage.” He swallowed. “You’re going to need this for a long time. Possibly for the rest of your life,” he continued, the brutal honesty cutting Thomas like the blade of a knife. “You will need to wash your eyes carefully for the next few weeks, just in case some residue ricin still causes irritation.”

Thomas started. Ricin, of all things? It couldn’t get more cliché if Alexander suddenly went down on his knee and began serenading Thomas about the way he had missed him—which Thomas wouldn’t be entirely opposed to, mind.

The mask disappeared once Thomas’ breathing had returned to normal. Thomas opened his eyes, meeting the familiar violet-blue ones that seemed to be filled with as much fear as with reassurance. Alexander rubbed his thumb over the back of Thomas’ palm.

The doctor asked something, tapping his pen against the board. Thomas looked to Alexander for clarification. “Can you clench your fingers?” Alexander repeated patiently. Thomas stomped down the sudden feeling of helpless/painfrustrated that threatened to overwhelm him; he needed Alexander to even understand the people around him. Without Alexander, he would—Actually, he
didn't know what he would do. What he even *could* do. He was a limp doll in Alexander’s capable hands.

Thomas tried. It took longer than it had any right to—next to him, the trepidation on Alexander’s face growing by the second—but he succeeded: his fingers moved. It didn’t hurt as much as his first attempt at moving his hand, but the pain was still there.

The doctor hummed, scribbling something on his board. Thomas hesitated. He glanced at Alexander, who quickly averted his eyes.

The doctor then turned to Alexander, saying something in that damned neutral voice of his. Alexander nodded. He looked down at Thomas, his hand sneaking its way around Thomas’, fingers intertwining. “Do you mind if I talk to the doctor for a second?” he asked quietly.

He shook his head.

Alexander’s face brightened up. He leaned down to tentatively kiss Thomas’ lips. Their lips barely touched, but it was as though a dam had been broken inside him. Anger, fear, and terror was mixed with relief, trust and *love*.

Alexander finally let go of Thomas’ hand. Thomas tried not to focus on the symbolism of the gesture. He glanced down at his hands again. He had a lot to take in; the world he had woken up in was vastly different from the one he had—he swallowed—been assassinated in.

As Alexander walked a little way off, whispering furiously to the doctor, Thomas fought down the urge to throw up as a realization made his stomach turn. Someone had tried to *assassinate* him—*him*, Thomas Jefferson. He wasn’t even meant to be there, wasn’t meant to drink it.

He had almost died.

Thomas’ fingers gripped the bedsheets tighter. He glanced in Alexander’s direction. On one hand, he yearned for Alexander more than anything, but on the other, what was the point? He couldn’t communicate with him anyway, couldn’t tell him what was on his mind; he couldn’t even seem to be able to control his reactions; his emotions were all over the place—and *that* terrified him more than any assassination attempts ever could.

He was a prisoner in his own body.

˚✧₊⁎نصرयነ ›imately ★ｧ★™*מצטבר ★ｧ★™*ずっと｝✧

Alexander stepped aside, partially to give Thomas a little privacy with his thoughts—God, he couldn’t even begin to imagine what kind of thoughts must be racing through his mind right now; the man couldn’t even *speak*—and partially to speak with the good doctor.

“Well?” he demanded as soon as they were a distance away from Thomas—not that he would be able to overhear them.

“As I thought,” the doctor mused. “Damaged motor skills. It’s too early to tell for certain yet, but I have a feeling that they are going to be relatively easy to recover. He will need to learn how to walk again as well, or at least relearn the *motions*. Apart from that, there is the damage to his lung, which, unlike his other physical injuries, will be permanent. Mr Jefferson was simply lucky that ricin is at its weakest when ingested as opposed to inhaled or injected—something which the assassin clearly had no idea about when he administered the dosage.” He shrugged. “I’m sorry, Your Highness,” he said simply. Hancock did sound sincerely sorry—not in the ‘it was my fault and I’m along for your forgiveness’ way, but in the ‘it's a pity this had to happen and I feel sympathy towards this person’
A realization suddenly hit Alexander like an approaching baseball. “He can’t write,” he said loudly.

The stare Hancock gave him had caused lesser men to run for cover. “Yes, Your Highness,” he drawled.

“And he can’t speak,” Alexander went on.

“Indeed.”

“That means he can’t communicate with us at all.” Alexander concluded, the sick feeling in his stomach growing. “He’s completely trapped inside his body.”

Before the doctor could stop Alexander, the redhead shot back to his husband's bedside. He repeated his conclusions to Thomas, puffing and panting in between words.

Thomas’ eyes widened as he listened to Alexander’s explanation. Alexander had just voiced his fears.

Alexander rubbed Thomas’ temples slowly, trying to ease some of the pain Thomas was feeling. “There, love,” he said soothingly. “I know that it feels terrifying—God knows I would be freaking out if I were in your position—but I’m going to be by your side the entire time. Whatever it takes,” he said resolutely.

Alexander’s faith in his own words was so absolute, so persuasive, that Thomas couldn’t help but believe him. He leaned into his husband's comforting touch in a distinctly feline behaviour.

Alexander's hands moved to the through Thomas’ hair, untangling his curls. He brushed away a few stray tufts of hair from Thomas’ face. “Besides,” he continued, “I believe in you. You're not going to just remain silent, and as soon as you are able to speak, we're going to start teaching you English again. You're going to bounce back from this, I promise.” The smile Alexander gave Thomas could outshine the morning sun. When he smiled like that, the last of Thomas’ reluctance fell apart like a chocolate orange. “That's okay with you, right?” Alexander asked, suddenly uncertain.

Thomas nodded numbly, his mind still processing everything that had happened since he—since he was assassinated.

It felt like only moments ago that he joked with Alexander in English, as carefree as he ever was, and now, he couldn't even understand English, let alone speak it. If someone had told him yesterday—no, two and a half months ago, he corrected himself bitterly—that the zenith of his dreams was to be able to speak—not even in English, just speak in any language—he would have laughed them off.

He had been able to communicate with other people since he was seven months old—he had always been incredibly bright, and he didn't shy away from showing it—and the thought of no longer being capable of that was—unthinkable.

It only went to show how much life could change in the blink of an eye.

One of Alexander's hands sneaked down to cradle Thomas' face. He ran a thumb across the twist of Thomas’ upper lip, the gesture oddly intimate, mindless of the fact that the doctor, whose name Thomas didn't remember (had he even introduced himself? Had Thomas not caught it?), had stepped back inside the room and was watching Thomas intently, like he was a specimen at a zoo.

Alexander's phone buzzed suddenly, startling them both. The doctor scribbled something on his board. Thomas tried to shut out the furious scratching. He had some experience with shutting out
incessant scribbling. Alexander grabbed his phone, scrolling briefly before making a triumphant sound.

Thomas tried to peek at the screen, but Alexander pressed the phone to his chest in an almost defensive manner. Thomas raised an eyebrow in a clear question.


Thomas huffed, non-verbally conveying his disbelief.

Alexander bit his lip. Thomas shouldn't find Alexander's annoying habit as comforting as he did, but it was obvious that he had very little control over his emotions at the moment.

“Can your sisters speak French?” Alexander asked, the question quite abrupt.

Thomas furrowed his brows. He didn't understand. Why would it even matter if—He shook his head. Even that movement caused pain to surge through his spine.

“Never mind,” Alexander said just a little too quickly.

Thomas shook his head insistently, his curiosity peaked. He wanted to know—no, he needed to know what was going on.

Alexander exhaled, seeming to come to a decision. “Your sisters are here,” he told Thomas. “Jane and Mary, I mean.”

Thomas stilled. Mary and Jane—here? He hadn't talked to them for years, hadn't thought that they'd even want to after Thomas got together with Alexander—he remembered the way Jane would nod in understanding during one of their father's rants, or the way Mary's mouth would form a disapproving scowl whenever they saw two girls holding hands from across the street. He hadn't imagined—

“Thomas?” Alexander was calling. He snapped his fingers before Thomas' eyes. “Are you sure you're okay? You don’t need to see them if you don’t want to.”

Thomas shook his head quickly.

Alexander frowned. “Okay, that was badly phrased, so let’s try again: do you want to see your sisters?”

Thomas nodded vigorously.

Alexander grinned. “I’ll tell them, okay?”

Thomas shrugged—as much as he could, at the very least, considering that his every movement brought him pain. He watched as Alexander clicked on one of the contacts. Instantly, Mary’s face popped up, along with the caption ‘incorrigible monster’. Thomas let out an exasperated huff. It really shouldn’t come as a surprise that Alexander and Mary got on like a house on fire—they were far too similar for their own good.

Thomas tilted his head curiously, reading over Alexander’s—well, not so much shoulder as hand. He watched Alexander type out a message informing her and Jane that Thomas had woken up and wanted to talk to them.

Hold on just a fucking second.
He tugged on Alexander’s sleeve insistently until Alexander met his eyes, then gestured at his husband’s phone insistently. Alexander’s eyes furrowed in confusion. “What are you—”

Thomas let out something resembling a growl, vexed by the fact that he couldn’t even communicate basic information. He nodded at the phone.

Alexander glanced between Thomas and his phone few times, before his eyes shone up with realization. “Thomas,” he breathed, a note of hope creeping into his voice, pressing the phone almost into Thomas’ face, “can you understand what this?”

Thomas nodded again, a smile on his face.

Alexander let go of his phone, which fell onto the sheets with a quiet clunk, and wrapped his arms around Thomas. “This is brilliant!” he exclaimed. Thomas coughed, trying to catch his breath. Alexander noticed this, and let go of him hastily. “Sorry,” he apologized. “But this”—he pointed at his phone—”is amazing. You can read English.

The doctor coughed pointedly, watching their exchange with a distinct lack of understanding. He asked Alexander something. Alexander replied, his words hurried, sentences almost tripping over each other in his haste to get them out.

Despite knowing that he couldn’t understand a word of what was going said, Thomas couldn’t help but try to eavesdrop. He took solace in the fact that, based on the doctor’s astounded facial expression, he, too, understood maybe half of what came out of Alexander’s mouth.

Alexander suddenly stopped mid-sentence. His eyes turned calculating as he glanced down at Thomas, who tried not to shudder under the intense scrutiny. Alexander said something aside to the doctor before addressing Thomas. “Can you try typing in English?” he asked, pressing his phone into Thomas’ limp hands.

Thomas turned it over with shaky hands. He lost his grip on the device, which fell down onto the sheets soundlessly. Thomas didn’t look up, not wanting to see the disappointment in Alexander’s eyes. He didn’t think he could stomach being reminded of what an utter failure he was.

A hand reached down and took the phone out of his sight. “Don’t worry about it,” Alexander said with an air of forced cheerfulness. “It was a long shot anyway.” Thomas felt one of Alexander’s hands return to rubbing circles on Thomas’ back. Definitely disappointment, then.

Alexander turned to look at the doctor. It was bit by bit killing him inside to see the way his husband so downtrodden. He paused as something occurred to him. “Wait,” he said in alarm, clutching his phone like it was his last lifeline, “if he can read, how come he can’t understand us when we”—he gestured between them—”speak?”

The doctor shrugged helplessly. “Frankly, sir, I have no explanation for that. As best as I could tell, only the areas controlling his verbal skills have been damaged. Contrary to popular belief, speech and reading is not, in fact, controlled by the same area of the brain.”

Alexander let the doctor’s words wash over him, calming him. He finally slashed a hand through the air, effectively silencing the doctor. “Okay, but he can read,” he said, choosing to focus on the positive aspects, because while he might be a certified genius, medical jabber went over his head—especially when his husband was finally awake.

Alexander grinned, giddy with relief. Thomas was awake. He made it. They both had.

The doctor shook his head in amazement. “Yes,” he confirmed what Alexander already knew, “he
can read, which means that he is not entirely reliant on outside help. I imagine that it must be quite a relief to you both,” he continued with a polite smile.

Alexander shifted awkwardly. “Is there anything else that you—”

“I need to run a few more tests to confirm my diagnosis and rule out other side effects,” the doctor told Alexander, “but I am confident that Mr Jefferson would greatly appreciate your company—as, quite frankly, would I, as my French is woefully limited,” he said teasingly.

Alexander nodded. “Can you just give me five minutes? I need to text someone.”

“Of course, Your Highness,” the doctor bowed his head shallowly. “I’ll prepare the equipment.”

Alexander took a deep breath and let it out, before stepping back into Thomas’ room. Instantly, Thomas’ eyes snapped back to him, and Alexander fought back the wave of guilt that threatened to overwhelm him. Thomas looked so bloody lonely, mute and withdrawn and literally shaking with fear, and it was no one’s fault but Alexander’s. He had, however inadvertently, smothered the flame of his husband’s brilliance, his sharp wit, his passion. How could Thomas look at him with anything but utter disgust for what he had done to him?

“Hey, honey,” Alexander said softly. “I have spoken with the doctor. He wants to run a few more tests to make sure that they haven’t missed anything. Are you alright with that?”

Thomas nodded mutely. Alexander let out a breath he hadn’t noticed that he had been holding. He didn’t know what he would have done if Thomas had put up a fight. “Good, good.”

He leaned down to the level of Thomas’ eyes. Thomas’ eyes flared briefly with something, but it was gone as quickly as it had appeared, and Alexander was left perplexed, struggling to identify it.

“I’m going to text James,” Alexander told Thomas after a moment’s silence. “Tell him that you’re awake. Is that okay with you?”

Thomas nodded numbly. Why couldn’t he just remember whether his best friend spoke French?

He watched his husband’s fingers glide over the smooth surface of the screen, twisting and turning with a dexterity Thomas could not hope to match in his current condition. He looked down at his hands again—they have never been so useless, he thought derisively, anger mounting. In a sudden fit of rage, he tried to clench his fingers into fists. He cried out as an acute burst of pain surged through his body, leaving him exhausted and struggling to catch his breath. Thomas gritted his teeth, squeezing his eyes shut as he tried to fight down the urge to cry. He drew in quick breaths through his nose, but it was as though his lungs weren’t working.

Alexander looked up at the distressed sound. His bewilderment gave way to trepidation and then terror as he watched his husband attempt to catch a breath, his face twisted in pain. He dropped his phone onto the table, the text half-finished, hurrying to Thomas’ bedside. “Thomas, no!” he yelled in alarm, all but forcing Thomas’ fists open. “Let go, please,” Alexander pleaded as he strapped the mask to Thomas’ mouth.

Thomas didn’t react.

“Thomas, let go. I’m here, love. You’re hurting yourself. Relax and take a deep breath.”

There were tears in Thomas’ eyes. Alexander shifted his position so that he was kneeling next to Thomas on his bed. He dabbed the corners of Thomas’ eyes with a tissue he had hastily grabbed from the nightstand.
Thomas blinked furiously, trying to suppress the tears coming from his eyes. Dammit, he hadn’t felt this weak and out of control in a very long time—ever, actually, if he let himself think about it. He hated himself—hated how frail, how feeble, how impotent he felt laying like this, unable to even control his physical reactions. Alexander didn’t deserve being stuck with him; he deserved better than this snotty mess that was Thomas Jefferson—and Thomas couldn’t even tell him that, tell Alexander how amazing he was, because his fucking vocal cords, like every other part of his body, were intently refusing to listen to him.

Alexander whispered sweet nothings into Thomas’ ear until his breathing evened out. He removed his mask, leaning back to be able to study Thomas’ face. “Are you okay?” he asked softly.

Thomas shook his head in response. He swallowed silently, his throat constricting. He coughed loudly, taking several sharp breaths when Alexander once again pressed the gas mask onto his nose. Alexander sighed. He leaned down to kiss Thomas’ brow. “It’s going to be okay,” he said gently. “I’m going to be right here by your side.”

Thomas leaned into Alexander’s touch as he tried to repress the fear he felt flooding him in waves that threatened to bury him.

He had Alexander; he had both of his older sisters; he had James; hell, he even had the Washingtons. Thomas has all these people around him—and yet, even though he was awake, curled up against his husband’s side, in an ironic twist, they both felt lonelier than ever.

After a more thorough inspection, the doctors informed them that, apart from the damage that Hancock had already informed Alexander of, there was also the risk of seizures. There was a noticeable change in Alexander after that: he was more protective—possessive, even, at times—of Thomas; he acted as though Thomas was made of glass, ready to shatter at any minute; he point-blank refused to leave Thomas alone in a room Thomas could have a seizure and Alexander wouldn’t even be there to help.

Thomas hated it, hated the way Alexander would hover uncertainly when it was clear that he had somewhere else to be, simply because someone in a white lab coat had told him that Thomas might experience seizures. Thomas called bullshit.

He dragged a hand across his face, sighing loudly. He hated feeling like—what was the word to describe a helpless person completely at the mercy of others? Thomas couldn’t remember, but that was exactly how he felt.

He saw that Alexander was worried about him, but he couldn’t do anything about it.

Thomas felt tears amassing in his eyes. He cursed himself for the way his emotions fluctuated from one extreme to another in a split second. The emotional roller-coaster was exhausting, draining him of the little energy he had, and yet he couldn’t find a way to disembark.

He couldn’t stop the tears from running down his cheeks, and he hated himself for it. He let out a quiet sob.

Alexander glanced at Thomas. His heart broke when he saw the state Thomas was in. His cheeks were glistening with tears. Alexander sat down next to Thomas and wrapped his arms around his husband, drawing him against Alexander, and tucking his head under Alexander’s chin in an echo of how Thomas used to comfort him after a truly bad day. Alexander felt Thomas go still at the touch. He forced himself not to react to it. “Shhh. It’s okay, love,” he said quietly. “It’s okay. You’re
allowed to cry. You’ve been through literal hell. Just let it all out.”

Thomas cried. With every tear he shed, his self-loathing grew. He was supposed to be above these mood shifts—he wasn’t a fucking toddler, or, worse, an adolescent with raging hormone levels. He was a snot-stained mess. Never mind talking, he couldn’t even breathe on his own—even his own lungs seemed to have given up on him.

Then again, Thomas couldn’t communicate with the outside world via anything more advanced than a nod. He would like to see anyone do any better in his position.

No, he changed his mind a second later as he curled up in Alexander’s lap. Alexander would have been able to do better. Alexander was a hundred times stronger than Thomas could ever dream to be. He was the kind of person Thomas strove towards being.

The door opened. Alexander paused mid-word as both he and Thomas glanced over to the source of the sound. Alexander felt his husband’s body go still as they registered the identities of his visitors.

“Thomas,” Jane breathed softly.

Mary practically shrieked with joy, her face shining up like a child’s on Christmas morning, and, ignoring any kind of decorum, rushed over to hug the life out of Thomas, while Jane hovered hesitantly in the doorway. Alexander motioned for her to come in. Jane gave him a grateful smile as she observed Mary and Thomas’ interaction.

To her credit, Mary didn’t talk away ten thousand words a minute, instead watching Thomas silently. So someone had told them what was going on, Thomas thought absentmindedly. Good.

Thomas stomach twisted as he looked between Mary and Jane. Whatever he had been expecting, it hadn’t been this. He hadn’t been sure that they even still gave a shit about him, not after all these years apart, and especially not after him falling for a guy, which he knew they would never approve of or understand, and when he had issued the invitations to their wedding and every one of his family members had RSVP’d a polite but decisive ‘no’, he thought that it had been the end of it, the end of Thomas’ interaction with the rest of the Jeffertons. It had stung, yes—they were his family, after all—but his world hadn’t exactly fallen apart because of it. He had lived on his own, maintaining only minimum contact with his parents for years. It would hardly be a novelty.

But now—? They were here, they had made an active effort to travel to see him, and, from the looks of it, were even on friendly terms with his husband (God, Alexander was his husband—they were fucking married, and the mere thought should have filled Thomas’ stomach with giddiness, so why didn’t it?), something that had been beyond the wildest of Thomas’ dreams.

They—cared. Jane and Mary cared. It shouldn’t have been as startling a thought as it was.

He hadn’t realized that he said it out loud until Alexander’s face turned ashen, looking like someone had driven over his puppy and left him to die by the side of the road. Alexander spoke, probably translating Thomas’ words into English for the sisters’ benefit, even though some things were better kept a secret, and Thomas wished that Alexander would learn that.

The next thing he knew, he once again had an armful of Mary Jefferson, with Jane lingering by his side with a resolute look on her face. Mary babbled something that Thomas couldn’t hope to understand. Thomas let out a pained hiss when Mary’s embrace became a little too strong. He coughed, and Mary started back in the same moment as Alexander took a decisive step forward,
mask in his hand at the ready. Thomas shook his head to indicate that he was okay for the moment. Alexander gave him a skeptical look that conveyed his disbelief stronger than any words could, but resumed his position by the wall, his fingers still wrapped around the mask.

Thomas turned to Jane, who was holding up the whiteboard. He squinted to make out her fine writing.

*Of course we care, dolt.*

A not altogether unexpected wave of relief washed over him. He smiled, trying to convey his emotions as well as he could. Judging by Mary and Jane’s ecstatic smiles, he had succeeded.

As Jane went back to writing on the whiteboard again, Mary began speaking again. Thomas glanced helplessly at Alexander, hoping that his husband would translate whatever the hell his sister was trying to say. Alexander was staring at Mary thoughtfully, his eyes flickering slightly back and forth in the empty air as they were wont to do when he was focused on something, his brain shifting and discarding information, trying to put together the pieces.

Mary finally stopped, looking at Alexander expectantly. Thomas exhaled in relief. So she hadn’t been expecting for him to understand it after all. Thomas had to admit that it was a little humiliating to be forced to use Alexander as his human translator for his native language, never mind the fact that Alexander was his husband and had seen him at his worst, that he had taken care of Thomas when Thomas could not. There was something intricately wrong about this situation, but, loathed as he was to admit it, there was little Thomas could do about it at the moment.

Alexander turned to Thomas. “She says that she misses you and that it had been a dick move to break contact with your family—”

Thomas glared at Mary. It hadn't been his fault, dammit. His mother had been the one to ignore his letters, even before the prince story had broken out, and he had certainly not voluntarily chosen to skip Thanksgiving. Not that it mattered now—that decision had been taken out of his hands months before.

“—and that you're a dork, which I feel inclined to agree with, by the way,” Alexander went on. He ran out of air and was forced to stop and take a breath, then continued. “She also says that you're an idiot for marrying me.”

As if on cue, Mary wrenched the whiteboard from Jane's hands, scribbling something frantically. She held up the board. *You're an idiot,* the letters spelled out.

Thomas stifled a grin. Alexander rolled his eyes. He said something to Mary, who stuck out his tongue at him. Alexander's face softened as he glanced back at Thomas; he intertwined his fingers in Thomas’, squeezing his hand gently as he ran his other hand down the side of Thomas’ face, his thumb finally coming to rest on Thomas’ cheekbone. There were so many feelings—so much affection and love and guilt—in his eyes that Thomas way tempted to look away. He didn’t.

*You're sickeningly adorable,* she had written. *If I get diabetes, I'm sending you the bill.*

Mary made a show of gagging. She deadpanned something, which Alexander studiously ignored.

As if on cue, Mary wrenched the whiteboard from Jane's hands, scribbling something frantically. She held up the board. *You're an idiot,* the letters spelled out.

Thomas stifled a grin. Alexander rolled his eyes. He said something to Mary, who stuck out his tongue at him. Alexander's face softened as he glanced back at Thomas; he intertwined his fingers in Thomas’, squeezing his hand gently as he ran his other hand down the side of Thomas’ face, his thumb finally coming to rest on Thomas’ cheekbone. There were so many feelings—so much affection and love and guilt—in his eyes that Thomas way tempted to look away. He didn’t.

Mary made a show of gagging. She deadpanned something, which Alexander studiously ignored. Jane rolled her eyes. She wiped whatever she had been writing, scrawling something hastily. She held up the board. Thomas squinted at the small letters, trying to make them out. Her handwriting was fancy, but all but impossible to read. *You're sickeningly adorable,* she had written. *If I get diabetes, I'm sending you the bill.*

Thomas offered her a faint smile which he hoped was reassuring. Damn, he hated feeling so trapped and worthless, unable to even talk to his own sister.
Jane erased the letters *All jokes aside, it's good to see you again, brother,* she continued.

*It's good to see that you actually love each other. We've been worried*

Jane's hand stopped. She bit her lip like she was considering her words. Jane finally wiped the board. *You're in good hands,* she scribbled simply.

*Debatable,* Mary added in red under Jane's black letters, having hunted down a second marker.

Alexander rolled his eyes. He said something aside to Mary, who scoffed.

*We're happy for you,* Jane wrote. *You deserve someone who loves you.*

Alexander fidgeted, clearly uncomfortable with Jane's words.

Mary grunted something to Jane, who passed on the board to her sister with a huff. *She was hogging the board,* Mary explained, her letters much larger and distinct than Jane’s old-fashioned handwriting. *My turn.*

Thomas couldn’t help but laugh at his sisters’ antics. The wheezes turned into coughs as Thomas suddenly couldn’t get enough breath again he couldn’t breathe couldn’t get enough air why was this happening to—

Alexander was at his side in an instant, pressing the mask Thomas had come to despise to his face. Thomas glared at it as he inhaled; it represented everything he hated: being doubly dependent on it and on Alexander, being an invalid—*that* was the word he had been looking for, being trapped here with no way out, and unable to talk to anyone bar two people, one of whom hated his guts. He hated Alexander hovering over him.

Thomas cried. He didn't know why; he wasn't feeling more sad than he was five minutes ago. Frustrated, yes; helpless, yes; but not sad; and yet, he lost control of his emotions like a fucking toddler. Maybe Alexander was right to coddle him, since he clearly wasn’t working at full capacity. He was fucking pathetic, was what he was.

Thomas vaguely heard a whoosh, indicating that the door had been opened and closed. Alexander had probably talked his sisters into giving them some space, although how he managed to convince Mary to leave, Thomas couldn’t fathom. Gratefulness flooded through him. It was bad enough that Alexander had to watch his constant breakdowns; he didn’t think he could stomach it if his sisters saw him like this. Maybe it was selfish, but he wanted them to remember him as he was before—not as the sniveling mess he was now.

When he got the breathing under control, the mask disappeared, only to be replaced with a plastic cup filled with several white pills.

“Hey, Thomas.” Alexander’s voice came from somewhere above Thomas’ right ear. “You need to take these.”

Thomas shook his head numbly. He didn’t think that he could stomach *anything* right about now. Besides, what was the use in taking this medicine when he wasn’t getting any better? He wouldn’t get better, he realized with a start, and it was about time that he faced that fact.

The hand not holding the cup moved to massage Thomas’ scalp. “I know, I know,” Alexander said soothingly. “It sucks right now, and I’m not going to lie to you—it’s going to suck for quite some time still. But it will get better—you will get better—and these medicines are here to make sure that you get recover quicker. They’re good for you.”
Thomas closed his eyes. The silence—the eerie, strange silence—was permeated by his loud and sharp breaths, and the occasional beeps coming from the machine Thomas was hooked up to. He was relying on fucking machines to survive. How did Alexander delude himself into thinking that Thomas could recover from this? It seemed impossible—no, it was impossible.

His thoughts spiraled downward, his panic increasing with every second as one thing after another occurred to him. He swallowed.

He hadn’t noticed that his body was shaking until Alexander swaddled Thomas up in his arms, wrapping him up in a human cocoon of sorts.

“Shh,” the ginger said gently. “Relax. You’re safe. You’re going to be okay. I will make sure of that.”

Thomas tried to find comfort in Alexander’s words, but instead, he ended up curling into himself, Alexander’s body shielding him from reality. He couldn’t help but think that it was poetic, somehow—they had met when Alexander had been running from his problems, and now, Thomas was the one avoiding his problems while Alexander was trying to coax him out of his shell.

He couldn’t quite find it in himself to find comfort in that, either.

On the third day, when Thomas opened his mouth, actual words came out. For Thomas, it felt as though a weight had been taking off his shoulders.

That was also the day Alexander had taken it upon himself to teach Thomas English again. He knew how much it hurt Thomas to have to rely on Alexander, and he sought to relieve him of even a fraction of the pain.

“Coffee,” Thomas said slowly, tasting the word as though it was foreign food in his mouth. He furrowed his brows. “The pronunciation is weird. Why do you make this… lilt at the end of the word?” he asked curiously.

Alexander smiled. “Because I’m British, Thomas. We tend to do that—makes us sound more sophisticated.”


Alexander snorted. “I’m aware of that, love, but I can’t teach you the American pronunciation. You’re going to have to ask your sisters or James about that.”

Thomas scrunched up his nose. “But I’m going to sound like a prat,” he pouted.

Alexander stifled a grin as he muttered something under his breath. Thomas frowned. “What did you just—did you just insult me?” he demanded.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “No, Thomas. I said—” he hesitated as a blush came appeared on his face. He cleared his throat. “I said that I love you.”

Thomas’ face snapped up. He met Alexander’s eyes. He mouthed the words silently. “I leave you?” he said finally.

Alexander’s laugh washed over him like a lukewarm cascade. It felt like a unicorn had crapped a rainbow right into Thomas’ ears. Alexander leaned down. “I love you,” he whispered into Thomas’
ear, sending shivers through Thomas’ body.


Thomas blinked. “What does that”—he waved his fingers, then stopped, wincing as the pain coursed through his hand—”mean?”

Alexander smirked mischievously. He rubbed his hands, a gesture that wouldn’t have looked out of place in an action scene where the villain was about to unveil his wicked plan. “Oh, this should be fun.”

Thomas was still mouthing ‘you’re welcome’—he was trying out different pronunciations, but it was quite a difficult thing to when Thomas didn’t even know what accents there were because his brain seemed to have decided to forget that as well—when the door opened. Thomas glanced up briefly, only to freeze when he met the frantic eyes of James Madison. The man himself looked like he had been swept up in a flurry—with his windswept coat, bloodshot eyes, and fists clenched so hard that it looked like he might crush the bag he was holding, he was really rocking the bedraggled look.

“Thomas,” James breathed. The bag clattered to the floor with a muffled thud as James rushed forward to embrace him. He pressed Thomas’ immobile body against his chest, which felt downright ridiculous considering that Thomas had almost a foot on him. It was adorable, all things considered. Thomas had never thought that he would openly acknowledge, at least to himself, that he thought that James was sweet—before Alexander, he would have considered the sort of thing too ‘gay’ by far, and even once he and Alexander had gotten together, there were certain things that, in Thomas’ mind, were still taboo—but a near-death experience had a way of shifting people’s priorities. Things like that didn’t seem to matter as much now, especially not considering that the fact that Thomas was even alive to witness James act the way he did was nothing short of a miracle.

James began to speak—well, babble aimlessly was a more accurate description. Thomas tensed up under James’ arms. Thomas could not distinguish more than a few words amidst the torrent that poured out of James’ mouth.

Had no one told James? Why hadn’t Alexander told him?

“I don’t—I can’t understand you,” Thomas finally cut him off. James leaned back to be able to take in all of Thomas’ face, When James only stared at him incomprehensibly, Thomas forced himself to take a deep breath, even though he was on the verge of freaking out. “I don’t speak English,” he said slowly, hoping that James’ knowledge of French extended this far at the very least.

James’ face fell. Thomas imagined that the expression on his face must look similar.

Movement by the door distracted Thomas from the armful. He met Alexander’s eyes, and the two exchanged a knowing look. “Tell him to write it out,” Thomas pleaded almost desperately. James gave both Alexander and Thomas curious looks. “Please.”

Alexander bit his lip. He undid his hair, only to tie it up again into a ponytail. “There’s something that I have neglected to tell you,” he admitted.

“That much is obvious,” James snapped.

Despite not understanding the words themselves, Thomas winced at their tone.
Alexander’s eyes narrowed in disapproval. “Don’t speak like that,” he said, voice carefully neutral so as not to startle Thomas further. He sighed. “The truth is that Thomas doesn’t understand English.”

James stilled. “What do you mean?” he asked tentatively, dreading the answer.

“Exactly what you think it means,” Alexander said somberly. “He woke up and had forgotten how to speak English. He only remembers how to speak French, for some bloody reason.” Thomas flinched at the bitterness in Alexander’s voice, and Alexander offered him a brief ‘sorry’ before turning his attention back to James. “He can’t understand speech either, but he can still read when you write something in English.” He motioned like he was writing something in the air, then gesturing at James. Thomas nodded eagerly, recognizing the movement for what it was.

“Wh—”

“I tried asking,” Alexander forestalled the inevitable question, “but the only answer I’m getting is some bullshit about verbal and nonverbal communications being disconnected.” That said, he presented James with a whiteboard, all but pressing a pen into his hands. “Here. Thomas said to tell you to write what you wanted to say. He won’t be able to write back—his hands are too shaky—but he can nod or shake his head, and I can translate whatever he wants me to.”

James let out an uneasy breath. “I really wish I had taken French,” he muttered under his breath as he accepted the board and the pen from Alexander.

While he was waiting for James to finish writing, Thomas turned to Alexander. “I need to learn how to say ‘I don’t speak English’ in English,” he demanded.

Alexander nodded, suddenly looking weary. “I know, but that’s an entire sentence. You’ve only done single phrases until—”

“I managed ‘I love you’ well enough,” Thomas snapped, making a point to say the phrase in English. James’ head snapped up, recognizing the familiar speech, but Thomas had already switched back to French. “I think that I can handle another few syllables.”

Alexander rubbed the corners of his eyes. “Sure,” he agreed. “Okay. Do you want to do that now or later?” he asked tentatively, as though apprehensive about the answer.

Thomas hesitated, glancing at his friend, who was frowning down at the board in thought. “Later,” he finally decided. He didn’t want James to see the way his closest friend struggled with even the easiest of words that ought to have come naturally to him. Thomas didn’t need that kind of humiliation.

Besides, if he said it, it would begin to really sink in, become real, and Thomas had neither the time nor the energy to deal with that. A quick glance at Alexander told him that his husband was thinking along similar lines.

James tapped his shoulder and gestured to the white board.

_They've finally found a way to keep you quiet, I see_, it read, and Thomas couldn’t help but laugh a little, if only at the absurdity of the situation.

“I’m surprised it took them this long,” he replied, doing his best to keep the situation light. James chuckled weakly as Alexander translated. “How are things States-side?”

_The usual. Nothing gets done until it has to, and nobody agrees on anything._
“Nice to know that the sun comes up and the world still spins,” Thomas said as he rolled his eyes.

James stared at him for a moment, and then scribbled, *Have you been working on English?*

Thomas was about to answer, but then grinned. “Yes,” he replied mimicking the way Alexander had said it.

James choked on air. He turned to Alexander. “You're making him sound like Mary Poppins!” he hissed indignantly, ignoring Thomas’ bewildered look as the two switched to English.

Alexander placed his hands on his hips, the picture of affront. “Well I'm sorry, but the only people here to teach him English are Lafayette and myself, and I figured I was the lesser of those two evils,” he snapped. "Believe me, if Lafayette was teaching him, he would sound like an elitist snob."

James stared. "Like he doesn't *already*?" he retorted. “He sounds like he's one wand short of a Hogwarts student! If he were to walk into a closet, he'd find Narnia!"

Alexander glared. “Well, at least he wouldn’t find himself from a year ago,” he snapped.

Thomas glanced between his best friend and his husband like he was watching a tennis game. He didn't understand most—if not everything—of what was being said. To him, it all sounded like ‘blah blah blah Thomas blah blah Lafayette blah blah Narnia blah blah blah’.

He coughed, trying to get their attention, but the two seemed content to debate like he wasn’t even in the fucking room.

“Could you both shut the fuck up?!” he yelled.

Both heads snapped his way. James looked puzzled, while Alexander’s face was apologetic. “I’m sorry, love,” he said to Thomas in French, before turning to James and switching languages. “He told us to be quiet, if not in those words,” he translated.

“I am *still here,*” Thomas growled, “Stop talking over my head like I'm some—some idiot child.”

Alexander bit his lip. “I’m sorry,” he repeated. “That was incredibly rude of us.” He then said something to James in English.

James turned and said something to Thomas. Thomas shook his head; he still didn’t understand a word of what James had said.

“He said he’s sorry,” Alexander translated quickly, before the situation could escalate. A part of his brain couldn’t help but point out the irony— **him**, Alexander Hamilton, acting as the peacekeeper. Lafayette would have had a field day if he were here.

James said it again, and Thomas furrowed his eyebrows. “I—I’m… sore-ie?” he asked, fumbling over the words. He winced. God, how *pathetic* was he?

Alexander opened his mouth, no doubt to repeat himself, but James cut him off with a wave of his hand. “Sar-ee,” he said.

“Sar-ee. Saree. Sorry,” Thomas repeated over and over until it no longer felt odd in his mouth.

James smiled and grabbed the whiteboard. *There. Now you sound like a real American.*

Alexander crossed his arms. “He sounds like a second-rate actor from a Clint Eastwood movie,” he told James with a huff.
“He sounds like *himself*, you tea-guzzling asshole,” James retorted.

Thomas’ head snapped up. He recognised the word ‘asshole’ from Alexander, but it made no sense in this context. Why would James convey his affections in such a harsh way? Unless he meant it sarcastically—which Thomas wouldn’t put past James, fond as he was of double meanings. It was part of what made him such a good politician—as well as, at times, an irritating conversation partner, because no one wanted to talk to someone who sounded like an enigmatic troll on crack.

“Why did James just call you ‘darling’?” Thomas asked curiously.

Alexander’s eyebrows furrowed. “What are you—Oh.” He bit his lip, as if trying to hold back laughter.

A lightbulb went off in Thomas’ head. “What does ‘asshole’ actually mean?” Thomas asked, enunciating the word slowly. He had a sneaking suspicion that Alexander hadn’t actually told him the whole truth.

Alexander wasn’t quite able to keep a blush from his face. He looked away from Thomas’ accusing eyes, a faint smile on his lips. “I may have… bent the truth a little,” he admitted.

Thomas’ eyes narrowed. “*Alexander*…” There was a light threat in his voice.

James was furtively glancing between Alexander and Thomas, as Alexander chuckled. “I’m sorry, but it was *hilarious*. I just couldn’t resist.”

“‘No’ is a three-letter word,” Thomas rolled his eyes, but there wasn’t much heat behind his words.

James asked Alexander something, who just shook his head with an unrepentant grin. James blinked, then scribbled something on the board. *What did he tell you asshole meant?*

Thomas glanced at Alexander, who wasn’t bothering to stifle a smirk. There was no way that his husband would translate whatever he said. Instead, Thomas steeled himself, gritting his teeth, and lifted up his hands to cup his hands into a heart. James choked on his breath. Alexander’s smirk grew. He said something aside to James, whose facial expression shifted into one of utter exasperation.

Thomas was content to simply lay there and enjoy the scene. It was the first time he was truly happy since he had woken up.

James said something in English, to which Alexander shook his head. At Thomas’ inquisitive look, Alexander translated. “James was wondering whether you’ve learned how to say ‘you’re welcome’ in English yet.”

Thomas met James’ eyes, then shook his head. “No,” he replied. “You’re welcome,” he repeated.”
“Yor wale-cum,” Thomas said obligingly.

James murmured something, smiling in approval. Thomas tilted his head, confused. Alexander said something quickly to James, who nodded. “Good,” he said slowly in English, giving Thomas a thumb up; smile was somewhat strained at the edges.

All of a sudden, it was as though a switch had been flipped inside Thomas’ brain. All Thomas felt like doing was collapsing into the bed and never getting up again—never having to face the reality that no, he wasn’t doing all that great after all, and that his husband was slowly falling apart because of him, and he couldn’t even remember one single word, one bloody word, and he would never speak English again as fluently as he did before, and never again be able to communicate with James or his sisters or anyone.

Before he knew what was up and what was down, he found himself tears, his head in Alexander’s lap as his husband massaged his temples, making soothing sounds to calm him down. The mask was around his nose, which was probably the only reason Thomas was still alive, just as it has been ever since he fucking woke up because he couldn’t even breathe on his own, and James was gone because he couldn’t stand to look at Thomas and Thomas couldn’t honestly blame him because he wouldn’t be able to look at himself either if he were in James’ shoes but it still hurt because James was his best—

“Thomas,” said Alexander, combing through his curls, “let it go. Relax.”

Thomas felt a hand remove the mask, only to press a straw into his mouth. “It’s medicine,” Alexander explained. “Drink it. It’s good for you.”

Thomas didn’t want. Didn’t Alexander see that it wasn’t helping? It would never fucking help.

“Drink,” the voice prompted.

Thomas drank, if only to make the voice go away and just leave him alone—

Before he knew it, Thomas was dozing off, Alexander’s face the last thing on his mind before he was claimed by Morpheus’ blissful arms.

Chapter End Notes

What are endings if not cliffhangers unto a continuation?

For the people who asked about the fluffy work that was literally created as an antitoxin to this, it's under 'inspired works'.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Hamilton is angsty, a Lafayette is long overdue, and the author did honestly did not mean to write this much angst.

Chapter Notes

Look at me, being all regular and responsible with updates.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Physical therapy was… hard. Thomas had known that before getting started.

There was no getting around the fact, or assuaging it. It was hard—both physically and mentally, it was the most painful thing he had ever done in his life.

Having Alexander by his side helped. Some days, it felt like Alexander was the only reason Thomas even kept going. Thomas didn't know what he would have done without him by his side. Not been poisoned, drewled a sarcastic part of his brain, which Thomas squashed like a bug. It had all the importance of one, anyway.

“Come on, love,” Alexander coaxed gently, standing next to Thomas, not quite hovering but also not not-hovering. It wasn’t a feeling Thomas knew how to describe. “You can do it.”

Thomas gritted his teeth. “Yes, thank you,” he snapped. “How about you try it while I’ll watch?”

Alexander flinched at Thomas’ words, and he immediately wished that he could take them back. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say—I mean, you’re amazing and gentle and patient and I couldn’t wish for—” Thomas was aware of the fact that he was rambling, but he couldn’t seem to stop.

Alexander placed a calming hand on Thomas’ shoulder. “I know, Thomas,” he said softly. “You’re doing your best. I can’t ask more of you than that of you.”

The therapist averted her eyes. She took a few steps back, thankfully giving the two men the illusion of privacy.

Thomas stared at Alexander’s lips, his eyes flickering quickly, suddenly wishing that he could just lean forward and kiss them. His body’s physical limitations didn’t just rob Thomas of basic independence regarding things like walking or eating or even breathing—he couldn’t even show the man he loved how much he loved him, couldn’t lean forward and touch him and just be able to feel him to ascertain that yes, Alexander was real and still at his side and, against all odds, hadn’t abandoned him yet.

Something he had taken for granted had been ripped away from him in an instant. Most things, actually. He couldn’t imagine what Alexander had gone through, keeping vigil at his bedside for two
and a half months, trying desperately not to give up hope.

Alexander seemed to notice Thomas’ staring. He caught his gaze, smiling slightly before he closed the distance between them, pressing his lips against Thomas’ in a light kiss. Thomas whimpered against Alexander’s mouth. After the weeks in bed, he was desperate for any kind of physical contact. While Alexander’s tendency to show his sentiment for Thomas was nice, they weren’t enough. Thomas needed human contact like he needed air to breathe—and Alexander was just the right person for the job.

Alexander grinned into the kiss, and wasn’t it just the most amazing feeling in the whole world. Thomas never wanted it to stop, never wanted the kiss to stop. He wanted to stay like this for forever. The world could go fuck itself sideways on a cactus sans lube for all Thomas cared.

All too soon, Alexander withdrew from the kiss. They were both breathing heavily, as though they had run a marathon, but at least Thomas had an excuse for being so out of shape—he had been bedridden for months. Alexander, though, seemed to just be really bad at holding his breath.

They were both grinning like fools.

Alexander leaned his forehead against Thomas so that mere inches separated them. He looked inquisitively into Thomas’ eyes, seemingly searching for something. Whatever it had been, he seemed to have found it. His grin widened. “I’m glad to see that I can still undo you,” he told Thomas, a twinkle in his eye. “It’s quite cute to watch you come apart in my hands.”

“Oh, fuck off,” Thomas replied with a huff. Alexander snickered. Thomas couldn’t help but grin back at his husband.

The therapist cleared her throat, reminding the two men of her presence. Right, Thomas remembered. Seriousness. She spoke in a measured, somewhat scolding yet light tone. Alexander nodded at her words.

As Thomas waited for Alexander to translate, some of his earlier anger and frustration came back full-force. He shouldn’t need to have his husband translate every word that was being said around him, but he did. He hated every minute of it.

Alexander finally turned back to Thomas. “She said that while she was delighted to see us act like sappy puppies,” Alexander reported cheerfully, the smile still on his lips, “she needed to remind us that we are here for a reason.”

Thomas sorely wished that he could cross his arms. “You mean that I am here for a reason,” he corrected. “You don’t have to be here, you know.”

The smile slipped from Alexander’s lips. He crinkled his eyebrows in concern at Thomas’ sudden mood change. “Love, you know I want to be here. I need to be here. I don’t want to leave you alone.”

“Because you’re convinced that I’m going to have a seizure the moment you let me out of your sight.” Thomas suppressed the urge to huff. “You can’t hide it from me. I see the distress on your face when you don’t think I’m looking.”

Alexander reached out, as if to touch Thomas’ face, but his hand stopped mid-movement, hovering uncertainly in the air before falling back to his side. “Thomas—”

Thomas shook his head. “Just—let’s keep going, okay?”
Alexander had a determined expression on his face, the kind that said that this discussion was by no means over, but he nodded decisively.

“Let’s go,” Thomas said in English.

The therapist started, not having expected the words. Even though Thomas just knew that he was mispronouncing something, the slightly bitter feeling it left on his tongue was well worth the smile blossoming up on Alexander’s face.

“Yes, let’s try again,” Alexander replied.

“What's your name?” Alexander asked slowly.


“How was your day?” Alexander asked, cupping his face in his hands. Thomas imagined him lying on his stomach, kicking his legs in the air.

“Um…” Fuck. “Good. Good. How was yours?” Thomas replied slowly, going over each word, its meaning, and its pronunciation in his mind.

“It is better now,” Alexander said with a grin, and Thomas took a moment to process the unexpected response.

“Uh… what you did today?” Thomas asked.

“‘What did you do today’, love,” Alexander told him.

Thomas wanted to rip out his hair, because honestly, this was unfair. “This is ridiculous!” he shouted. “Why is English so hard?”

“Because you just started relearning it a week ago?” Alexander reminded him softly.

“It's—it's—ugh! I just—things won’t stick. It wasn't this hard to learn French!” Thomas exclaimed.

“Thomas! Thomas, dear—”

“‘You know that I'm right! It's like—things used to just stay ; I didn't have to try to remember—I just could!’ Thomas was close to tears now, and it just pissed him off more. “Sometimes—sometimes you say things, and I know they should make sense, but they just don't, and—and—”

“Thomas,” Alexander said firmly, taking him by the shoulders, “I need you to calm down, please. Please. You're going to hurt yourself.”

Thomas finally took a deep breath and rested his head on Alexander's shoulder. “I hate it,” he muttered. “I hate it so much.”

“I know, love. I know. Your speech isn't unimpeachable, but you're getting better, I promise. You got through almost an entire conversation, and even though you stumbled over a sentence, I still knew what you meant,” Alexander replied gently as he ran a hand through Thomas’ curls. “You told the nurse you were thirsty earlier. You told Hancock to shut up. You're doing wonderfully, love. Just…” he sighed. “Give it time.”

For once, Thomas didn't argue. He couldn't find any energy in him to argue.
“I—I’m sorry,” Thomas said, and then in English, like a mantra—like a prayer—”I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Alexander reassured him.

Thomas couldn’t help but think about how much their roles had been reversed. Thomas was the emotional mess, swinging from mood to mood like a hysteric Tarzan. Alexander was level-headed, was calm, was calm and dependable and steady. Thomas was quick to anger while Alexander urged him to calm down. Thomas worked himself until he was blue in the face, not accepting even the slightest of mistakes, whilst Alexander told him to slow down, to give it time, to relax.

Thomas was suddenly struck by an odd feeling, like he had fallen down the rabbit hole—he had become Alice and this was Wonderland, and the world had turned upside down.

His breath hitched.

“How long will it take for me to relearn English?” Thomas asked, hoping that he didn’t sound as desperate as he felt.

Alexander shrugged helplessly. “In all honesty, I don’t know. Learning a language usually takes anywhere from months to years, but I’ve never had to relearn one, so we are on uncharted territory here.”

“Months,” Thomas echoed. There wasn’t disbelief in his voice, nor was it a question.

Alexander nodded wordlessly. “Adults typically take longer than kids since their pathways are already formed, which makes it harder to make the new connections required to learn a new language,” he added mournfully, reflecting some of the anxiety Thomas could feel building up inside of him.

It would take months, at best, for Thomas to be able to speak English with any kind of fluency—and even then, he doubted whether he would ever be able to attain the same kind of mastery over the language as he had before their wedding. For months, he would lose a large piece of his independence. He wouldn’t regain what was still essentially an important piece of his personal identity—what made Thomas Thomas.

For months, he wouldn’t be himself.

“I do not—” he tried in English before giving up and switching to French. “I don’t know whether I’ll be able to do it.”

Alexander opened his mouth, but his words were drowned out by a knock at the door.

Alexander said a few words that Thomas had slowly inferred meant ‘enter’, or some form of it, and the door swung open.

“George James Alexander Jefferson-Hamilton-Washington,” Lafayette said loudly, his French distinctly different from Alexander’s, “you have five minutes to say goodbye, and then you are getting your insufferable ass home. This is not a request.”

“You can’t tell me—”

“I am tired of doing your job. You are going. Thomas won't die while you're gone,” Lafayette snapped.
“But if I'm not”— Alexander tried to argue.

“I will stay. He will be in safe hands,” Lafayette said. “Now hurry and do your romance thing so that you can go get yelled at by His Majesty for once.”

Alexander hissed something at Lafayette in English—and the irony of Lafayette understanding it and not him was not lost on Thomas—before he turned back to Thomas. “I'll be back soon, I swear,” he promised, and then added, in English, “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Thomas replied. He pushed himself up for a kiss, wincing at the pain.

Alexander gave him a concerned look. He seemed to be about to say something when Lafayette ushered him out. “Shoo, shoo,” he said. “Thomas will not shatter while you do paperwork, he is tough.”

He shut the door behind Alexander. Thomas gave him a wary glance. Lafayette held up a finger. He shouted something in English—Thomas picked up a few words, something to do with his father and the maître?—through the closed door. Not waiting for a reply, he crossed the room, taking the chair vacated by Alexander. “So,” he began. “How have you been?”

Thomas let out a stifled laugh. “Well,” he made a show of looking at himself, “apart from being nearly assassinated, spending two and a half months in a coma, being unable to walk or even move, and losing my ability to speak my native language, I’m fine,” he drawled. “Just dandy. How are you?” he shot back.

Lafayette shrugged. “Now that I’m not being yelled at by the king for failing at something I’m definitely not qualified for, I’m good, thank you for asking.” He took a deep breath. “I figured you might want a new conversation partner. Alexander can get rather, let us say, repetitive after awhile,” he grinned.

Thomas snorted. “That's definitely one way to put it,” he agreed. “Has he been acting… odd lately, in your opinion?” he asked delicately.

Lafayette shrugged. “Alexander is Alexander; what's odd for the rest of us is normal for him. Why do you ask?” he turned Thomas’ question on the man himself.

“I'm worried about him,” Thomas replied honestly.

Lafayette snorted. “You, in a hospital bed, practically paralyzed and hooked up to what could basically constitute as the entire Galactic Fleet, are worried about him?” he asked.

Thomas shrugged. “That's love, I guess.”

Lafayette stared at him for a moment. “I do not believe I have been in any way... subtle about my doubts regarding your intentions,” he said slowly. “I would chalk it up to my affections for our little lion—he is as a close to a brother as I will ever have, and I love him—but... that does not excuse my hostility towards you, Thomas. You are, for better or for worse, the person Alexander loves, and I see that you truly love him in return.” Lafayette took a breath. “I apologise for my actions, Thomas, and I hope we can put our... initial conflict behind us.”

Thomas wrinkled his nose. “Like the way you threatened to publish my early sketches if I ever broke Alex’s heart?”

Lafayette winced. “‘Threatened’ is such an ugly word. I prefer the term 'influential persuasion'. And I would not call him ‘Alex’ if I were you,” he warned.
Thomas raised his eyebrows. “Why not?” he asked curiously.

Lafayette hesitated. “It is a term of endearment that Alexander associates with John. Laurens,” he elaborated, as if there was any need.

Thomas closed his eyes, wishing that he wasn’t in a bed so that he could collapse onto it. Drama queen, snickered a part of his brain that sounded suspiciously like Alexander. Thomas quenched it. He was bloody well allowed to be jealous of his husband’s ex-boyfriend.

“Don’t worry,” Lafayette hurried to add, seeing Thomas’ face, “whatever feelings he may still harbour towards John, they pale in comparison to what he feels towards you.”

“Was that supposed to make me feel better?” Thomas retorted. “Because you’re a shitty therapist. I hope you know that.”

Lafayette shrugged. “I’m not here to comfort you—that’s Alexander’s job,” he said simply. “I’m here to make sure you know the facts.”

“How reassuring.” Thomas’ voice was dripping with sarcasm.

Lafayette didn’t rise up to Thomas’ words. Instead, he reached into his bag and took out a few books. “I brought you something,” he said—gratuitously, because it was pretty fucking self-explanatory. What other reason did someone have for towing around four thick books in their backpack? Not even Alexander was this much of a sesquipedalian. Logophile. Book-lover. Whatever.

Thomas chanced a look at the titles. He raised an eyebrow when he recognized the authors. “You got me philosophy?” he asked rhetorically.

Lafayette smiled. “I’ve heard that you’re fond of Locke and Bacon.”

Thomas couldn’t stop his lips from twisting into a smile. “I don’t know who you got that news from,” he said slowly, “but I owe them a fruit basket.”

“I believe your husband will be inclined to share it with you,” Lafayette teased. “Though, fair warning, he hates pineapples.”

“Change of plans,” Thomas decided. “He’s getting a fucking tomato instead.”

Lafayette groaned. “You two deserve each other.”

Physical therapy wasn’t the same without Alexander by his side. Thomas knew that it was irrational, but losing Alexander, even temporarily, felt like losing a crutch. He couldn’t keep himself steady, couldn’t walk, couldn’t move.

Some days, he did not bother trying.

Thomas wasn’t an idiot. Even if no one was saying it, he knew that something was wrong. Even past suddenly losing a large chunk of his vocabulary what felt like overnight, past not being able to lift up his arms or move without feeling excruciating pain—past all of that, there was something inherently wrong with him.
He noticed that there were moments—they were rare, but they were there—when he didn’t—
couldn't—keep up with Alexander anymore, with his rapid thought patterns, his plans, even the
sheer speed of his thoughts. Thomas could see it in the frown lines crinkling around Alexander’s
eyes as he stared at Thomas in concern; he could see the way the guilt in Alexander was practically
pressing down on him; he could see the forced smiles Alexander was sending him. He saw the
endless guilt trips Alexander thought that he was hiding from Thomas. He saw it all, but he couldn’t
do anything about it because his brain refused to work.

He should probably on some level blame Alexander for this—for destroying yet another part of his
identity, yet another thing that made Thomas who he was—but he didn’t. It wasn’t his fault. Yes, he
had proposed, but Thomas was the one who accepted the proposal. Alexander couldn’t help the fact
that he was born into a royal family, and, since Alexander wasn’t asking Thomas to give up being an
architect, Thomas couldn’t every well demand that Alexander stop being a prince—especially not
when it was clear how much Alexander loved his people, and how much he thrived at his job. Yes,
Thomas had nearly been killed at his own wedding, but the poison had been meant for Alexander,
had been in Alexander’s drink—Thomas only had himself to blame for the fact that he chose to drink
it.

Maybe it was because his brain was so much slower than he was used to, but Thomas couldn’t
fathom why he should blame Alexander for this.

He scrunched up his eyes. God, was this how normal people felt? So slow. So mediocre. How did
anyone ever get anything done? Oh, right—they didn’t.

Thomas knew that Alexander has noticed that Thomas took longer than usual to think things
through, to draw certain conclusions, to remember. He could see it on Alexander’s worried face.

He couldn’t stop the wave of insecurity that washed over him. Alexander had said, on numerous
occasions, that Thomas’ brain was what made him fall in love with Thomas.

Thomas remembered what Alexander had told him months ago. “You’re the only person I’ve ever
met who is my intellectual equal. I don’t have to dumb myself down around you. I can be as
ostentatious and loquacious as my heart desires to be, and I can trust you'll understand and
appreciate every word,” Alexander had said several months ago—had it really been that long?
Thinking back on it, it felt like only yesterday.

Now though? Now that he, well, wasn’t always Alexander’s intellectual equal, now that Alexander
did have to dumb down some of his more ingenious insights for Thomas or have to explain them
twice, Thomas was terrified. He was terrified because he couldn’t help but wonder whether
Alexander’s feelings for him would change now that—he swallowed—now that he couldn’t always
keep up with him. Now that Thomas’ mind wasn’t as sharp. Alexander had never been one to
tolerate simpletons. What did it do to him to know that he was married to one? Thomas wouldn’t
want to be in his shoes. Theoretically, Thomas knew that his brain was usually much faster than this,
and he hated feeling so average, so mediocre. It scared him more than he could put into words. If
their positions were reversed—

He didn’t know what he would do. Maybe he would try to remain by Alexander’s side, smile
forcibly in a way that fooled no one. Maybe he would cut his ties and run. Maybe he would try to
burrow himself in his work to try to drown out the guilt and avoid having to think about it, as
Alexander was clearly doing, now that Lafayette had given him an excuse not to have to visit
Thomas. The Frenchman’s presence must have lifted a heavy weight off Alexander’s shoulders.

The point was that Thomas didn’t know what he would do if he were in Alexander’s shoes. He
wasn’t about to start throwing stones.
“Hey,” said a familiar voice somewhere over his head. Thomas looked up just in time to Alexander smile down at him, the smile strained at the edges.

Thomas could see the guilt amassing in waves in Alexander’s eyes. He yearned for nothing more than to be able to reach out to him, to comfort him, to tell him that this wasn’t his fault, because none of this was his fault and he should stop blaming himself, but he couldn’t. He couldn’t even talk, couldn’t even understand his own native language.

“Hello,” Thomas forced himself to say in English, the word still sounding foreign to his ears. Shouldn’t it at least start to make sense, start to come back to him, once he had begun to learn? Thomas was constantly waiting for a click that would tell him that yes, this was how the word was supposed to sound. So far, there had been nothing of the sort—almost like he had not so much forgotten English than as if he had never known English in the first place.

Thomas suddenly couldn’t breathe. One would think that he would have become used to the feeling by now, but somehow, one could never become quite accustomed to the feeling that only forty seconds separated them from death. Funny, that.

A heaving feeling settled in his stomach. He didn’t want to feel this way. He wanted with all his might for this to just go away.

A pair of hands began threading through his hair, playing with it. Thomas relaxed unwittingly, recognizing Alexander’s hands. It probably should have struck him as strange that he was so familiar with the feel of his husband’s hands that he could recognize it by touch alone, but it didn’t. It was oddly comforting.

“Alexander?” Thomas rasped.

The massaging stopped. “Yes, love?” Alexander asked quietly.

“Do we know who did this?” Thomas asked, desperate for positive news.

Alexander shook his head. “We have narrowed down a list of suspects, but no one definitive person yet,” he said heavily, as though admitting to a personal failure. Which, viewed from Alexander’s perspective, it was.

Thomas ran a hand through his hair. “‘We’?” he echoed. “Why are you—“

“Because the security staffers weren’t thorough or fast enough,” Alexander replied succinctly. He clenched his fingers into fists, his nails digging hard enough into his skin to draw blood. He looked down at the floor for no other reason than to avoid having to look into Thomas’ searching eyes.

It was killing Thomas to see his husband this broken inside, so plainly afraid. Before this, Thomas had never seen Alexander be scared of anything. The sudden change was scarring, to say the least.

Thomas closed his eyes. He blinked rapidly as he felt an itch almost behind his irises. “What the—”

He heard shuffling around him, before something wet was suddenly pressed against his eyes. “Love, open your eyes,” Alexander requested, pressing the cloth to Thomas’ eyelids.

It had the opposite effect: Thomas only squeezed them shut tighter.

Alexander paused mid-movement. “Thomas, what are you—“

“I am capable of washing my own damn eyes,” Thomas snapped. “I’m hardly a damsel in distress.”
Alexander sighed. Alexander brushed his fingers against Thomas' forehead. "It's not about you being some sort of damsel in distress; it's about the fact that your hands are too shaky for you to wash your own eyes. So, no, Thomas, you aren't capable of washing your eyes. Let me help." A beat. "Please."

Thomas was well and truly tired of Alexander’s hovering, well-meaning though it was. Unfortunately, he couldn’t do a fucking thing about it. He closed his eyes, swallowing deeply as his mind jumped from one thought to another, every thought darker than the last.

He couldn’t do this.

Thomas hadn’t noticed that he had slipped—again, dammit—until a hand was propping up his head, violet-blue eyes peering down at him in concern. “Breathe, Thomas,” Alexander’s voice instructed, and when had he become so calm, so collected, so good at this?

Thomas listened to his husband’s voice. Breathe in. One, two, three. Breathe out. Four, five, six. Gradually, the chaotic thoughts swirling in his brain lessened to a dull thud at the back of his head. Okay. That was manageable. Thomas could drown that out.

Alexander sighed, trailing Thomas’ eyebrows with his thumb absentmindedly. “Look,” he said slowly, “I know that you only focus on the negative aspects of this,” he continued soothingly, “but I know that's not all that's going on. I've seen you in physical therapy. You're amazing, Thomas—you're the strongest person I know. No one else would have been able to go through this and keep their sanity intact.”

“You would have,” Thomas mumbled under his breath. He hadn't intended for his husband to overhear, but, as he watched Alexander stiffen next to him, he realized that he had failed miserably.

“Oh, honey,” Alexander brushed away the stray curls from Thomas’ face, cupping his cheeks to lean in for a chaste kiss, “I never would have been able to do what you're doing. I mean, the progress you're making is incredible. You are incredible. You're an inspiration to us all, love.”

Thomas wasn't. He really wasn't. All he was a representation of was how to fail at life without really trying.

Huh. That would be a good title for his biography—if he ever regained enough control over his hands to write, or even type, again, that is.

Thomas couldn’t imagine what Alexander would have felt in his position. To Alexander, writing was everything. Alexander would rather have lost his eyesight than his ability to write.

Thomas shook his head, hoping against hope that it would help to refresh his mind. He locked eyes with Alexander, desperate for a distraction from his increasingly melancholy thoughts.

"How have you been dealing with”—Thomas gestured at himself—“this?"


"John?" Thomas echoed emptily, his stomach twisting unpleasingly. What was Alexander's boyfriend planning?

Alexander waved a hand dismissively, as if it wasn't important. "Yes. He called me, actually. We got talking, and we sorted out a few of our problems." He laughed freely, almost absently. "Turns out, we've been having one miscommunication problem after another."
The sickening feeling in Thomas' guts grew with every word Alexander said. He felt as though he was being punched over and over and over again.

"Why—why John?" Thomas finally managed.

Alexander frowned. "Thomas, you have to understand," he said slowly, a note of irritation creeping into his voice. "You were comatose for almost three months. I needed someone I could confide in, someone I could talk to, because bottling it all up inside was killing me."

"Oh, of course," Thomas snorted. "I forgot that being out of working order automatically gives you the rights to look for solace in the nearest bed you can find."

Alexander froze, his eyes not unlike those of the deer caught in the headlights. "Thomas, no!" he hurried to reassure him. "I didn't cheat on you! It was—it was all platonic, I swear!"

"Excuse me if I don't believe you. Put yourself in my shoes," Thomas tried to wave his hand, but all that resulted from it was a sharp burst of pain. Alexander made as if to examine his arm, a look of concern and heartbreaking guilt on his face, but Thomas pulled out of his grip, ignoring the pain that followed. "You've just woken up from a coma after a nearly fatal assassination attempt, unable to speak your native language, and one of the first things your husband—your husband—says to you is that he has been cozying up to his ex. How else am I supposed to take it?"

"You're supposed to trust me, Thomas," Alexander snapped.

"And you're supposed to be here! With me! For me! In—in sickness and in health! You swore!"

Thomas shouted back, his throat scratching and painful as he choked on the words. He didn't know why he was getting so worked up. He didn't know why tears were beginning to prick at the corners of his eyes. Thomas didn't cry. He never cried. Why was he crying?

Alexander took a step back, eyes widening as a look of something akin to horror spread across his face.

Thomas couldn't stop crying.

Alexander was upon him in a second, babbling in a language Thomas recognized was probably English but he couldn't understand. He kissed Thomas' hairline and held his hand and Thomas didn't know whether to pull away from or lean into the touch because he was still mad but to have Alex, to have him here—

"Thomas, look at me," Alexander ordered, but his words were soft. "Look at me, please." Thomas slowly met his eyes. The obvious hesitance in his husband's movement was killing Alexander, but he kept going. "Take a deep breath and hold it until I get to five, alright?" Alexander said, his eyes never leaving Thomas' own.

Thomas managed to nod, and forced himself to suck in some air.

Alexander began to count—probably—but it wasn't in French and Thomas didn't know what he was saying and the panic was building again and—

"No, Thomas. Watch, okay?" Alexander demanded. He began to count again, in English, but as he did so, he held up his fingers.

One, two, three, four, five. Breathe in. Six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Breathe out.

"I love you, I love you, I love you so fucking much," Alexander rambled on, a distressed look in his
eyes.

“You still have feelings for him, don’t you?” Thomas asked hollowly.

Alexander stilled, which was all the response Thomas needed.

“I love you more though,” Alexander rushed to assure him. “You can’t blame me for it. It’s practically impossible not to fall in love with him.”

“Of course I can,” Thomas hissed. “I am your husband, not John Laurens.”

“I can’t help whom I develop feelings for. I can help whether I act on them or not. And I have not. Not that it seems to be making much of a difference,” he scowled, his eyes glistening.

“I was poisoned, you fucking buffoon! I was comatose! I don’t even speak English, and you’re complaining because I’m upset about you loving another man?!” Thomas growled. His throat hurt, his head hurt, his whole body hurt, tears were streaming down his face and everything was spiralling out of control.

“I never said I loved him——”

“You don’t have to, Alexander!” Thomas snapped, his eyes watering. “I’m your husband, you absolute prick; you think I don’t know what you look like when you’re in love?” Thomas interrupted, his voice growing louder and louder until it broke and——

“At least, I thought I did.” His voice was scratchy and rough, barely a whisper. He knew it was a low blow, he knew that, but in that moment, all he wanted was for Alexander to feel even a small portion of the pain Thomas felt.

Alexander stumbled back, as though physically struck, and a look of sheer terror tore his face in half for a brief moment. Thomas’ breath stopped as he watched, fixated, Alexander’s face undergo a million changes, each emotion disappearing in a flash only for another to take its place. Thomas tried to keep up, but the image of his terrified face kept coming back to him like a song on repeat.

Alexander didn’t say a word as he was driven back to the castle. He didn’t speak as he was swarmed by the press on his way up the stairs. He didn’t greet the staff or the diplomats scurrying about the halls as he made his way to his room—their room.

He fell back onto his mattress and stared at the ceiling.

The sheets didn't smell like Thomas anymore. They hadn't for a long time.

Alexander laid there for another minute before stumbling out of bed and over to the dresser they'd somehow ended up sharing. He pulled out one of Thomas’ sweatshirts—an old one from college, proudly sporting ‘Hampton School of Engineering and Technology’ across the chest. He held it up to his nose and took a deep breath.

Coconut and something somewhat musky and definitely expensive.

Alexander slipped it on over his clothes and climbed back in bed, wrapping himself in quilts and comforters before taking a piece of paper and a pen from his bedside table.

Hundreds of thousands of words swirled in his brain, too quickly for even him to be able to keep up.
None of them felt quite *right*, but he had made do with worse in the past.

He didn't try and stop the tears as he wrote.

A nurse walked in with a whiteboard. On it, it all caps, someone had written, in all caps, *PHYSICAL THERAPY*. Thomas shook his head frantically. He did not want to do it, could not muster the energy to do it—not without Alexander.

Thomas had a belated realization. He put his head in his hands, disregarding the pain that surged through his arms at the sudden movement. He had alienated the one person who could help him communicate with the world. What had he *done*?

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to shout your opinions at me. Or just shout. That works too.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In which the promised 5% of fluff are located. Or maybe not. At least Martha Washington’s here.

Chapter Notes

For reasons of a missing scene, I’m afraid that I’m going to have to cut this chapter a little short.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Mr Jefferson?” a nurse asked as she poked her head into Thomas’ room. Thomas stifled the urge to groan.

He may not understand English, but he knew his damn name, and he knew that tone of voice. This wasn't going to be fun.

He nodded.

The nurse said something else, and Thomas pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don't speak English,” he said slowly.

The nurse scrunched up her nose in a way that painfully reminded Thomas of Alexander. Thomas sighed and simply nodded.

The nurse smiled and opened the door.

In strolled John fucking Laurens. Thomas felt himself tense. What was John doing here? Was he here to gloat? To brag? To smear Thomas’ face in the fact that his husband—his Alexander—had run back to John?

Thomas felt like throwing up.

“Thomas?” John asked, as if they were old friends, as if he knew him.

“Out,” Thomas snapped, not a care in the world whether John was about to understand him; his tone made his intentions more than clear.

John held up a hand defensively, stalling Thomas. “I come in peace,” he said, the words loud and clear to Thomas, and wasn't it just typical that John Laurens, of all people, spoke French? “I feel that I need to explain a few things.”

“Like what?” Thomas snapped. “Like the fact that you stole my husband without even having to think about it?”
John blinked. “I didn't steal Alexander.” Thomas didn't miss how casually—how informally—John referred to Alexander. It sent a searing pang through his chest.

“No,” Thomas retorted, “it was all consensual.”

“What—I—We—” John spluttered. “Nothing happened!”

“I find that hard to believe,” Thomas drawled derisively. “I know Alexander; I know how gullible he is, how trusting, how eager to seek comfort and offer some in return. Besides, I know how Alexander feels about you. He still harbours feelings for you.”

Was it just Thomas' imagination, or did John's face flush just a little? “I know that, but you don't understand,” John spoke zealously, a note of desperation creeping into his voice. “It doesn't matter if he still likes me, the fact remains that he chose you. It's a conscious choice that he made, and that matters a hell of a lot more than any feelings he might still have—feelings that are, frankly, out of his control.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Oh, spare me your sweet talk. I've just woken up from a two and a half months long coma, only to find out that my husband cheated on me the first moment he got. I don't need his ex—who, conveniently enough, was the person with whom my husband cheated—meddling in my love life as well.”

“Believe me, Alexander loves you more than you can imagine. Watching him sit at your side, as though glued to that chair”—John gestured at the chair next to Thomas’ bed—”watching him stare at you expectantly, as if you would wake up any second, the way he shone up whenever he thought about you, it was killing me inside. I couldn’t watch the man I fell in love with love someone else and be able to move on from me as though I was nothing, and that was exactly what was happening right before my eyes,” John said with no small amount of bitterness. “So I left. I simply couldn’t stay. So don’t you ever accuse Alexander of not being loyal to you. He loves you more than you can possibly imagine. Alexander is the best thing that will ever happen to you. Don’t you dare screw it up.”

Thomas was taken aback for a moment, before he remembered he was supposed to be pissed. “You act as if you have any room to discuss my relationship with my husband,” he sneered.

John rolled his eyes. “Oh my God,” he groaned. “I finally know why the two of you get on so well! You're both massive pricks!”

“Wow. You swoop in, try to steal my husband, and then proceed to insult me. Remind me why I should listen to you again?” Thomas scoffed.

John looked as if he were asking the good Lord for patience before he turned and strangled Thomas. “Because I lost him, okay?” he finally snapped, “Because I had him, and he was mine, and then I lost him. I—I didn't fight for him. I just… let him leave. He left, and it broke me. I… I don't want the same thing to happen to you.”

Thomas’ jaw clicked shut as he thought about John's words.

Then—

“Why not?”

John stared at him as if he'd never expected to hear that question. “Because you make him happy,” he explained, “and because no one should have to live with knowing they willingly forfeited the best thing they ever had.”
Thomas rubbed his face. “What if it's not me forfeiting it?” he asked. “He all but told me he still loves you. Between a bed-ridden, emotional mess who can't even speak English, and you? I know who I'd choose.”

John tugged at his hair, evidently frustrated. “Fine. I didn't want to have to do this because it's a blatant breach of privacy, but seeing as you're just as fucking stubborn as he is, I guess I have to.” He pulled out a folded wad of papers from his coat pocket and tossed them on the bed. “Here,” he said. “They're letters. To you. From Alexander. I watched him write them. If this doesn't prove how much he loves you, then you're such an idiot that you shouldn't be with him in the first place.”

Thomas stared at the offering pieces of paper for a long moment.

“I wish you all the best, Thomas,” John said slowly, “I sincerely do.”

And with that, he was gone.

Thomas lifted the first letter from the pile hesitantly, his hands shaking visibly. Squaring himself, he began reading.

There was a knock on the door. Alexander didn't bother looking up as he beckoned for the person to enter. “Yes?” He wasn't quite able to mask the irritation in his voice.

“Your Highness,” said a timid voice as a diminutive man peered into the room, “Mr Jefferson has been trying to contact you.”

Alexander's head snapped up. “Thomas wants to speak to me?” He couldn't quite keep the disbelief out of his voice. “I doubt that.”

The man blinked. “Sire, I assure you that I am not lying to—”

“Never mind.” Alexander waved his hand dismissively. “I don't doubt you. I'm simply… surprised.”

The servant didn't comment—whether out of shyness or contempt for Alexander’s obliviousness, Alexander didn't know. Knowing his luck, probably the latter.

Alexander forced himself to relinquish the quill he had been unconsciously clutching.

“Okay,” he said faux-lightly. “Let’s see what our beloved Mr Jefferson wants—though if he keeps yelling at me, I swear to God, I’m going to punch him,” he muttered to himself.

The servant wisely pretended that he did not hear Alexander’s words.

When Thomas had compared Alexander to a hurricane, he hadn’t thought that the comparison would be so apt.

“What do you want?” Alexander snarled, storming into the room like a literal hurricane, leaving disruption, petrified interns, and general turmoil in his wake. Fury and thunder were practically oozing out of him, and if he didn’t know Alexander’s methods of repressing his emotions better than his own hand, Thomas would have thought that he had been drinking. “Chew me out again? Because if that’s it, then I’m sorry but I don’t—”

“I read your letters,” Thomas said simply.
Alexander paused in his tracks. “I beg your pardon?” he finally said, his face the picture of confusion.

“I read your letters,” Thomas repeated. “The ones you wrote to me.”

“How did you—“ Alexander began, before something shifted in his eyes. “John,” he growled, spitting the name like it was poison.

Thomas saw no reason for him to try to cover up the truth. “I met Mr Laurens when he brought them for me to read.”

“He had no right,” Alexander hissed. “They were a private journal.”

“Addressed to me. I had every right to read them,” Thomas shot back, anger mounting behind his eyes, before he took a calming breath. It did not do to get angry at Alexander. He was the one who had fucked up, as John had told him—though not in as many words. He had to leave himself vulnerable for Alexander to see. That was how relationships worked: mutual trust. Thomas had violated Alexander’s trust in one of the worst ways possible—if this was the price he had to pay to regain it, he would gladly do so a thousand times over.

Thomas forced himself to take a deep breath. “Listen,” he began, then hesitated. How did Alexander ever phrase things? Words were hard. “I—you’re the love of my life,” he finally spoke.

Alexander didn’t react. “So?” he asked pointedly, almost like he was testing Thomas.

“I hurt you,” Thomas said bluntly. “I shouldn’t have. It wasn’t right. You’re just trying to be supportive, even though I can see how much it hurts you to see me this way. I’m dumb, disfigured, and obstinate. I break down every five seconds. I wouldn’t have blamed you if you tried to distance yourself from me—I’m not the man you married, and I never will be. But you stayed by my side, helping me every step of the way during the recovery, and how did I thank you? By accusing you of being unfaithful to me. Unfaithful.” He giggled hysterically. “That’s the last thing you are. If anything, you’re too dedicated to me for your own good. I’m weighing you down. No, don’t try to deny it,” he went on, cutting Alexander off before he could object. “I know it, you know it, the world probably knows it. It’s time we admit it.”

Alexander exhaled. “I could try to convince you how wrong you are, how mistaken, but you’re far from receptive right now. What you do need to understand is that you are brilliant just the way you are. You’re amazing. Yes, you do have… moments when you’re not as sharp as you used to be,” he conceded awkwardly, “but overall, you are still you. You’re still the person I fell in love with. Yes, you’ve changed, but who wouldn’t, in your position? Besides, people change all the time. I’m not the person I was three months ago, and I don’t expect you to be. And yes, that’s an ‘I accept your apology, you douchebag.”

Alexander exhaled. “I could try to convince you how wrong you are, how mistaken, but you’re far from receptive right now. What you do need to understand is that you are brilliant just the way you are. You’re amazing. Yes, you do have… moments when you’re not as sharp as you used to be,” he conceded awkwardly, “but overall, you are still you. You’re still the person I fell in love with. Yes, you’ve changed, but who wouldn’t, in your position? Besides, people change all the time. I’m not the person I was three months ago, and I don’t expect you to be. And yes, that’s an ‘I accept your apology, you douchebag.”

Thomas’ throat clammed up at the sight of the tender smile Alexander gave him.

Alexander, however, wasn’t done. “But”—Alexander held up a finger—”there’s something you need to hear, something you need to understand, or you’re always going to wonder why I sought comfort from John. It’s always going to be at the back of your mind. So, here goes.” Alexander stopped. He took a steadying breath. “You had a—You had a spiking fever. Nobody knew whether you were even going to make it those first few days. And then when you did but the fever didn’t break—” He swallowed. “I didn’t know what to do. What could I do? Nothing, that’s what. I could do nothing—I was sitting and waiting, like a duck, for something to happen. Nothing did. Not for two months. Those were the worst moments of my life. You—you are important to me, Thomas. You matter to me more than anything. Don’t you ever doubt that,” he said passionately.
“Alexander—” Thomas began, then stopped. He tugged at a stray lock, before exhaling loudly. “Forgive me.”

Alexander attempted a smile. “There’s nothing to forgive.” Quicker than Thomas’ eye could register, he surged forward, meeting Thomas’ lips in a kiss.

Objectively speaking, it wasn’t the best kiss they’ve ever had—hell it was as mediocre as they come—but after two and a half months of helplessness, of not knowing whether his husband would live or die—every kiss felt like salvation felt like hope, felt like love. Every kiss felt like Thomas. Alexander had never tasted anything sweeter.

Thomas gripped the cane tighter. He moved forward his other foot, grunting with effort as he slowly shifted his weight from the cane to the foot. It hurt, but not as much as it did a week ago. The progress was visible—a fact which, in itself, was encouraging. Whenever he stopped, Alexander’s voice was right there next to him, gently coaxing him to try again, Thomas, it was okay to fail, you’re going to walk in no time at this rate.

The therapist watched Thomas impassively. Occasionally, she made a note here or there, or told him to shift his posture a little to help him relieve the pain or alleviate the strain on his leg.

Thomas hissed when he took a wrong step. He stumbled. Alexander was at his side in an instant, one hand supporting Thomas around his waist and another under his arm. “You're okay,” he murmured quickly into Thomas’ ear. “You're fine.”

Thomas exhaled loudly. “I’m not.”

“But you are,” Alexander insisted. “You're strong and persistent and—”

“I'm none of those things,” Thomas cut off his husband. “That's you, not me.”

Alexander's brows creased. “You underestimate yourself, love.”

The therapist cleared her throat. “I thinks that's quite enough for today,” she told Thomas decisively. Alexander, as always, acted the translator between them. Thomas’ mastery of the language, while improving, was still lacking in some areas. He did not dare to go anywhere without Alexander—even if he could, which, as his frail body proved mere moments ago, he could not. The dependency on his husband stung.

Thomas closed his eyes in frustration. “No. I can do more.” Thomas grip on the cane tightened. “I need to do more.”

The therapist shook her head. “At this point, Your Highness, you will do more harm than good if you continue. Don’t push yourself beyond your limits. There will be plenty of time to improve.”

Thomas looked at Alexander to translate, an overwhelming feeling of dread and hopelessness building up in his stomach.

Alexander grimaced. He put his hand around Thomas’ shoulder instinctively. “She says that if you don’t stop, you might find yourself in a bit of a pickle.”

“In other words, a catastrophic situation with potentially fatal consequences,” Thomas drawled condescendingly. “Got it. How laudable of her.”
Alexander’s grip on Thomas’ shoulder tightened. “Stop it. Just stop it. You don’t need to shut me out. I’m not about to leave.”

Thomas let out a heavy breath. “I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I didn’t mean that. I don’t know why I’m this way.” Except he did know—almost too well, in fact. Partially, it was the mood swings, but Thomas couldn’t place the entirety of the blame on them, as much as he wished that he could. In the end, the blame laid with Thomas himself for being unable to control himself. Yes, the mood swings were a catalyst, a trigger, but they didn’t force Thomas to act this way. The only thing that forced Thomas to act this way was Thomas himself.

The therapist was beginning to collect her things. Alexander made to speak with her, but a knock interrupted him. He nearly growled. “Come in,” he replied gruffly, not bothering to keep his tone overly polite.

The door swung open to reveal George Washington.

“Your Majesty,” the therapist said simply, offering a shallow bow. Alexander rather thought that she had become indentured to meeting royalty. People tended to lose their awe that royalty tended to induce after knowing Alexander for longer than five minutes. (Either that, or it would become so deeply entrenched that nobody would be able to reverse it. That has also been known to happen.)

“Dad,” Alexander said despondently.

Thomas remained silent. He offered George a quick bow.

George quirked a small smile. It wasn’t quite bitter, but it was by no means the happiness Alexander had recalled from his childhood. “Am I intruding?”

Yes, thought Thomas.

“Not at all, sir,” the therapist said. “We were just finishing up. I’ll just leave, shall I?” She swept out of the room before Thomas had a chance to voice his protest.

Thomas’ shoulders slumped. It didn’t go unnoticed by Alexander, whose eyes zeroed in on his husband. “Hey, you’re going to do better tomorrow, okay?”

George cleared his throat. “I am afraid that my French is not very good,” he said slowly in broken French.

Thomas’ lips twisted into a smile. “That’s okay. My English is not very good either at the moment.” The words still left a pang of hurt in his chest, even after months of repeating them again and again.

Alexander wrapped an arm around Thomas’ waist. He helped Thomas to the chair. Despite himself, Thomas let out a relieved sigh when he sat down. He pushed himself in his quest to return to his former glory, so to speak, but God was it good to sit down.

Alexander placed a gentle kiss to Thomas’ left temple before drawing up a chair next to Thomas. George’s eyes followed the movement, studying them both keenly. “May I sit?” he finally asked.

Thomas gestured at the remaining chairs. “Be my visitor,” he told George in English.

“Guest,” Alexander corrected. “It’s ‘be my guest’. ”

Thomas squeezed his eyes in irritation. “Yes, that.”
“Thank you.” George followed Thomas’ recommendation. “I would like to say that, at first, I didn’t think much of you. You were—were…” he began in French, before giving up and switching to English. He glanced at Alexander, relying on his son to translate his words to Thomas. “When you came to the palace,” he addressed Thomas, “I thought of you as a spoiled brat. Not someone worth noticing, and certainly not the kind of person I would want my son and heir involved with.”

Alexander swallowed uncomfortably, but translated his father’s words dutifully. Thomas took a deep breath. He would be lying if he claimed that the conversation—if it could even be called that, seeing as, so far, the king was the one doing all the talking—wasn’t making him uncomfortable, but he had a feeling that, should he try to cut the king off, the consequences would be far worse than a little bit of discomfort. “You were, quite honestly, still brimming with internalized homophobia and self-hate. You were lost, you were arrogant, you were selfish, and there was something else, something I’m still struggling to pinpoint, simmering under the surface that unsettled me far more than I would have liked to admit. I was afraid of what that would have meant for my son, had you two gotten back together. Besides, you hurt him more than you can possibly understand when you broke up with him. I’ve never seen him this heartbroken.”

“Father—” Alexander objected.

George held up a hand. “Don’t interrupt me, son. Translate my words.”

Alexander glared up at his father mutinously. “I don’t want him to hear this.”

“But I do. And he needs to hear it. I’d rather these words stay just with the three of us, but I will not hesitate to hire a professional translator should you try to twist my words, or outright refuse to relay them. Your husband has been through a lot. He needs to hear this, Alexander. If he’s here to stay, and it’s becoming obvious that he is”—Alexander snorted derisively at that—“our relationship cannot be based on a lie of omission.”

Alexander huffed. He turned back to Thomas, repeating his father’s words reluctantly.

“But you proved me wrong,” George went on. Alexander’s head snapped up at the words. “You exceeded my expectations. I watched you grow from a puny and, quite frankly, clingy man, to the sort of person I would be proud to call son.”

If Alexander’s eyes were glistening as he repeated George’s words… well, neither of them pointed that out. Thomas’ own eyes watered as he heard them. “Thank you,” he whispered.

George nodded sharply. He glanced down at his hands, and it occurred to Thomas that he was just as uncomfortable with this conversation as Thomas was.

“That is—that is good,” the king said finally. “I’m glad that you understand.”

Thomas understood. He didn’t like it, per se, but he did understand George’s reasoning.

“You’re obstinate, too. Then again, so is Alexander.” George inhaled sharply. “I don’t think you could stand each other any other way.”

“That’s the most roundabout compliment I’ve ever heard,” Thomas replied with a slight scoff. “I’m not sure whether to be flattered or insulted.”

Alexander smirked. “I for one take it as praise.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Of course you do,” he said affectionately.

George was glancing between them, following their exchange, a small smile on his lips. A small
flame of hope flared up within him. Maybe there was a chance that things would work out.

When George returned a week later, he was accompanied by his wife. Martha smiled down at Thomas. Her smile had an immediate soothing effect on him. “Hello, dear,” she said in surprisingly smooth French. She smiled at him. “How are you holding up?”

“Good,” Thomas mumbled quietly.

Martha’s hand cradled his cheek. She followed the sharp lines of his cheekbones with her thumb. “You’re not,” she said quietly, dispensing with the formalities and cutting right to the chase. “But I think you will be.”

Thomas started, glancing up at her in open curiosity. So far, everyone—even Alexander, to some extent, although he masked it beneath five layers of sarcasm and physical affection—had been trying to convince him that he was alright, even though he could feel that he wasn’t. But Martha? Martha did the exact opposite: she acknowledged his pain. She told him straight off that it was bad, because there was really no other way of viewing it, but that things would turn out okay—eventually.

And God, it was good to hear.

Thomas didn’t even try to stop the tears—he has realized by this point that it was a futile effort, and he might as well not bother trying. Martha pressed his head to her chest and combed her fingers through his hair.

Thomas heard Washington say something he couldn’t understand. He felt Martha comb through Thomas’ curls. He was beginning to suspect that Alexander’s tactility was, if not genetic, a thing in the royal family. Or they would be, if George himself didn’t look as though he might actually throw up whenever there was a change that he would need to initiate or tolerate physical contact.

“Well, dear,” Martha continued, blithely ignoring the awkward silence with patented ease, “I’ve brought you a few gifts. Alexander mentioned that you’re fond of the Greeks of old, so I thought you might be interested in the Works of Plato and Cicero. I also took the liberty of finding Xenophon’s Memorabilia of Socrates and Anabasis & Hellenica. I’m fond of them myself.”

Thomas stared at Martha, his amazement growing by the second. Her concern, her sheer goodness, was unprecedented. Here he was, someone who had barged into her life, sweeping her stepson off his feet and causing turmoil wherever he went, making even the most familiar seem foreign. Thomas had turned her life upside down in more than one fashion, and yet she was by his side, sharing her favourite books with him. She had set aside time just to inquire about his favourite books. She was a genial woman, one he would have been proud to call ‘mother’.

“Thank you,” he breathed. He felt that the words didn’t quite convey what he was feeling, but he was no Alexander.

Martha smiled, even as her husband began to fidget. She seemed to understand what he wasn’t saying. “Think nothing of it, dear.”

Martha began visiting Thomas more often after that. First, she was accompanied by her husband, but after a time, she began visiting on her own. Frankly, Thomas was secretly grateful, because George still unnerved him with that impregnable stare of his that promised judgment of Thomas’ every action. There were moments when Thomas barely dared to breathe in George’s presence for fear of
incensing the king, and while he gave off the appearance that he didn’t care about George’s opinion of him, the man was still Alexander’s father and Thomas’ father-in-law.

After Martha came her children. Patsy and Jack visited together, which was relieving, because if Thomas would have had to deal with Jack’s unnerving stare alone, he might actually start to scream.

Jack spoke passable French, and seemed content to, for the most part, serve as the translator between Patsy and Thomas. Small talk wasn’t his suite. If he didn’t know better, Thomas would say that he was a younger copy of George. Thomas, for his part, was steadily improving his grasp of the English language, even if he didn’t speak it fluently quite yet. It was slow work, and it felt like, for every three steps forward, he took a step left and two steps back, but it wasn’t entirely futile. Thomas simply wished it was happening faster.

“I brought chess,” Patsy said brightly. “I thought you might appreciate a chance at a little mental stimulation.”

“Sure, why not?” Thomas managed a smile, even as it felt as though his insides were being put through a grinder. If he was honest with himself, this was exactly what he has dreaded. What if he lost? What if this would become definitive proof of the fact that his intelligence was permanently damaged and that he was never going to be able to recover it? He had always treasured his mind above all—it had been what had set him apart from the crowd. If he lost to Patsy, it would confirm what he and Alexander already suspected: that Thomas was mediocre, that he was plebeian. That a large part of his personal identity had been taken away from him—stolen, like a coveted toy, and Thomas, not unlike a toddler, was throwing a temper tantrum about it.

Patsy grabbed two pieces. She moved them about out of Thomas’ sight, then held out two fists. On impulse, Thomas chose the right hand. Patsy unclenched it, unveiling a single black pawn. Good. Defensive was good. Thomas could do defensive.

Twenty minutes later, Thomas was beginning to reevaluate that assessment as he stared down, flummoxed, at the board. One of Patsy’s bishops had quite unexpectedly sneaked its way across the board and was threatening both Thomas’ king and his rook. The queen had been captured seven moves back. Thomas’ only solace was that Patsy has lost both her rooks, a knight, and a bishop to Thomas’ queen before she died a valiant death.

After a moment, Thomas move the king diagonally to the left. Patsy’s grin immediately told him that it had been a mistake. She moved her one remaining knight down and two paces to the left.

“Checkmate, Thomas.”

Thomas closed his eyes, feeling something heavy settle over him. This was exactly what he had known would happen. Patsy was smart, yes, but she was by no means a genius. To be beaten by her, and as soundly as he was, was downright humiliating. It was a cold shower, dragging him back down to Earth. At last, he had to face the reality he had steadfastly been avoiding, refusing to even acknowledge the possibility.

He shouldn’t have played. It was a mistake.

Suppressing a groan, Thomas pushed the chess board away from him, as though it had been its fault.

Jack seemed to understand what was going on inside Thomas’ mind, or had at least guessed at some of it. He glanced at his sister, who was packing away the chess pieces in blissful ignorance. Jack said something in rapid English. Thomas watched at Patsy’s eyes snapped up to meet his, widening almost comically. “I’m sorry,” she blurted out. “I didn’t mean to—”
“Thomas, would you like for us to give you a moment?” Jack cut in smoothly.

Thomas nodded numbly, not trusting his voice not to betray him.

Patsy tried to catch Thomas’ eye again, but he refused to meet her gaze. He was apprehensive as to what she would find there. Thomas didn’t look up until he heard the door close behind the Custis siblings. His hands had, seemingly out of Thomas’ control, clenched themselves into fists. He abhorred how weak even the most mundane of tasks made him feel. It was like he was a child all over again, constantly desperate for validation, and withdrawing into himself the moment he didn’t get it.

Thomas closed his eyes, biting his lip hard enough to draw blood. He wasn’t bloody Loki Odinson. He could handle, nay, needed to be able to handle a bit of disappointment, because it didn’t look like things would get better for a very long time.

For the next several days, an apprehension was gnawing away at Thomas. What if he had scared away Patsy and Jack? Their company wasn’t the most stimulating—that title was without a doubt Alexander’s—but it was better than being alone, trapped in his own thoughts that inevitably spiraled down to places he would rather not go.

Fortunately, Patsy wasn’t the kind of person to be deterred by a little adversity. A week later, she returned, Risk in hand. She set to explaining the rules in a peculiar mix of French and English.

“It sounds like a game that Alexander would love,” Thomas said slowly when Patsy finished explaining.

Patsy laughed. “Well, you’re not wrong,” she confirmed. “He’s absolutely ruthless. The last time we played, he positively slaughtered me.”

Thomas understood maybe seventy percent of what Patsy had said, but he could guess his way to the missing thirty. He hummed in contemplation. “I cannot say that I am surprised.”

Patsy grinned. “That’s because you know your husband.”

The day that Thomas succeeded in crossing the room without either Alexander or the therapist’s help, he wasn’t ashamed to admit that he teared up. (He had thought that he had regained some semblance of emotional control. Apparently not—but, for once, he didn’t mind.) Judging by the way Alexander eyes were glistening in a tell-tale manner, he wasn’t the only one.

“You're amazing,” Alexander gushed, all but glowing with joy. “You’ve made incredible progress.”

The therapist nodded in agreement. “I'm not in the habit of lying to my patients—I find that false praise actually hinders their recovery—but His Highness is correct: the rate at which you're recuperating is actually astounding. You've made remarkable headway, and it's rather inspiring to watch.”

Thomas blinked. He would have glanced away, uncomfortable with the unexpected praise, but he was too exhausted to care. Alexander exchanged amused glances with the therapist.

Thomas suddenly felt as though the world was tilting on its axis. He wobbled, and Alexander reached out, wrapping an arm around his waist to steady him. “There, love,” he murmured. “I think
we broke you.”

Thomas opened his mouth to argue, but closed it again as a wave of nausea threatened to overwhelm him. He simply nodded numbly. “Yeah,” he said hoarsely. “That’s a good idea.”

Alexander chuckled. “I know, love. I tend to have those. Now come back to bed.”

“Hello, James,” Thomas told James, smiling lightly. He was feeling oddly cheerful today. He couldn’t quite figure out why, but he wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth. Honestly, if these mood swings were what Alexander has had dealt with on a daily basis throughout his entire life, then Thomas had a new kind of respect for Alexander.

The smile James offered him was well-worth the effort it took for him to speak English. His head wasn’t hurting that afternoon. Thomas wasn’t about to complain. He’s had enough of those to last him a lifetime.

“Hello, Thomas,” James reached out, as if to clasp Thomas’ arm, before hesitating mid-air. “Is it—“

“It is okay,” Thomas said before James could complete the question. “I do not care.”

“Mind,” Alexander corrected him.

“Mind,” Thomas repeated dutifully. He tilted his head curiously. “I have a question. Why do James' words have odd dips at the end? Yours don’t.”

“Y'all'd've,” James shrugged.

Thomas blinked. Turning to Alexander, he switched to French. “What the actual hell did James say?”

Alexander couldn’t smother a grin. “I have no idea,” he confessed. “Translation from Virginian to human?” he addressed James, a twinkle in his eye.

James rolled his eyes. “You all would have,” he elaborated. “Honestly, it isn’t even that bizarre.”

“You are welcome to switch to English any minute now,” Alexander deadpanned.

Thomas was glancing between the two men, oddly proud of himself for the fact that he could keep up with what Alexander was saying. “What is happening in America?” he interjected.

It hadn’t taken all of his efforts to put together that sentence, but it had been close. It was all worth it to see the way James’ face shone up at Thomas’ words. “It’s…”—he shrugged—”messy. As always.”

Thomas looked at Alexander quizzically. “‘Messy’?” he echoed.


James rolled his eyes. He said something to Alexander, most of which Thomas didn’t understand. He turned to Alexander for clarification.

Alexander snorted. “James said that me rattling of synonyms like I’m ‘a walking dictionary’”—he made air quotes—”is not helping.”
“I feel inclined to agree with him,” Thomas told Alexander. For James’ benefit, he added in English, “I agree.”

Alexander pretended to clutch his heart, gasping dramatically. He took pleasure in the way the corners of Thomas’ mouth twitched at his antics. If making himself look the fool got a smile out of his husband, it was worth it. “Betrayed! O, so sweet the taste of love, so gentle her caress, yet so bitter the touch of betrayal. Though those that are betray’d do feel the treason sharply, yet the traitor stands in worse case of woe.”

“Shakespeare, Cymbeline, Act III, scene 4, line 87,” James shot back without hesitation.

Alexander stopped. His eyebrow went up in surprise. “I hadn’t taken you for a Shakespeare buff.”

“I’m full of surprises,” James replied with a slight shrug.

In response, Alexander lifted up his hand to his lips and nibbled at his thumb.

James closed his eyes in exasperation. “Really? Are you really biting your thumb at me? That’s how low we’ve sunk with the insults?”

Alexander glanced briefly at Thomas to see whether he was keeping up with the conversation. He was looking somewhat puzzled, but he hadn’t yet interrupted them for clarification, so that had to count for something. “All the world’s a stage, as they say.” Alexander smirked.

James shook his head. “To quote Hamlet, Act III, Scene 3, line 87: No.”

Alexander threw up his hands into the air. “Do you have all of Shakespeare memorized to the letter?”

“I have eidetic memory. I can’t help it. Besides, can you think of something better?”

“Fair enough,” Alexander allowed. “I mean, I can’t even blame you. I do pretty much the same thing except with numbers.” He stood up. “Well, I’m feeling like tea. Do you want some?”

“I’d like some black tea, if you have any.”

“Just so you know, I’m not making any of the sludge you Southerners call ‘sweet tea’. That’s a disgrace to all things tea,” Alexander warned. He repeated the same question to Thomas in French.

Thomas nodded. “Yes, I would like England water,” he told Alexander in English, enunciating each word carefully.

Alexander grinned. “Coming right up, love!” he chirped. He all but skipped out of the room, ignoring James’ yelp of “England water?!”.

Chapter End Notes

Coming up next: Thomas talks to his sisters. Again.

Tell me what you thought! Was anything missing? Was there anything you liked in particular? Is there anything you want to see in the future?
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

In which there’s panic attacks, physical rehab, general angst, puppy therapy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“How are you doing, brother?” Mary asked gently, threading her fingers through his hair. It seemed to be a popular gesture these days, Thomas thought absentmindedly.

“I am doing well,” Thomas said dutifully.

Mary smiled. “I miss you, you know. We all do.”

“So do I,” Thomas replied automatically.

“We love you,” Jane added.

Thomas’ eyes narrowed. “Clearly not enough to come to my wedding,” he retorted, a bit of anger leaking into his voice.

Jane frowned as Mary crossed her arms. “Now, that’s a little unfair, she said slowly. We couldn’t come.”

“What stopped you?” Thomas mocked. “Lack of money? All three of us know that you are wealthy. You could afforded the tickets.” He paused every now and again to think over a particular word. His sisters let him talk at his own speed. A few months ago, Mary would have undoubtedly cut into his monologue with a witty retort, but now, she was simply glad that Thomas was able to talk. “And besides, even if you couldn't have, I would have paid for them with pleasure. So what was it?” he asked again. “Was it the disapproval of mother and father? No,” he said thoughtfully, “that’s not quite it either—that never stopped you in the past, even while you were”—he floundered for a moment—“mineurs. C'est ça. Maybe it wa—”

“I didn't want to see you married to a man, okay?” Mary finally shouted. “That would go against everything mother and father have taught you—have taught us. When I found out—from Fox, might I add—that you had been dating the crown prince of England—"

"The United Kingdom,” Thomas corrected automatically, all too aware of the difference. The image of Lady Fallowfield flashed through his mind. It was funny, he reflected, that he couldn't recall a great deal about his own wedding, but he recalled his etiquette lessons with perfect clarity.

Mary rolled her eyes. "See? That's exactly what I'm talking about right here. You defend him. I hadn't thought it possible that you, my baby brother, would like men.”

“And yet here we are,” Thomas deadpanned. He did not elaborate.

Mary spread out her hands helplessly. "I'm sorry, Thomas, I know that it sounds stupid in retrospect, but I couldn't bear to see you betray your core beliefs in such a fashion. I wanted to keep the image
of my brother the way it was, rather than watching it slowly be corrupted."

“So?” Thomas shot back pointedly. “Has it been corrupted? Am I a more bad person because I fell for an Alexander rather than an Alexandra?” He would never admit it out loud, but it was a question that has been on Thomas’ mind for a long time—ever since he realized that he was attracted to Alexander, really. It would be refreshing to get someone else’s point of view rather than rehash old arguments.

Mary swallowed. “That’s what I’m trying to determine,” she answered noncommittally. It wasn’t a straight no. Thomas’ throat constricted. He hadn't expected outright approval, but this felt a little too close to rejection. *Please, don’t do this.*

“You're not a worse person,” Jane hurried to assure Thomas, glowering at her sister so fiercely that Thomas was honestly surprised that Mary hasn't caught on fire. “You're just... different. Besides, keep in mind that you professed to hate royalty. It was this, more than anything, that blew me away. I couldn't wrap my mind around it—still can't, to be entirely honest.” She pursed her lips. “How could you date one, let alone marry into their family? Did they threaten you with something to keep you here?” she asked sharply.

Thomas’ mind went back to Lafayette's words. *There’s quite a few cut corners in your designs for the buildings you create. I cannot imagine your clients would be very happy about that,* he had said back in June. The words had been meant to scare Thomas away though. "No," Thomas replied eventually. "Quite the opposite, really."

Mary frowned. “And what's *that* supposed to mean?” she demanded.

Thomas could have bit his tongue. “Nothing,” he said curtly.

“It's not nothing—” Mary began, but was silenced by a sharp look from Jane.

“Okay,” Jane said calmly. “I believe you. We're not going to press you for details.”

Thomas’ eyes narrowed as he glanced between his older sisters. “Is this a sort of a way *detourné* to make me talk?” he demanded.

“Not at all.”

‘Yes,” the sisters said simultaneously.

Jane pursed her lips. “It’s not,” she snapped. “I'm not going to pressure Thomas into disclosing something he clearly doesn't want to talk about.”

Mary rolled her eyes. “Fine. Be that way. I'm just calling it as I see it.”

Jane's nostrils flared. “Well, *stop.*”

The sisters glared at each other, before Mary finally looked down at the floor. “I'm going to get some coffee. Anyone want some?” she asked abruptly. Jane and Thomas both shook their heads, and Mary headed for the door.

Once the door closed behind the younger sister, Jane turned to Thomas with a sigh. “I'm sorry about her.”

“Do not apologize for her,” Thomas told Jane, suddenly feeling drained despite having laid in bed since yesterday evening.
Jane's eyes were compassionate as she studied Thomas. “For what it's worth, I did mean it,” she said at length. “I'm not going to pressure you into talking about things better left unspoken. Just remember that if you want to talk, I'm here for you.”

Thomas was at a loss as to how to reply to that. In the end, he settled for a simple “Thank you.”

Jane reached for Thomas’ hand, squeezing it gently. She smiled. “You know,” she switched subjects in an attempt to relieve the tension in the room, “everyone back at home will be delighted to know that you're doing better.”

Thomas snorted. “I highly doubt that,” he replied skeptically.

Jane’s brows creased. “You do know that we care about you, right?” she asked suddenly. “All of us—even mother and father.”

Thomas huffed. “They have an odd way of showing it.”

“Trust me, they love you,” Jane said quietly. “They may not agree with your life choices, but they do love you.”

Thomas scoffed. “You were not the one to get a phone call from mother telling you not to show up for Thanksgiving because you were a bad influence on your siblings.”

Jane's eyes narrowed. “She said that?” she asked, her lips drawing up into a thin line.

“In as many words.”

Jane’s nostrils flared. “That’s horrible.”

“I am not defending mother,” Thomas told Jane. “I am simply stating that I do not believe that mother and father hold much affection for me.”

“They haven’t dissed you just because you’re into guys too,” Jane said. They both winced at how weak her voice sounded. “They’ve loved you for over three decades. Mum gave birth to you, for God’s sake. She’s not about to tell you to fuck off ju—”

“No,” Thomas agreed with a tight smile, “she simply made it clear that I was welcome no longer.”

Jane took a steadying breath, as if trying to distract herself from the topic at hand. “Let’s talk about something else, shall we?”

Thomas frowned. He was by no means satisfied with his sister’s abrupt subject change, but he could see that it wasn’t a battle he would win. He had learned to pick his battles, and this discussion needed to be shelved for later.

“Very well,” he finally replied. “Tell me about Mary. How is she holding?”

“Holding up,” Jane corrected with a soft smile.

As Thomas listened to Jane relay the ongoings in the Jefferson household, he ran through her words in his mind time after time. He needed to talk to her—to both his sisters, actually—about this at some point, because it seemed that they had two vastly different versions of the story.

˚✧₊⁎.ta ᷀ົ≀ˍ̮❝ ᷀ົ⁎⁺˳✧˚

“Are you ready?” Alexander asked softly.
Thomas took a deep breath, then let it out slowly. He met Alexander’s eyes. “Yes,” he said with more confidence than he felt.

Alexander’s hand squeezed Thomas’. His thumb trailed the lines of Thomas’ palm. “I’m going to be right here by your side the whole time. You know that, right?”

“I know. I wouldn’t be able to do it without you,” Thomas admitted. His other hand was fingering the breathing mask in his pocket. The mask he needed to have with him at all times for the foreseeable future—if not for the rest of his life, he thought bitterly.

He knew that Alexander also had a mask on him, just in case.

“There's a little surprise for you when we get back home,” Alexander murmured into Thomas’ ear.

Thomas forced a smile onto his lips. “I’m looking forward to it.” He hoped that the enthusiasm sounded less strained than it felt.

Alexander leaned back, taking in Thomas’ expression. “You don't seem like it.”

Thomas let out a shaky breath. “I’m not,” he admitted. “But I need to get out of this fucking hospital. I've been cooped up here for too long. There's too many bad memories—for the both of us.”

Alexander didn’t reply for a long moment. “But you’ll tell me if you need a break.” It wasn't a question.

Thomas huffed. “Alexander, I’m not suicidal.” It wasn’t a promise, but it was as close to it as Thomas could give.

Alexander leaned in, his lips ghosting over Thomas’, before he planted a light kiss. “Do you want anything to drink before we leave?”

Thomas shook his head.

Alexander smirked. “Not even tea?” he asked, an amused gleam in his eye.

“I can’t believe that you tricked me into believing that ‘tea’ translated to ‘England water’, ” Thomas grumbled.

Alexander smirked. “In hindsight, it’s rather hilarious, isn’t it?”

“Not to me,” Thomas mumbled.

Alexander kissed the corners of Thomas’ mouth. “Don’t pout, Thomas. It’s unbecoming of the prince consort.”

It was a statement to Thomas’ mental state that he didn’t even flinch at the title.

Thomas glanced at Alexander, who was still patiently waiting at his side. Not quite hovering, but definitely close enough to catch him if anything happened. Thomas let go of the hand he was holding, instead grabbing the dark-purple cane that had been placed by his bedside. His fingers curled around the round handle—simple yet sophisticated. If someone didn’t know what Thomas had gone through, they might misinterpret it as a fashion statement.

“Let’s go,” Thomas said resolutely. He needed to get out of this hospital; he had been cooped up here for too long. He said as much out loud.
Alexander nodded. He motioned at one of the RaSP agents, who said something into the radio in her wrist, then bowed his head to Alexander and Thomas. “Agent Burr will meet you shortly, Your Highnesses,” she said demurely.

“Thank you,” Alexander said, voice curt. So he still hadn’t quite recovered his trust in the RaSP, Thomas noted absentmindedly. For his own part, as much as he would have liked to be able to blame Aaron Burr and his minions for being unable to stop the poisoning, he knew that they couldn’t have prevented it, couldn’t have anticipated it. Yes, it had been a probability, but the security was tight enough already that it would have been easier to simply walk up to Thomas or Alexander and strangle them than to smuggle in a weapon. A poisoning hadn’t been a possibility anyone had seriously contemplated. Even Alexander had considered it so far-fetched that he didn’t want any food tasters.

They made their way through the hospital. The staff they passed greeted them with a smile or, in the case of the receptionist, a hasty bow. Alexander made a note to send her an apologetic card. He might have come off as a little—curt.

At some point, Thomas heard a shift in the footsteps of the agents shadowing them. He felt a shiver up his spine, as though he was being watched under a microscope. It wasn’t an unfamiliar feeling. He paused, casting a quick look behind them. Aaron Burr was walking two steps behind them. Thomas didn’t know whether he found his presence comforting or unsettling. As much as he didn’t blame Burr for how wrong things have gone, he was a physical reminder of what happened. He embodied the very things Thomas tried desperately not to think about.

Their eyes met. Burr stared at Thomas for a moment; just as Thomas was considering averting his eyes, Burr unexpectedly looked down in shame. It was a silent apology if Thomas had ever seen one.

It occurred to Thomas that, even though he didn’t blame Burr, it didn’t mean that Burr didn’t blame himself. Thomas heaved a sigh. Yet another person who blamed themselves for something that was ultimately out of their control.

Thomas noticed that Alexander didn’t stray from his side for a second, much like a personal Saint Bernard. He knew that Alexander still blamed himself—for being who he was, for proposing, for dismissing a food taster, for putting a target on Thomas’ head—for what had happened. His entire posture practically screamed that didn’t want to endanger Thomas. It was kind of overwhelming how much Alexander cared, now that he didn’t hide it behind a façade of nonchalance.

It took Thomas’ breath away. He loved Alexander as much as he had ever loved anything, but fuck, he had almost died.

The dean was waiting for them at the entrance. Hancock was at her side, a forced smile on his face. She made a shallow bow. “It’s been an honour to be able to help you recover, Your Highness.”

She nudged the doctor at his side. Hancock scowled. “Indeed,” he muttered. Alexander stifled a smirk. It seemed that, between Alexander's unwillingness to leave Thomas’ bedside and Thomas’ tendency to take out his frustration on his doctor, Hancock hadn't been left with the best impression of them. He briefly considered sending the man a fruit basket, but decided against it. All of his and Thomas’ faults aside, the man was an insensitive jerk, and Alexander couldn’t just set that aside. Two wrongs didn’t make a right.

“Yes,” Hancock muttered. “It’s truly been an honour.” It was a credit to his acting that he could say it with a straight face, when his eyes said that he wanted nothing but to be able to kick both Alexander and Thomas out of the hospital as quickly as possible.
Alexander shook both of their hands. “Likewise,” he told the dean, glaring at Hancock when the dean turned to exchange pleasantries with Thomas. Hancock glared back.

Thomas nudged Alexander’s side. “Grow up, you dork,” Thomas whispered in French. “You’re the heir to the British throne, not a toddler trying to get his nanny to quit.”

“The two are related more closely than you’d think,” Alexander muttered.

Thomas rolled his eyes. His husband could be such a child sometimes. “Let’s just go. Burr looks like he’s about to pop a vein in his forehead.”

Alexander cast a quick look behind him, stifling a smirk. Burr did indeed look like he was in physical pain from watching Alexander.

“Okay.” Alexander put his arm around Thomas’ elbow. “Besides, that surprise is still waiting for you.”

The drive back seemed to last seconds that stretched out for hours. Thomas sunk down into the backseat, leaning into his husband’s touch as he nuzzled his nose into Alexander’s neck. Burr sat opposite them, alternating between staring at them like they were going to both die as soon as he let them out of his sight, and averting his eyes remorsefully. Alexander wrapped his arm around Thomas’ shoulders, drawing him in closer, all 115 pounds of ink, bad clothing choices, and rage and remorse. Thomas sighed, trying to release the stress that had him in a choke-hold lately. He wasn’t quite successful—every time he tried to unwind, the anxiety that was gnawing at him at the thought of returning to the palace, of returning to the place where he had almost died, reared its ugly head.

Thomas settled for trying to clear his head and deliberately not think of anything.

The car pulled up at the gate intended for the royal family only. Thomas appreciated the privacy. There was no doubt in his mind that everything wouldn’t go as smoothly as planned.

The driver opened the door. Burr stepped out first, surveying the area briefly before giving the go-ahead nod for the couple. Alexander laced his fingers in Thomas’. He kissed the back of Thomas’ hand, looking up at Thomas through his thick eyelashes. “Ready?”

Thomas nodded.

Alexander helped Thomas out of the car. The corners of Thomas’ mouth twitched. “My own personal prince in shining armour,” he teased.

Thomas threw him another grateful look before looking up at the building looming ahead. Was it only his imagination, or did even the building look ominous?

Ignoring Alexander’s concern, he took a few cautious steps forward, leaning heavily on his cane, before coming to a sudden stop as a sharp pain surged through his head. He was assaulted with flashing images—memories of Alexander laughing, of Alexander’s crinkled eyes as his lips curled up into a brilliant smile; of them chasing each other through the corridors; of Lafayette standing in the midst of chaos, yelling and pointing fingers, as he planned their wedding in true French fashion; of the wedding itself, of Thomas looking into Alexander’s eyes as the world seemed to fall away; of dancing for what seemed like hours but was probably just a few minutes; and, of course, memories of the meal, of reaching for the glass.

He could remember it in perfect detail, every colour as vivid as the day he had experienced it. Every
part of that moment was etched into his memory as though someone had physically engraved them into his brain. Thomas didn’t think he would ever forget it—forget the way it felt as he choked on his own saliva, as he struggled to take a breath but just couldn’t get enough oxygen, as his body was shutting down but his brain was still functioning perfectly, chaotic thoughts coursing through it as they raced past one another faster than even Thomas could register.

He remembered feeling his body die, and being helpless to stop it.

His body had withered away, fading into nothingness. There had been frantic voices—Alexander—trying to reach him, but it had all been in vain.

He barely registered anything of what was happening around him until a jolst startled him. He looked to the side, and into Alexander’s concerned eyes. “Hey, are you okay?” his husband whispered. “Is it —”

“Flashbacks,” Thomas managed, voice hoarse.

Alexander wordlessly drew in Thomas for a hug. Thomas buried his face in Alexander’s hair, breathing in the smell of chocolate shampoo, the ink that seemed to be a perpetual feature of Alexander, and something distinctly Alexander.

“It’s okay,” Alexander whispered.

Thomas shook his head. “No, it’s not.” He paused, trying to calm his shaky breath. “But I think it’s going to be. Eventually. Just—give me a minute, okay?”

“I’ll give you all the time you need,” Alexander replied immediately.

Thomas swallowed. He wanted to thank Alexander, but the words were stuck in his throat. He settled for nodding.

Alexander seemed to understand his gesture. “Don’t worry about it,” he said quietly. “Let’s get inside, okay?”

Thomas let himself be tugged along by Alexander. Inside, the Washingtons were waiting. The king’s face was expectant, though for what, Thomas didn’t know, while the queen’s held nothing but compassion. Thomas was torn up a little inside, because Martha Washington was too pure for anyone. She was literally the sweetest person Thomas had ever met. Patsy looked like the mirror image of her mother, except with a determined look in her eyes, while Jack’s face was clouded over with some emotion Thomas didn’t have the mental capacity to analyze at the moment. He stored it for later consideration. He needed to focus on not stumbling and falling onto his face.

“Your Majesty,” he said formally, stumbling slightly over the words even though he had practiced them innumerable times before. He bent his head into as much of a bow as his condition allowed him.

Washington waved a hand, dispensing with the formalities. “I told you, Thomas. There’s no need to bow to family, especially not in private, and definitely not in your current condition. There’s no need to stand on ceremony. Call me George.”

Thomas averted his eyes. “Yes, George,” he said stiffly.

He saw the elder Washingtons exchange a knowing look. “There’s no need to look so pained,” Martha said kindly.
“We’re hardly about to murder you,” Jack added under his breath, yelping when he was elbowed by his sister.

“Behave,” Patsy hissed. “He’s gone through a traumatic event, give him—“

“No, it is okay,” Thomas said lightly, even as his stomach was twisting into a knot at reminder of the memories Jack’s words triggered.

Patsy shook her head. “No, it’s not,” she insisted angrily. “You’ve gone through a horrible thing, and my inconsiderate brother doesn’t understand that. You look like you’re about to throw up, for God’s sake. You shouldn’t need to suffer just because my brother has the emotional range of a teaspoon.”

Thomas glanced down at his shaking hands. “I thought it was…” he trailed off as he racked his brain in search of the right word. He turned to Alexander, instinctively switching to French. “How do you say tablespoon in English?” Alexander told him obligingly. Thomas turned back to Patsy. “Tablespoon,” he finished, saying the word carefully, hesitating over the last syllable. Alexander nodded in silent approval, reassuring Thomas that he had gotten it right.

Patsy stifled a smile. “You two are adorable,” she told them unexpectedly. “I know that I’ve already told you that”—Thomas was hard-pressed to keep up with her unintentionally increasingly faster speech—“but you really are. Anyway,” she switched subjects, “Ron Weasley was the one with the emotional range of a tablespoon. My brother’s worse.”

“Patsy,” Alexander put a warning hand on her shoulder. “Slow down. Remember what we talked about?”

Patsy paused mid-word. She glanced searchingly at Thomas, then looked away, covering her mouth in shame. “Sorry,” she said quietly. “I didn’t mean to unsettle you. Good Lord, I’m as bad as Jack!” she fretted.

Thomas felt Alexander wrap his arm around Thomas’ waist. He leaned into the touch, careful not to lose his balance. It wouldn’t do for him to fall flat on his face the moment he put a foot outside of the hospital. “Patsy, stop.” Alexander’s voice was sharp, if not outright chiding.

“Sorry,” Patsy said, face crestfallen.

Thomas’ throat was constricted. He felt like he was supposed to do something now, but he was at his wits’ ends as to what. He hated seeing Patsy this way, especially with how she has shown nothing but kindness towards him. He felt somewhat responsible for how she was feeling, even though it wasn’t strictly speaking his fault.

In the end, it was Martha who broke the stand-off. “Alexander, don’t forget you-know-what,” she reminded him.

Thomas watched as Alexander’s face all but shone up with joy. “Come on,” Alexander all but whined, tugging on Thomas’ sleeve. “There’s a thing I need to show you.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “You’re a toddler,” he told Alexander, but let himself be dragged along.

Alexander led him to—Thomas ran through his mental map of Buckingham Palace on his mind, mildly surprised at the fact that he hadn’t forgotten—the blue drawing room. Huh. He hadn’t had an occasion to visit this one more than on that tour Alexander had dragged him on. His interest was piqued.

“Wait here,” Alexander ordered, making sure that Thomas stayed put before beating a hasty retreat
through one of the side doors.

Thomas stood perfectly still, bemused at the situation. Alexander’s absence at his side was already becoming glaringly obvious to him. It occurred to him how dependent he had become on Alexander, these past few months. The thought simultaneously shook him to the bone, and didn’t faze him at all. He should be terrified, or at least alarmed, but he found that the only thing he felt was… a pleasant numbness. As though he didn’t care either way. As though he had become too used to it to still freak out about it.

Thomas’ mind wandered back to the early days of his and Alexander’s relationship, when he had asked Alexander how he could possibly tolerate the flagrant invasion of privacy that Burr’s constant presence at his side was. Alexander had shrugged and told Thomas that he didn’t mind it very much—that he barely noticed it some days. At that time, Thomas had thought Alexander crazy; now, he was beginning to see what Alexander had meant. That, in itself, was unsettling.

Alexander whistled. Thomas strained his ears, and heard something akin to rapid clicking as something scrambled across the floor. The sound of paws, he realized. He didn’t have time to give Alexander more than a precursory look, registering the grin on his husband’s face, before a German Shepherd trotted into the room. It came to a stop next to Alexander, giving Thomas a precursory look before glancing up at Alexander curiously.

Alexander gestured at the dog. “Thomas, meet Newton. Newton, that’s Thomas, your new master,” he told the dog, who now turned his attention to Thomas, studying him. His nose was twitching in that way peculiar to dogs as they were smelling something new.

Thomas blinked. This, he hadn’t been expecting. “Newton?” he repeated, mostly because he couldn’t figure out a proper response. Did his husband just give him a dog?

Alexander’s shrug was somewhat abashed. “I thought you’d like the name.”


“Newton is a service dog,” Alexander explained, and oh.

“That’s… very considerate of you,” Thomas said awkwardly, “but I don’t—“

“If you’re about to tell me that you don’t need a service dog, I’m going to smack you upside the head with that purple cane of yours,” Alexander threatened. “You’ve literally just gotten out of hospital after a ten-week coma and months of recovery. You can barely walk with a cane, and you have frequent panic attacks. There’s no shame in admitting the fact that you need help, and I’ll feel much better knowing that there’s someone there to protect you when I can’t be. Besides, Newton is a service dog,” Alexander emphasized. “He’s fuzzy and cute and comforting and all manners of great.”

“There are people who need a service dog more than I do.”

Alexander shrugged. “Maybe,” he allowed, “but that doesn’t mean that you don’t need one too. Look, Thomas, just accept the fucking dog.”

“Holy shit,” Thomas breathed, “are you pouting?”

“No,” Alexander said weakly.

Thomas let out a snort laugh, which turned into a cough. He waved away Alexander’s concern. “I'll
be fine, just give me a second,” he assured his husband. “Very well,” he decided. “If it means so much to you, I’ll take the dog.” He glanced down at the German Shepherd, whose head was tilted to the side as he stared at the two men. “Newton, huh?” He switched the cane to his left hand, putting his full weight on the cane, then leaned down to pet the dog. “It suits you.”

Alexander watched Thomas pet the dog. They made an odd couple—Thomas dressed in his favourite velvet magenta coat, and Newton wearing the trademark red vest that all service dogs seemed to be required to wear.

It was the weirdest sight he had seen since he had, back in college, walked in on one of John's pals, Ben, sitting naked in an empty bathtub, the window unlatched, claiming that 'air baths' were now in vogue. Alexander would probably have taken him more seriously, had he not been high as a kite at the time.

The moment was oddly intimate. Alexander would have hated to interrupt it, so he didn’t. Thomas deserved to be happy.

That evening, Thomas curled up against Alexander on their bed—Thomas still couldn’t get over the fact that he was actually back at Buckingham, back home—with Newton at his feet. They stayed like that, drawing comfort from each other's presence and the familiarity of it all.

Eventually, Alexander got up. He stretched his back. Thomas grinned as it cracked. “Getting old already?” he teased.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “You wish,” he shot back. “I'm younger than you, in case you’ve forgotten.” He absentmindedly captured one of Thomas’ hands between his own, then set to gently massaging his fingers.

“Only by two years,” Thomas protested. “That's comparatively little. It's not a valid indication of who's going to age first.”

“It so is,” Alexander grinned triumphantly. “You just don't want to admit it.”

Thomas tried to prop himself up onto his elbow, but it gave out on him. He ended up splashed across the bed—the picture of anguish. Newton looked up in concern. He jumped down and trotted over to where Thomas hand was hanging limply from the edge of the bed. Newton nosed the hand inquisitively, trying to ascertain whether Thomas was hurt.

The hand suddenly moved, scratching Newton behind his ear. “I'm fine, Newton,” said Thomas, his voice muffled by the sheets. “I'm just miserable.”

Newton whimpered. Freeing himself from beneath Thomas' hand, he put up his front paws up on the bed, then nudged Thomas' forehead with his nose.

“I don't think he's going to leave you alone until you show him you're okay,” came Alexander's amused voice from somewhere above him.

Thomas lifted up his head, and have Newton a long look. “I'm fine,” he said in exasperation. “See?” He let Newton sniff his face. Satisfied, the dog stepped back, taking up a guarding position at the edge of the bed next to Thomas’ limp arm.

“You're in good hands. Or, well, good paws, I should say.”
Thomas groaned, burying his face back in that pillow. “A dog is nagging me to take care of myself,” he said to himself, voice muffled, as if struggling to believe it. “This is what I’ve been reduced to.”

Alexander chuckled. He sat down on the bed next to Thomas. “I’d hardly say you've been reduced to dog ownership. That’s not how dog ownership works.”

“Oh, shush, you.” Thomas turned around onto his back, and rested his head in Alexander’s lap.

“You know,” Alexander took up the subject again, “for a while back at the hospital, before you woke up, I had almost lost hope that I’d talk to you again. This?” He gestured between them. Newton looked up at the movement. Thomas patted him absentmindedly. “This was being my wildest dreams. I'm not about to throw away this second chance that we've been given. Thomas Jefferson, have I told you lately just how much I love you?”

Thomas smiled. “It's been a while,” he admitted. “I could do with some affirmation.”

A mischievous smirk plastered on Alexander's face was the only warning Thomas for before Alexander, moving quicker than Thomas’ eye could register, shifted his position so that he was lying next to Thomas, and bridged the distance between them. His lips ghosted over Thomas’ teasingly for a moment, before finally drawing him in for a prolonged kiss. Thomas couldn’t stifle the pleased whimper that left him at the movement. Alexander hummed in amusement, wrapping one of his hands in Thomas’ curls, tugging on them to shift back Thomas’ head. He pressed his lips to Thomas’ neck, leaving a trail of kisses down to his collarbone.

Thomas’ breath hitched. “Alexander…” he managed breathlessly.

Alexander pulled away to study Thomas’ face. “Is this okay?” he asked suddenly, concern in his voice.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Yes, I’m okay, mother,” he answered the question Alexander was really asking. “Now shut up and kiss me.”

Alexander smirked. “It would be my pleasure.”

“I’m sure it woul—Mmmph!” Thomas retort was cut short when Alexander kissed him again. He closed his eyes, letting himself simply enjoy the moment, because this? Thomas had missed this like he missed bloody sweet tea.

Speaking of…

Thomas pulled away from the kiss. He crossed his arms. “Is there anyone in this bloody place who can make a decent glass of sweet tea?” he asked. “James brought me some in the hospital, and ever since I’ve fucking missed it.”

Alexander scoffed. “I’m trying to snog you senseless here, and you bring up sweet tea of all things. I must not be doing a very good job.”

Alexander ran a thumb across Thomas’ lip. Thomas pecked it. “Oh, no, you’re doing just fine, darling,” Thomas intentionally used the English endearment.

A myriad of emotions flashed through Alexander’s eyes. He averted his eyes, oddly reticent.

Alexander bit his lip. “It’s nothing,” he said.

Thomas had never heard anyone sound less convinced in his entire life. He glowered. “I may not be as smart as I used to be, but I’m not an idiot. Care to try again?”

Thomas could see the internal battle raging on inside Alexander. Eventually, the redhead sighed. “It sounds different,” he admitted.

“What sound— Oh.” Thomas didn’t know what to say to that. “I’m sorry,” he blurted out. He didn’t know why he was apologizing for no reason. It seemed that Britain was rubbing off on him in more ways than he had thought.

Now that he had started, it seemed that there was no stopping Alexander. “I know that you can’t hear that right now, but there’s a massive difference between what you used to sound like and what you sound like right now. It makes me sad,” Alexander said, brutally honest. Well, Thomas had demanded the truth, hadn’t he? “And then I feel guilty because it’s my fault that you sound like that. Maybe not directly—”

“Alexander—”

“Let me finish,” Alexander cut him off. “I didn’t intentionally change your accent or poison you—but there’s this thing called indirect consequences.”

“Alexa—”

“At the same time”—Alexander’s lips suddenly twisted into a mischievous smirk—“it’s really adorable. I’d always wondered how you’d sound with a British accent, you know.”

Thomas glanced at Alexander hesitantly. “You… don’t mind?”

“That you sound like a proper person?” Alexander teased. “I’m having a major crisis here, Thomas, in case you haven’t noticed.”

“Huh,” Thomas murmured thoughtfully. “I didn’t know you had a thing for accents.”

“It’s not a thing,” Alexander immediately protested.

“Sure, darling,” Thomas shot back, watching as the expression Alexander’s face wavered between guilty and oddly intrigued. “Now, is there someone who can make a decent sweet tea around here?”

Alexander huffed. “I’m feeling used here.”

“Yes, of course, my secret plan all along has been to make you fall for me and marry you, just so that I’d be able to get the Buckingham Palace kitchen staff to make me sweet tea,” Thomas drawled sarcastically. “I knew you’d catch on eventually, Hamilton.”

“That’s Jefferson-Hamilton-Washington to you,” Alexander said, pressing another kiss to Thomas’ cheek.

Alexander had always been a tactile person, but this was a whole new level of affection. It wasn’t lost on Thomas. “I’ll agree to Jefferson-Hamilton, but there’s no way I’m calling you Washington in bed.” Thomas put down his metaphorical foot. “Don’t try to bring your father into this like you’re Draco Malfoy or something. It’s creepy.”

Alexander grimaced. “Thank you for that mental picture.”
Thomas flashed him a grin. “You’re welcome.”

“You’re horrible,” Alexander declared.

Thomas’ grin widened. It bore a striking resemblance to that of a shark staring at its next meal. “I do try.”

“Well, you succeed. Congratulations, prick, now I’m not in the mood,” Alexander huffed, crossing his arms.

“Knowing you?” Thomas teased, smirking at his husband. “I doubt that.”

Alexander spluttered. “Wha—Why—Thomas!”

“Yes, darling?”

“You’re a right prick.” Alexander shook his head. He leaned forward, pressing a kiss to Thomas’ forehead. “And yet I love you. Apparently, I haven’t told you that enough.”

Abruptly, he took a step back. Thomas’ lips followed him, trying to preserve the moment. He whimpered at the loss of contact as Alexander’s lips disappeared. “Who’s a tease now, huh?” his eyes slightly dazed.

Alexander smiled fondly. “Have I mentioned that Aemon has begun her champion training?” he mentioned casually, his voice fond, as it was wont to be whenever he spoke of his horses.

Thomas tilted his head. “When—?”

“Oh, just last month.” Alexander waved his hand dismissively. “You haven’t missed much yet, love. You should really see some of the tricks I’ve been teaching her.”

Thomas shook his head. “You are a dork. Did you, between everything you’ve been doing, have time for, I don’t know, sleep?”

Alexander rolled his eyes in exasperation. “I did sleep.”

“For longer than five consecutive hours?”

Alexander winced. “I wouldn’t go quite that far…” he trailed off.

Thomas exhaled slowly. Why has he ever expected anything else?

“Now”—Alexander’s eyes were twinkling with amusement—“there’s a musical waiting for us.”

“Oh?” Thomas glanced at his husband in curiosity. “Pray tell.”

Alexander lifted up Thomas’ knuckles and placed gentle kisses on them. “You’ll see,” he said mysteriously.

Thomas scowled. “You know how I hate surprises,” he muttered under his breath.

Alexander grimaced. “I’m sincerely sorry for that,” he replied, thinking back to when he had lied to his boyfriend—or, more accurately, had neglected to tell Thomas the truth—in order to preserve a façade of anonymity.

He had not been entirely unselfish in his desire to keep Thomas to himself. He had known—or had
thought that he had known, any rate—that Thomas could never love a prince. In thinking of himself, he had failed to take Thomas’ feelings into account—he knew that now. He wanted Thomas to remain by his side like some sort of a watchdog, a being incapable of having their own will. By robbing Thomas of the ability to make his own choices, he had reduced him, in a way, to an object, a toy, something that could be owned and tossed aside when he grew bored with it. By leaving him ignorant of the truth, he had been reducing Thomas as a person—and, in a way, had subtracted from what Alexander loved the most about Thomas: his mind. His gorgeous, sharp, ever-so-witty mind.

Then again, he thought as he glanced at Thomas, spread out on their bed and looking up at Alexander in a mixture of exasperation and fondness, while he loved Thomas’ intelligence, he was beginning to realize that it wasn’t the be-all and end-all of things.

Thomas cleared his throat awkwardly. “You’ve apologized enough, I think,” he spoke softly, his voice deceptively casual. “Now, the musical?”

“Sorry love, not telling you.” Alexander had a shit-eating grin on his face. “You’ll see soon enough, at any rate.”

“See? It’s a movie adaptation, then?” Thomas pressed.

“You’ll see,” Alexander repeated his earlier words.


“Think more France,” Alexander finally caved in as he fiddled with the AirPlay remote.

“Les Mis,” Thomas’ face practically shone up with delight.

Alexander laughed as he pressed play. “You’re adorable. Now, hush. I love this part.”

Thomas’ brows creased. “The intro?”

Alexander punched his shoulder lightly. “Yes, the intro. No judging.”

Thomas raised his hands defensively. “I wasn’t saying anything,” he said with a smirk.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “You were thinking it. Stop that.”

Thomas quirked an eyebrow. “Stop what, thinking? I thought you liked that about me?”

“Not when it cuts into my movie time.”

“Oh, I see how it is.” Thomas crossed his arms. “You’re leaving me for the movie.”

Alexander pretended to think. “Well, I don’t know. Enjolras has this something that just draws you in, doesn’t he?” The mirth in his eyes belied his words.

Thomas snorted. “You are aware of the fact that Enjolras doesn’t swing that way.” It wasn’t a question.

Alexander made a dismissive gesture. “Yeah, I know he’s aromantic. Don’t worry, you’re still my favourite francophile.”

“You’re a child.”

“I’m very much an adult. I’m very smart, you see.”
Thomas snorted. “I know you’re smart, especially when you’re drunk. Back in the States, when I got you drunk that one time, you designed an entire freaking airplane and then promptly forgot about it.”

Alexander’s brows furrowed in confusion. “I did?”

Thomas smirked. “I still have the design if you want to see it later, darling. You then memorized the Apple terms and conditions and proceeded to recite it from memory.”

Alexander’s lips curled up into a smirk. “What can I say? I’m an intelligent drunk.”

Thomas squeezed Alexander’s hand, wary of his still shaky fingers. “You’re intelligent, period. I love your mind; you know that, right?”

Alexander hummed. He didn’t reply, and didn’t need to.

They settled into a comfortable position on the bed, Thomas’ head on Alexander’s shoulder, Newton nestled between the two men. Alexander was mouthing the lyrics of the songs, while Thomas was watching the movie intently.

“It’s so weird to watch this movie now,” Thomas whispered after a while. The words hadn’t been intended for Alexander’s ears, but he harboured no illusions that his husband hadn’t heard him.

Alexander lifted up his head. “Why?”

“Because I wish it was in French. I’ve understood it more then,” Thomas told him. He ran a hand through Alexander’s hair. “It’s a weird feeling—I can remember knowing all the songs, but I don’t know them anymore.”

Alexander cradled Thomas close to his breast. “I’m sorry,” he murmured quietly. In the background, Valjean was having his existential crisis. Thomas could sympathize.

“It’s not your fault,” Thomas repeated for the umpteenth time. “And don’t you dare start on indirect consequences. If anything, I have more blame in this than you do. I drank your drink, after all. I know you won’t stop blaming yourself just like that—I know you too well, Alexander—but I’m going to repeat that for as many times as it takes for you to understand: it’s not your fault. Stop saying that. The fault lies with the one who commits the crime.”

“My soul is awash in a great flood of Sorrow as I reflect upon your Circumstances,” Alexander said mockingly.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “My husband is an actual six-year-old,” he told the lovely ladies on the screen. “Just so you know, every time you claim that I’m melancholy or depressed, remember that your angst was infuriating enough to pull a disembodied consciousness out of the abyss of existential despair and into the physical world out of pure spite.”

"Fuck you."

"Maybe later. Les Mis takes precedence."

Alexander shook his head. "Your priorities are seriously fucked up."

Chapter End Notes
Did I say puppy therapy? More like service dog therapy. Close enough.

In other news, a dickwad stole my computer, and Google Drive's never been as great as it is right now, but I'm still feeling a bit homicidal.

What did you think? Is there anything you'd like to see in future chapters?
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Alexander and Thomas watch a movie. Angst ensues. Also includes annoying politicians and singing.

Chapter Notes

I’m sorry for the late update. I’ve been cooped up in a room for the past five hours, trying to decide on songs for a theatre musical we’re supposed to be performing, and we didn’t come to a clear decision by the end of it. It’s 10:30pm and I’m Dead.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

‘OKAY WHY DO PEOPLE ALWAYS INSIST ON BRINGING UP THE ‘WHAT’S THEIR FAVOURITE COLOUR’ QUESTION WHEN YOU SAY YOU KNOW SOMEONE’
‘…’
‘LIKE *I* DON’T KNOW WHAT MY FUCKING FAVOURITE COLOUR IS’
‘mon petit lion’
‘HOW THE FUCK IS ANYONE ELSE SUPPOSED TO KNOW’
‘c’est comme à l’aube de stupide’
‘ALSO THERE ARE SO MANY MORE INTERESTING THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT A PERSON THAN THEIR FAVOURITE COLOUR THAT IS SUCH A USELESS QUESTION’
‘”do you believe in extraterrestrial life?”’
‘”what happens after death?”’
‘”does something have to be a certain way simply because it is?”’
‘”is the multiverse theory credible?”’
‘”why do vampires not have a reflection? do door sensors/clappers work on them?”’
‘”comment est-ce que tu fais éveillé”’
‘I WANT TO KNOW THE ANSWER TO QUESTIONS LIKE THESE WHEN I GET TO KNOW A PERSON NOT THEIR FUCKING FAVOURITE COLOUR WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THAT PIECE OF INFO, HANG IT ON THE FRIDGE?’
‘Is this really why you woke me up at 3am’
‘You’d end up like Freud’

‘Overanalyzing every decision in your life’

‘Alexander, go the fuck to sleep’

‘Even the truly random ones’

‘Trying to find the cause to that decision in your childhood trauma or your relationship with your mother’

‘I’m texting Jefferson. He might be able to control you’

‘All I’m saying is that colours don’t always have the symbolism we try to give them’

‘Case in point: blue for boys, pink for girls’

‘Society assigned them’

‘Not our instinct’

‘which was a little off track but oh well’

‘#did not sign up for this’

Thomas frowned at his incessantly-beeping phone. He rolled around, briefly considering ignoring it and going back to sleep. In the end, curiosity got the best of him. He unlocked the phone, not without difficulty. He blinked back the sudden glare from the phone, squinting at the screen.

There was one message from Lafayette.

‘Thomas Jefferson, get your fucking husband under control or else’

‘What has Alexander done?’ he typed out carefully, not for the first time cursing his still-lacking motor skills. It felt like he was moving through mud, his movements painfully slow.

‘He’s texting me in the middle of the night’

‘Find him and get him to go to bed’

‘I don’t care if you have to tie him down or give him a sedative. He needs to sleep and to leave me alone’

‘Don’t make me go all the way across Buckingham, Jefferson, you know I will’

"What are you working on?" Thomas asked curiously, leaning over Alexander’s shoulder to glance at the document Alexander had been typing away on for the better part of the evening.

Alexander shifted. "It's just a short story at this point," he said evasively. “Nothing, really.”

Thomas peered over Alexander’s shoulder. He blinked. “Is that… fan fiction?” he asked incredulously.
Alexander shut the laptop with a thud. “Don’t read it! It’s private!”

Thomas’ lips curled up into a smile. “Aren’t you, like, a writer? Used to people reading your works?”

“Yes, but”—Alexander spread out his hands in a helpless fashion—“not like that. Directly. It always feels like people are judging me based on what I write, how I write, how fast I type, whether I backspace—”

“You don’t,” Thomas cut in.

“The point is, I like when people read my works, but only once they’re done. Or at least when I’m not in the middle of writing them.”

Thomas huffed. “Very well, if you’re going to be that way.” He scooted back, creating some space between himself and his husband. He winced at the pain in his leg resulting from the movement.

Alexander’s brows crinkled in distress. “Are you alright?”

Thomas waved away Alexander’s concern. “I’m okay, don’t worry.”

Alexander huffed. “I can’t just stop worrying,” he retorted. “You’re my husband, in case you haven’t noticed.”

“In any case,” Thomas took up again, “I’ll be fine.”

Alexander rolled his eyes. He crossed his arms. “I know that; that wasn’t what I asked. I want to know whether you’re okay right now.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Thomas said sharply.

Alexander scowled. “Too bad. I care about you too much to allow you to harm yourself just because you don’t want to ask for help.”

Thomas held Alexander’s gaze for a long moment before finally averting his eyes. “No,” he admitted. “I’m not okay. Every movement, every bout of pain coursing through my body, serves as a stark reminder of the fact that I nearly lost my life, that I’m only alive through sheer dumb luck. Every time I allow myself to think about it, a sort of ball forms in my throat and in my stomach, weighing me down and constraining my breathing, making it impossible to function, until all I want to do is to curl up into a ball and forget about the world, to suppress the fact that someone despises me and what I stand for enough to want me de—”

“Thomas,” Alexander’s voice came from somewhere above his head, and when had Thomas closed his eyes? He forced them open again, and met Alexander’s violet ones. “Look at me,” Alexander ordered calmly. “Relax. Focus on my voice. You’re safe. I’m not going to let anyone hurt you ever again, even if I have to hunt down every last one of those sons of bitches myself.”

Without a warning, Alexander suddenly grabbed the back of Thomas’ neck and pressed Thomas to himself, as if trying to shield him from the cruel reality without. Thomas froze for a moment, then forced himself to relax. He nuzzled his face into the side of his husband’s neck.

“I’d like it if you didn’t endanger yourself on my account,” Thomas said, his voice coming muffled.

Alexander chuckled. “Can’t make any promises, love,” he teased.
Thomas huffed. “You’re impossible,” he said fondly.

Alexander flashed him a bright smile. “Thanks, I do try.” His expression then turned serious. “I’m sorry for pressuring you. I shouldn’t have.”

Thomas didn’t tell him that it was okay, because it wasn’t. He wasn’t going to lie just to appease Alexander’s conscience. “I’m glad that you care enough to ask,” he replied instead, “but trust me when I tell you that I don’t want to talk about it.”

Alexander nodded sharply. “I will,” he promised.

˚
✧
₊⁎

Alexander really didn’t know how or when he had agreed to watch Maleficent. One minute, he was working on something—a story of some sort, although he didn’t quite have a clear goal in mind as to where he wanted to take it—and the next, Thomas was at his side, clutching a remote control to the television, telling Alexander to lie down on the bed already, darling, because they were going to watch Maleficent.

“I wasn’t consulted for this,” Alexander retorted, even as he obediently settled on the bed.

“You weren’t protesting, either,” Thomas told him, his French coming out slightly garbled. While he tried to speak English as much as possible in public, that meant that, by the time he was allowed to be alone in his and Alexander’s rooms at the end of the day, his brain was exhausted from the sheer effort it still took to speak what should, by all rights, be his native language, and he found himself reverting to French when he spoke with Alexander in private.

“There was nothing to protest,” Alexander pointed out.

Thomas scoffed. “Just stop talking and watch the bloody movie already.”

Which was how Alexander found himself on the bed at—he glanced at the clock—five in the afternoon, his husband’s head in his lap. “You know,” he said conversationally, “I don’t really get this movie.”

“What’s there to get?” Thomas asked with a snort.

“What’s the point of redeeming one villain if you’re just going to vilify another character?” Alexander went on. “That’s so… unoriginal. It ruins the entire purpose of a reboot.”


Alexander shrugged. “I’m just calling them out as I see them. Why do you like this movie so much, anyway?” he switched subjects.

Thomas bit his lip, a stupid habit he had picked up from Alexander. “No reason,” he said evasively.

Alexander quirked an eyebrow, clearly not falling for Thomas’ bullshit. “Care to try again, or am I going to have to speculate?” he retorted.

“I’m not hiding anything,” Thomas said defensively.

Alexander pursed his lips, before his face split into a smirk. “You have a crush on Maleficent,” he hypothesized.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous.”
“Not Maleficent, then,” Alexander drawled. “I’m going to rule out Aurora right here, because that’s just creepy, and if you are crushing on a pre-teen, I’m going to file the divorce papers.”

Thomas glared at his husband. “I’m not a paedophile, and I would thank you not to insinuate otherwise.”

Alexander breathed a relieved sigh. “Okay, so not that. Which leaves… Stefan and Diaval.” He paused. His smirk was positively diabolical now. “Oh, I see,” he teased. “You have a crush on Diaval.”

“Just drop it, okay?” Thomas snapped.

Alexander’s smirk shifted into a softer grin. “You do!” he squealed with delight. “That’s positively adorable.”

“Alexander—“ Thomas began threateningly.

Alexander raised his hands defensively. “Hey, I’m not saying that it’s a bad thing,” he told Thomas hastily. “It’s good to see you display human tendencies again. You shouldn’t need to hide whom you find attractive.”

Thomas frowned. “I do not find Diaval attractive,” he objected. “And for your information, the last time I was open about whom I love”—Alexander’s face shone up at that—“I swung between life and death for over two months.” He took a steadying breath, shaking his head, as if trying to rid himself of the images that appeared in his head. “Thanks, but no thanks.”

He avoided Alexander’s questioning eyes, instead focusing on the movie. Suddenly, he felt a hand cover his own. Startled, he glanced up, meeting familiar violet eyes.

“Hey,” Alexander said quietly. One of his thumbs trailed the outline of Thomas’ mouth. Thomas relaxed under Alexander’s touch.

“Hey,” he replied.

“I’m sorry,” Alexander said sincerely. “I didn’t mean to bring up painful memories, you know.”

Thomas held back a sigh. That was precisely the problem with Alexander, wasn’t it? He never meant to do things, but they happened anyway. He wished that Alexander would think through his actions more. He considered mentioning it to Alexander, but decided against it. That wasn’t why he had put on the movie. He wanted to enjoy himself, to relax, to have a bit of personal time with his husband, not to fight—and a fight would be exactly what would happen, should Thomas bring it up, of that he had no doubt.

“I know,” he said softly. “Just watch the movie, alright?”

Alexander’s eyes lingered on Thomas’ face. “I worry for you,” he said eventually.

“I know,” Thomas repeated himself. “It’s quite unnecessary.”

Alexander scoffed. “I wouldn’t exactly call it ‘unnecessary’, all things considered.”

“You don’t need to worry about me all the time,” Thomas insisted.

Alexander’s smile had no small traces of bitterness. “Will you promise to tell me if you need help?” he asked.
“You can’t help me.”

“I can try. I refuse to believe that there is nothing I can do to make your life easier.”

This time, Thomas did sigh. There was actually one thing Alexander could do. “Actually,” he began, “you could tell everyone to stop pointing out that I have a French accent,” he acceded. “It doesn’t help, and it’s quite maddening. I know that I don’t speak perfect English anymore—I don’t need a reminder every five minutes.” Not that he expected it to work—he had to be realistic, after all—but Alexander wanted something to occupy himself with, and it really couldn’t do any harm to try.

Alexander nodded. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thank you,” Thomas said with almost audible relief in his voice.

Alexander tilted his head, before something flashed behind his eyes. Without any warning, he leaned forward and placed a kiss to Thomas’ lips. Thomas positively melted into the touch, shifting into a more comfortable position.

It seemed like only seconds later that Alexander pulled away. His eyes were twinkling with mischief as he said, “I’m glad I haven’t lost my touch quite yet.”

Thomas hummed. “I’m not quite sure I am able to get behind that statement quite yet. I’d need another demonstration first,” he teased Alexander.

Alexander grinned. He leaned in again obligingly. “By all means,” he said, before drawing Thomas in for another kiss.

Alexander was sitting at his desk the first time he heard it.

Thomas hadn’t quite closed the bathroom door behind him—whether it was because he forgot or because he was too exhausted to do it, Alexander didn’t know—and Alexander suddenly heard a voice coming from the bathroom.

Singing.

Alexander pushed away the pen he had been fiddling with. A grin threatened to split his face into two. Holy shit, Thomas was singing. His husband, Thomas Jefferson, was singing in the shower.

And he was quite good at it, too. Better than good, in fact: his voice was like Bornholmian hot chocolate with just a dash of mint in it, soothing yet invigorating at the same time. The more Alexander listened to Thomas’ singing, the more he never wanted it to stop.

Good God. How had Alexander never discovered that Thomas could sing? What kind of a husband was he?

He glanced at the papers in front of him, then sighed. The crown prince of Britain, he reminded himself, which sometimes left him little time to spend with the people he loved. In the past, Alexander hadn’t minded sacrificing his private life for his public one, but now… He wasn’t alone. He had Thomas to think of as well. Thomas, who had just gotten out of the hospital and needed Alexander by his side, to aid and protect and be there, just the way he had promised Thomas in his wedding vows. Alexander couldn’t just fuck off to politics and throw Thomas to the metaphorical wolves.
Alexander stood up, his mind made up. He left the files, still unsigned, on his desk, in favour of approaching the bathroom door.

He hesitated at the door, wondering whether he should announce his presence. That would be the polite thing to do. On the other hand, Thomas would undoubtedly clam up if he heard Alexander’s approach. He peered through the crack. Thomas was still in the shower, although the water wasn’t running anymore. After a moment’s consideration, he decided to take a chance and try to ever-so-gently open the door.

That done, Alexander stepped into the bathroom, leaving the door slightly ajar—closed enough to keep the warm air inside, but open enough not to make Thomas feel trapped. That was the last thing he wanted to do. Newton turned his head upon Alexander’s arrival, studying him for a moment, then, once Alexander’s identity registered with him, settled back into a position next to the sink. Alexander leaned against the wall, crossing his arms, as he listened to his husband’s voice. He was singing some song Alexander vaguely recalled having heard on the radio a few weeks back. Occasionally, he stumbled over some words, restarting until he found the sound that satisfied him. It wasn’t always correct, Alexander had to admit, but Alexander didn’t care. He didn’t need to be.

Newton turned his head upon Alexander’s arrival, studying him for a moment, then, once Alexander’s identity registered with him, settled back into a position next to the sink. Alexander leaned against the wall, crossing his arms, as he listened to his husband’s voice. He was singing some song Alexander vaguely recalled having heard on the radio a few weeks back. Occasionally, he stumbled over some words, restarting until he found the sound that satisfied him. It wasn’t always correct, Alexander had to admit, but Alexander didn’t care. He didn’t need to be.

Thomas wasn’t perfect, but he was Alexander’s, and that was all that mattered.

The shower finally stopped. The cabin door opened and out stepped Thomas, his singing more subdued now. Newton fixed him with a loving look, while Alexander pointedly kept his eyes on the mirror. He knew that it made Thomas uncomfortable to have Alexander look at him in anything but full attire—even more so now, after all that had happened. Underneath a veneer of confidence, Thomas’ self-esteem issues could fill a movie trilogy in and of themselves, no matter how much Alexander told him over and over again that Alexander wouldn’t have Thomas any other way.

Thomas didn’t seem to spot Alexander. He moved to grab a towel and wrapped himself up with it, then wrapped up his hair in the second towel. Alexander stifled a smile. He could very well imagine how fluffy it would look once it had time to dry.

Thomas turned to study himself critically in the mirror.

Truth be told, Alexander could spend hours on end just watching his husband make odd expressions at himself in the mirror. He had the most peculiar facial expressions when he thought no one was watching. Still, that wasn’t why Alexander was here, and he somehow doubted that Thomas would appreciate being spied upon, no matter that Alexander didn’t try to hide. Alexander didn’t want to violate Thomas’ privacy.

Alexander cleared his throat politely to garner Thomas’ attention. Thomas finally seemed to notice Alexander’s presence. He stiffened. “What are you doing?” he asked defensively.

Alexander couldn’t keep himself from beaming. “I’m listening to you, you wet sock. You have a beautiful singing voice. Has anyone ever told you that?”

Thomas snorted. “I have a terrible singing voice,” he refuted.

Alexander scowled. “Thomas, I have a terrible singing voice. You, on the other hand, are amazing.” He paused, letting his words sink in. “You should sing more often. It’s not right that you should feel like you need to hide this talent of yours.”

“You’re not being objective about this,” Thomas shot back.

“On the contrary, my love,” Alexander said seriously. “I can’t think of a single person who would be
more willing to criticize you than I am. I did promise to be ‘your greatest fan and your toughest adversary’, didn’t I?” he reminded Thomas. “And I’m telling you that I can’t find a single fault with your voice.”

Thomas looked away, a faint blush creeping up his cheeks. He didn’t respond.

Alexander took several steps towards Thomas, until he found himself mere inches away from the other man. “Hey,” he said softly, reaching out to cup Thomas’ jaw with his hand while tracing patterns visible only to himself on Thomas’ cheek with his thumb. “Trust me; I love you exactly as you are. Never change. You’re not perfect, but you’re you.” His eyes flickered between Thomas’, sincerity shining behind them. Thomas swallowed. “I’m not in love with some ideal—I’m in love with a real person, with faults and flaws, and a habit of leaving chocolate candy wrappers everywhere, and sleeping with a book next to him in the bed, and a tendency to steal my shrimps when you think I’m not watching, except I am,”—Alexander tapped Thomas lightly on his nose, though the reproaching gesture was belied by the warmth in his voice—”and a frankly unhealthy obsession with the journals of ancient philosophers, and, yes, an amazing singing voice.”

The blush deepened. “Flattery will get you nowhere.”

Alexander smiled. “It got me here, didn’t it?” he retorted lightly. “Besides, it’s hardly flattery if it’s true.”

Newton trudged over to Thomas, and nudged him with his nose. Thomas seemed to snap out of whatever stupor he had fallen into. He took a quick look at the dog, petting him absentmindedly.

Alexander hesitatingly took another step towards Thomas. “You’re really talented,” he repeated.

“So what?” Thomas apparently switched defensives. “It doesn’t matter. I’m hardly going to make a career out of it.”

“I’m not asking you to,” Alexander promised. “All I’m saying is that you don’t need to hide it. It’s a pleasure to hear you sing—and again, I’m not being subjective, love.”

Thomas didn’t meet his eyes for several moments, before finally tearing his eyes away from Newton. “Thank you,” he said sincerely.

Alexander grinned. He stretched up onto his toes, briefly pressing his lips against Thomas’. “Think nothing of it. After all, I didn’t say anything untrue.”

At long last, he managed to coax a smile out of Thomas. “Now, be gone.” He made a shushing motion with his hands. “Let me dress in peace. I can’t stay in a towel forever.”

Privately, Alexander thought that it was a little unfair that Thomas trusted his dog more than his own husband. Then again, the treacherous voice in his head reminded him, Alexander hadn’t exactly done anything lately to merit Thomas’ trust. His shoulders slouched almost imperceptibly. He hoped that Thomas didn’t notice.

He forced the smile to stay on his lips, and if it was a little strained—well. “Of course.”

Alexander made as if to leave. Suddenly, he felt Thomas’ hand wrap itself around Alexander’s wrist. He stilled, waiting for Thomas to say something. In the silence that ensued, a pained intake of breath echoed in the bathroom. Alexander silently cursed himself. Rationally, he knew that he couldn’t be blamed for Thomas’ every ache, that it wasn’t solely his fault, but it was hard to remember in moments like these, when he could clearly see how much his husband’s everyday life was still impaired by things out of his control.
Alexander imagined the grimace on Thomas’ face, the way he was suppressing the waves of pain that resulted from every hasty movement. He forced himself not to turn around, figuring that Thomas wouldn’t appreciate being under the scrutiny of another’s eyes.

“Hey,” Thomas said when he could speak again, “you do know that I’m not doing it because I don’t love you, right?”

No, Thomas did it because he didn’t trust Alexander—because he was afraid of Alexander’s reaction—and that hurt more than the alternative.

Alexander nodded numbly.

Thomas sighed. “I’m just not ready.” His voice was as vulnerable as Alexander has ever heard it. His mind flashed back to the day when he met Thomas for the first time in Buckingham. After somehow persuading Alexander’s father to grant him an audience with the crown prince himself, Thomas had laid himself bare before Alexander. He had glanced up into Alexander’s eyes and laid all his cards for Alexander to see. “I don’t want you to see me this way.”

Alexander finally turned back to face Thomas. “Which way?” Alexander countered, unable to stop himself. He wanted to take back the words as soon as they left him mouth, but it was too late.

Thomas’ face twisted into something Alexander dared not put a name to. “Ugly. Deformed. Disabled.”

“You’re not ugly or deformed,” Alexander countered immediately. He covered Thomas’ hand with his own, squeezing it in reassurance. “Disabled, yes, but that’s hardly an insult. You’re no different in my eyes than you were before the wedding. In fact, if anything, you’re more beautiful than you were, because you’re mine;” he said zealously.

Thomas huffed. “It’s a very nice monologue, Alexander, but it doesn’t change the fact that it’s just not true. I know that people view me differently now. I can see it in their eyes.”

Alexander fought off the urge to sigh. “To the outside world, the only change to your physical appearance is that you’re using a cane now. That’s literally all that has changed,” he told Thomas firmly. “And to me, even that doesn’t make an iota of difference. I didn’t marry you for your body.”

“No,” Thomas agreed, “you married me for my mind—and now I don’t even have that. I wish that I could give you something, at least, as recompense.”

“I don’t need recompense,” Alexander told him fiercely, tightening his grip on Thomas’ hand minisculely. “I need you to be yourself, just as you are now, not as you were before or as you wish you could be. Do I occasionally miss the past you?” He paused, letting Thomas process his words. “Yes, I do, but you’re still the same person, and anyway, for the most part, you still keep up with me. I loved you before, and I love you now.”

Thomas said nothing. The hand wrapped around Alexander’s wrist loosened its hold. Alexander turned his hand, clasping Thomas’ hand between his palms.

“Please, Thomas, don’t try to shut me out,” Alexander pleaded. “I’m just trying to help you.”

Thomas’ eyes suddenly snapped up to meet Alexander’s. “Alexander,” he asked tartly, “why do you care?”

Alexander blinked. Of all the things he had expected Thomas to say, this didn’t even make the list. “What?” he echoed disbelievingly. “Why do I care?”
“Yes,” Thomas repeated himself. “Why do you care? I’m a cripple, in case you haven’t noticed. I’m broken. My hands keep shaking all the time. I can’t do anything—I can’t hold a pen, I can’t write, and when I try to type something, it takes me longer to type a single sentence than it takes for you to type an entire page.”

“To be fair,” Alexander reasoned, “I’m a quick typer, and it depends on the length of the sentence. For example, that Louis Phili—”

“Don’t,” Thomas said sharply, a warning in his voice. “Don’t do this. Don’t try to twist my words. You know perfectly well what I meant. The speed at which I’m able to type might as well be zero for all the progress I’m making,” he said self-deprecatingly. “I’m useless.”

“You’re not,” Alexander protested. “Besides, you’re improving by leaps and bounds. Just two days ago, you wrote that e-mail to James, remember?”

“That was with Google’s voice-to-text,” Thomas pointed out.

Alexander shook his head. “Not all of it. You edited several things manually.

Thomas scowled. “That hardly makes for success.”

The corners of Alexander’s lips drew up into a smile. “Actually, I do think that it counts. It’s still progress. You’re learning to how to function. And the day before that, you found that app—”

“Forge Neon,” Thomas interjected.

“Forge Neon to play whenever you’re feeling anxious. The long-term goal is for you to get better, yes, but you need a way to function as you are while you’re healing.”

Thomas pursed his lips. He met Alexander’s eyes. “I’ll try not to shut you out,” he said finally, a faint blush creeping up his cheeks again. “I don’t know whether I’ll succeed, but I’ll try.”

Alexander breathed a sigh of relief. “That’s all I can ask for,” he said softly. He cleared his throat as he kept his eyes firmly on Thomas’ face. “Now, do you want me to leave?” He couldn’t keep a little hope from his voice.

Thomas hesitated. For a moment, he seemed as if he was going to dismiss Alexander again, but finally he took a deep breath and nodded. “You can stay,” he said, his voice so quiet—so scared—that it nearly broke Alexander’s heart.

Instead of drawing attention to it, Alexander placed another gentle kiss to Thomas’ lips and took a seat on the bathroom counter.

He’d find a way to fix this—to fix all of this.

He couldn’t afford not to.

“I don’t want to talk to the Parliament,” Thomas said, hating how much he sounded like a whining child.

Alexander smiled fondly. "Thomas, you're the prince consort—one who was nearly assassinated on his wedding day, no less. You’re going to at some point have to talk to the Parliament about what happened."
"I told you before we got married that I wouldn't be playing any political games," Thomas reminded him.

"Dammit, Thomas, this isn't a political ploy!" Alexander threw up his hands in frustration. "This is about ascertaining the governing body of the United Kingdom that you, a part of the royal family, are safe and sound. Begins, you've already talked to them once before, remember? When I introduced you as my future spouse and you were formally vetted."

"Yes." Thomas rolled his eyes. "Who can forget that wonderful meeting?"

Alexander’s posture shifted. “Look, Thomas, you are going to do this.”

“You can’t force me,” Thomas shot back defiantly.

Alexander quirked an eyebrow. “Actually, you’ll find that I can,” he shot Thomas down. “Well, ‘I’ as in ‘the governing body of the country you current reside in’, but the devil’s in the details.”

Thomas glanced down at his hands. “I just… I don’t want to do this,” he confessed. “I don’t want to do this. What if they think I’m a disappointment? And I know that I am, Alexander, so don’t even try to contradict me,” he said when he saw that Alexander was opening his mouth to protest. “I’m a fucking failure. What am I doing? I’m way in over my head. I’m married to the British prince, yet I can’t even speak English properly.” His voice sounded hollow as he spoke. “If I speak to them, I’ll be the laughingstock of the British community. You’ll only be dragged down by me.”

Alexander didn’t dare to breathe during Thomas’ rant. When he finished, Alexander didn’t say anything for a moment, before suddenly crossing the distance between them and sweeping Thomas up into his arms. “If anyone even thinks about laughing at you, I’ll lock them in the Tower,” he muttered as he pressed a kiss to Thomas’ forehead. “You’re an inspiration to us all, Thomas. I can’t imagine anyone else going through even half of what you did and still remaining as strong as you are.” He kissed the top of Thomas’ head.

Thomas let his forehead fall against Alexander’s. “Somehow, I don’t feel very strong,” he admitted. He took a deep breath, exhaling it slowly. “I don’t want to do this, but I especially don’t want to do this alone. Please don’t make me do this alone,” he beseeched.

Alexander caught Thomas’ eyes. “I’m never going to leave you, okay? I promise.” There was a certain urgency behind his words.

Thomas scowled. “Mind, I wouldn’t blame you if you did.”

“Thomas…” Alexander said slowly, “you may be an entitled prat with an ego the size of Russia and terrible opinions to match it, but I love you. Not despite you being who you are, but because of it. I wouldn’t leave you for anything. All the money in the world wouldn’t change how I feel about you.”

“Alexander,” Thomas replied, “You’re a bloody millionaire. Besides, no one should have all the money in the world. It’d absolutely ruin the global economy, not to mention the mere purpose of a central currency. If no one else has money to pay workers, there’s not going to be any services or goods to buy. All the money in the world shouldn’t change how you feel about me, not because it’s ‘noble’, but because it’d cause an international crisis.”

Alexander pouted. “Don’t ruin my argument. I’m trying to be romantic here, and you’re poking logic-shaped holes in my love declaration,” he complained. “Also, don’t you lecture me on economics, Mr. Tax-Cuts-To-Create-Revenue. Honestly, don’t you realize how bad it even sounds?”
Thomas huffed. “Of course you’d find a way to twist a compliment into a roundabout insult. I can’t even say that I’m surprised.”

“What can I say?” Alexander grinned. “I’m talented like that.”

The day that Thomas was supposed to present himself to the Parliament ranked, arguably, among the worst days in his life.

He woke up with a massive headache threatening to split his head in half. Alexander was already gone, undoubtedly busy with some meeting or other. Thomas had wished that Alexander would accompany him to the Parliament, for moral support if nothing else, but he knew just how hard it was to tear Alexander away from what he saw as his utmost duty to the people. Instead, Martha and Patsy would join him. At least that was some measure of familiarity, even if Thomas would have preferred his husband, because, well, Alexander was his husband.

He was going to be fine, he told himself over and over again. He didn’t need Alexander to be able to deal with a bunch of entitled aristocrats.

He could do this.

He could most definitely not do this. *Fuck.*

He glanced out over the crowd of unfamiliar faces staring back at him—although *crowd* was something of an understatement, considering that he was about to address a joint session of the Parliament, with all its one thousand, four hundred and forty-nine members present. Jesus Christ.

*Don’t think about it*, he repeated like a mantra, because this was *so* not the time for his social anxiety to rear its ugly head.

He came to a stop at the podium. He took a deep breath, then let it out again, feeling a multitude of expectant eyes on him, eyes ready to pass judgment at a slight slip-up, aaand that wasn’t exactly helping.

Relax, Jefferson. Relax and imagine that the audience is sitting before you in pink tutus.

“Ladies, gentlemen, esteemed members of Parliament,” Thomas began, reciting from heart the greeting Lady Fallowfield had made him learn by heart. “I have been called before this Body of Parliament in the hopes of clearing up the”—mess—“chaotic events of the 18th of October of last year.” Thomas was proud of how little his voice shook as he said that.

From her honorary seat at the front, Martha gave Thomas an encouraging smile.

He swallowed, hoping that the sound wasn’t as audible as it seemed to him. The last thing he needed was for the Parliament to lose what little respect they had for him by making a complete fool of himself in front of the one and a half thousand most powerful individuals in Britain. “I am at your disposal to answer any questions you might have regarding the events that day, to the best of my knowledge.”

One of the men cleared his throat. “For the sake of formality, please state your name and position,” he requested.
Thomas nodded. “Thomas Jefferson-Hamilton-Washington, the husband of the crown prince Alexander Jefferson-Hamilton-Washington,” he said slowly, making sure to enunciate every word clearly, because there was no way he was going to screw up in front of all of Parliament.

It rattled a little to be reduced to merely being the ‘and’ to someone else—the Patroclus to Alexander’s Achilles, the Grantaire to Alexander’s Enjolras—but it was a fact that he had come to terms with before he got married to Alexander. It didn’t do well to dwell on the past and forget to live.

And Thomas’ internal monologue has deteriorated into quoting Rowling. Again. Go him. He was good at this.

“What were you doing on the evening of the 18th of October, last year?” the man went on.

Thomas refrained from snorting only by the good graces of whatever angel happened to be watching. Wasn’t the whole point of this—Thomas hesitated to call it hearing, because he hadn’t done anything wrong, but that was precisely what it was—hearing to determine what happened during their wedding? He would take it as a given that he, Thomas Jefferson, the assassination victim, was at the bloody wedding. “I was at my wedding.”

The man rolled his eyes. “The location, sir, if you will.”

Thomas’ cheeks flushed. “Buckingham Palace, my lord.”

A woman tapped her microphone. “At what time did you notice that something was amiss?” she said, her expression inscrutable.

Thomas scowled. “Approximately at the time when I began to choke on my saliva,” he drawled, putting in as much sarcasm into his voice as he could manage.

Martha threw him an admonishing glower. She mouthed something that looked suspiciously like ‘Thomas, behave yourself’.

The woman cleared her throat. “Whenever you’re ready,” she said pointedly.

Thomas took a deep breath, flashing her a contrite look, before turning back to the woman, who was staring at Thomas with an inscrutable look. “Ma’am,” he said politely.

“Do you know who did it?” asked another man impertinently. Thomas turned his head, meeting the man’s eyes. He identified the speaker as Ashton of Hyde.

This time, Thomas didn’t stop the eye-roll. “If I did, my lord, I would not be here,” he said sharply, glad that he had taken the time to learn how to emphasize English words; Lord Ashton’s flustered expression was well worth the effort.

Ashton cleared his throat. “Let us continue. What was your first reaction upon discovering the crime?”

What the actual fuck. Was he joking?

Thomas said as much.

Ashton glared. “I do not appreciate your tone,” he said sharply. “Now, unless His Highness has any other inane remarks to make, I would appreciate it if the question was answered.”
Thomas’ nostrils flared. “Very well, my lord,” he snapped. “My first reaction upon waking up in a hospital after a ten-week coma brought about by an assassination attempt on my life and discovering that I could not move was to panic. Tell me, my lord, do you know how it feels to be unable to move a single part of your body, only to discover that you are also unable to make even one sound? Adding insult to injury, you discover that you are unable to understand your native language, and the language you can understand is spoken only by two other people that you know. Do you know how that feels?”

Silence. Absolute silence.

Thomas felt everyone's eyes on him again, staring at him as though seeing him for the very first time. He fought the urge to fidget with his arm.

Finally, one of the men next to Ashton tapped his fingers against the table. “Yes, we will take that under consideration.”

Thomas fought the urge to strangle the man, because that was inconsiderate at fuck. Instead, he sighed. He was surrounded by idiots, and unfortunately, it didn't seem like the interrogation was going to end anytime soon.

They were five minutes into the interrogation, and he was already more than ready to go back to bed.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who asked: whether Alexander and Thomas’ relationship is sexual or not is up to interpretation. I’m not going to write any smut, because a) asexual, and b) sex-repulsed, but, while I’m personally headcanoning this relationship as non-sexual, you’re more than free to imagine it some other way. If anyone feels like they want to add something to this, feel free to.

Opinions? Was it too fluffy? I'll try to tone it down in the future, dear readers. I know it might be a bit of a fluff overdose.

In other news, I might take a week off from posting stay alive, because I need to catch up on Real Life and studies and some scenes that I need to incorporate into the next chapter, and I'm hoping that you're prepared for angst.

Yell at me because I'm a sucker for validation
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

In which there’s a Christmas and a Thanksgiving and fluff and cuteness. Fluff ahead!

Chapter Notes

Think of this as the Christmas chapter, except two weeks early.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thomas didn’t so much lack an opinion on the subject of Christmas—it was more of a case of simply not caring. Sure, it was a pity that he had missed the celebration—he liked Christmas well enough, wasn’t the bloody Grinch—but, all things considered, it was far from the worst thing that could happen to him. He had quite literally faced death, and he was working tirelessly to recover from a near-absolute paralysis. Christmas wasn’t that important. It was just another day of the year, and it would come again. There would be another. He really didn’t know why Alexander got so worked up over having missed it.

That was why he was somewhat taken aback by Alexander’s sheer indignation.

“What do you mean, you don’t want to celebrate Christmas!?” Alexander all but demanded.

Thomas winced. Alexander’s shrieks were all but destroying what was left of his hearing. Was he trying to render Thomas deaf?

Thomas shrugged. “It would be fun, but it’s not that much of a hassle. Christmas isn’t unique, you know.”

“No.” There was finality in Alexander’s voice. “We’re going to celebrate Christmas.”

“‘We’?” Thomas echoed.

“‘We’?” Thomas echoed.

“Yes, we. You, me, dad, Martha, Patsy, Jack.” Newton glanced up at Alexander with chiding eyes. Alexander winced. “And Newton, of course,” he added. He could have almost sworn that the dog inclined his head approvingly. That dog really was something else.

“No,” Thomas shot him down immediately. “Absolutely not.”

Alexander fought the urge to roll his eyes. “And why not?” he countered.

“I fail to see how it will help matters. What’s done is done—we need to move on from that.”

Alexander scoffed. “It’s Christmas, Thomas,” he repeated, as if he might be able to change his husband’s opinion on the matter.

Thomas lifted up his hand to rub his forehead, trying to stave off the headache he could feel coming
on. “I really don’t think it’s a good idea,” Thomas tried to persuade Alexander, who only grinned.

“On the contrary, love,” he said brightly. “It’s going to be great. Besides, a celebration is long overdue. The mood needs to be lifted up

“Yes, but why does it have to be—“

This time, Alexander did roll his eyes. “Because I say so,” he said simply, cutting Thomas off mid-word.

Thomas sighed. “I’m not going to be able to persuade you to drop it, am I?” he asked rhetorically.

Alexander beamed. “Not a chance, and I’d rather you didn’t try.”

Thomas shook his head. “You’re impossible.”

Alexander glanced up at Thomas, before coming to a spontaneous decision. “Do you want to come with me to the stables?” he suggested.

Thomas grimaced. “You know that I can’t ride,” he reminded Alexander, his words more than a little bitter. It wasn’t that Thomas wasn’t perfectly aware of the fact that he wouldn’t be able to do a multitude of things he had long taken for granted for quite some time, if ever, but he didn’t need it rubbed in his face every other moment.

“Not as in riding,” Alexander amended quickly, but his audibly disappointed tone belied his words. Thomas could see it in his eyes that he wanted nothing more than to be able to go for a ride in the forest with Thomas, to be able to unwind away from his responsibilities and spend some time in his husband’s company.

Thomas missed that too. The knowledge that he couldn’t wasn’t exactly a pleasant reminder. He felt his heart clench in his chest. He swallowed, not trusting his voice not to betray him.

“I merely proposed that you keep me company. The horses have missed you,” Alexander coaxed.

Thomas’ shoulder slouched. “Fine,” he gave in.

He didn’t know why he agreed—it wasn’t as though it would be pleasant for him to watch someone else do something he viewed as his hobby, in full knowledge of the fact that he wouldn’t be able to copy Alexander no matter how much he tried. Thomas supposed that he simply liked to torture himself, because there didn’t seem to be a better explanation.

Alexander met his eyes searchingly. “Are you certain?” he asked, uncharacteristically delicate.

Thomas pursed his lips silently. He nodded. “Yes.” He wished that he could sound more convincing than he did.

Alexander wasn’t swayed by Thomas’ empty words. “You don’t need to. I know it’s rather painful for you to—“

“I’ll be fine,” Thomas snapped unexpectedly. “I’m not a child; you don’t need to take care of me.”

Alexander raised his hands defensively. “I’m not saying that.”

“No, you’re just being protective to the point of being possessive,” Thomas retorted hotly.

He half-expected Alexander to apologize, or to defend his actions. He did neither. Thomas didn’t
know whether to be grateful or infuriated.

“You’re my husband,” Alexander snapped, eyes flashing with irritation. “What do you expect me to do? Just throw you to the wolves?”

“No, I’m expecting you to give me space and privacy to be able to live.”

“I am,” Alexander insisted.

“Not from my point of view.”

“With all due respect,” Alexander said sharply, “your point of view is skewed right now.”

Thomas gaped. “And yours isn’t?”

“This isn’t about me,” Alexander growled. “It’s about you and the fact that you can’t get over yourself.”

Thomas sighed, feeling the adrenaline leave him. It was as if all the fight had gone out of him, leaving behind an empty shell that miraculously resembled a human body. “Just drop it,” okay?” he asked, exhaustion creeping into his voice. He wasn’t up for having another pointless argument with Alexander that would leave them right where they stared.

Alexander opened his mouth, no doubt on the verge of telling Thomas exactly where he could stick his opinions, then closed it again. He shook his head. “Fine, I’ll drop it,” he bit back. “If you want to join me, come on. I’m leaving.”

Thomas hurried after Alexander. Alexander slowed down his pace so that Thomas could keep up. The air between them was tense, and Thomas felt his good mood from earlier dissipate. Alexander was the most unique person to grace this Earth. He was also a first-rate asshole, something Thomas had a tendency to forget every now and again.

Thomas thought about saying something, breaking the oppressive silence that had fallen over them, but decided against it. His husband was the reason it was even there to begin with; let him deal with it.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he could see Alexander glance at him every now and again. He steadfastly ignored him. It wasn’t his fault, Thomas repeated to himself. He clenched the hand not wrapped around the cane, his nails digging into his skin with enough force to draw blood. He forced himself to relax, stuffing the hand into his suit pocket.

Alexander shot him a mock-glare. “That was low.”
“A bit like you, then,” Thomas retaliated, falling back into the easy banter despite himself. Dammit, it was really hard to stay angry at Alexander when he was like this. He had a way of distracting Thomas from what he was thinking. It was frustrating.

Alexander scrunched up his nose. “Oi, rude.”

“It’s not rudeness if it’s the truth,” Thomas said simply. “And don’t you stick out your tongue at me, Mister,” he added in a stern voice, but the effect was belied by the twitch of the corners of his lips.

Alexander then proceeded to stick out his tongue at Thomas, who snickered at his husband’s antics. The worries from several minutes earlier were still fresh on his mind, at the edge of his mind, tugging at it, hanging over him like an ominous cloud, but he subdued them for the time being. “Go on,” he said with a laugh. “You wanted to show off, so show off.”

Alexander made an exaggerated bow, the drama queen that he was. “Your wish is my command, my love.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Save the flatteries for the horse.”

Even knowing what Alexander was planning, he still managed to surprise Thomas. He really outdid himself with this on. Thomas was impressed despite himself.

The bed was empty when he woke up. Once, it might not have been an out-of-place occurrence, but it was almost as if, ever since he had left the hospital, Alexander made a point of spending more time with Thomas. It was… nice. A nice change. To feel only coldness where he usually felt heat informed Thomas that something was different.

Curious, he got out of bed, dressing himself quickly, before making his way to the common living area that he and Alexander shared with the rest of the household, hoping to get some answers. Or food, since there was a small dining room attached to it.

There was a Christmas tree waiting for him when he arrived. Its lights were blinking merrily, as if trying to send Thomas a coded message.

Thomas blinked. Only last night, there had been no Christmas tree. He would have remembered if there had been. What the…?

“Merry Christmas, Thomas,” chirped a voice from right behind Thomas’ ear.

Alexander. Of course.

Thomas turned around, coming face to face with his husband. “Did you do this?” he asked accusingly. His grip on the cane strengthened. He really didn’t like surprises, even if Alexander had all but warned him about this one.

Alexander, at least, had the decency to look guilty. “Yeah,” he admitted. “I just thought that, since you had missed Christmas and all, that it would be good for—”

“You’ve already made that argument,” Thomas reminded him. “Last week, in fact. I’m no more impressed by it now than I was then.”

Alexander shrugged. “You didn’t protest, did you?” he asked rhetorically.
Thomas rolled his eyes. “They way I recall it, I did, actually.”

“No, you said that you were fine with it,” Alexander insisted. “Anyhow, glad that you finally arrived. The others were starting to worry.”

The others? How many people had Alexander invited? “If you were beginning to worry, did it not occur to you to come and get me?” Thomas asked, more in order to have something to do than because he expected an answer.

“That would have ruined the surprise,” Alexander replied, because of course he did.

Thomas sighed. It was too bloody early to be arguing with his husband, who, by the slightly deranged look on his face, didn’t so much get up very early as simply didn’t go to sleep at all last night. Thomas made a note to bring it up with him at a later date.

“Okay,” he said finally. “What have you concocted?”

Alexander grinned. “Come and see.”

Reluctantly, Thomas followed Alexander to the kitchen, where Martha and Washington—George—were waiting around the private dinner table, along with the Custis siblings.

“Good morning,” Martha said serenely, smiling at Thomas.

Thomas offered her a strained smile. “Good morning, ma’am.”

“How many times do I have to tell you to call me Martha?”

“Sorry,” Thomas said quietly. “Martha.”

George, as usual, was stoic. “Good morning, Thomas.”

Thomas offered a shallow bow. “Your Majesty—I mean, George. I am sorry,” he said quickly, his words rushed.

George’s expression was inscrutable as he said, “You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“Exactly,” Patsy agreed amicably. “Good morning, by the way. Merry Christmas.” She stood up to kiss Thomas on the cheek, before returning to her seat.

Jack glanced at Thomas. He inclined his head. “Merry Christmas, Thomas.”

Thomas glanced between them. “Merry Christmas to y’all,” he said slowly, taking extra care to pronounce the last word the way James had taught him the last time they had spoken.

Martha’s smile widened. “It gladdens me to see you on the path of recovery.”

“Thank you,” Thomas said awkwardly.

Alexander came up behind Thomas, casually wrapping his arm around Thomas’ waist as he did so. “See?” he whispered into Thomas’ ear, quietly enough so that only Thomas would be able to hear him. “Everything’s fine.” He placed a kiss to his husband’s temple, before raising his voice. “Now, unless you have any other objections, let’s sit down and eat, and then you’ll open your gifts.”

Thomas swallowed as a most pressing matter occurred to him. “I did not buy you anything,” he confessed, face flushing with embarrassment.
“That’s okay, love,” Martha assured him soothingly. She reached out and brushed a hand through Thomas’ curls, and Thomas suddenly realized where Alexander got his habits—his tendency for being tactile—from. “You came back to us; you’re improving; that’s the best gift you could have given us.”

Martha’s words had a way of making Thomas feel better, no matter the circumstances. “Thank you,” he said automatically, then, at George’s warning look, realized that he had spoken in French. He cleared his throat, making a conscious effort to switch to English. “Thank you.”


Once they were done, Jack and Patsy stood up to gather the plates. Normally, that would be the job of the staff, but they had been dismissed that morning.

George looked up from the newspaper he had been perusing, locking eyes with Thomas. “You’re different,” he remarked.

“Oh?” Thomas shot back. “How?”

George sighed. “I can’t say. Simply different.”

Thomas tilted his head. “How am I doing?”

“Good. Better than I had anticipated,” George said matter-of-factly. It wasn’t so much a confession as a declaration.

“Am I shaming the royal family?” Thomas pressed.

Washington paused for a moment, a thoughtful look on his face. Thomas appreciated the fact that Washington didn’t immediately assure him that he wasn’t, or snap that he was. He was actually putting some thought into his answer. Thomas couldn’t ask for more, no matter what the ultimate response would be. “No,” George finally asserted. “You aren’t. Your behaviour isn’t exemplary, either, but you are not shaming us.” shaming me went unspoken.

Martha turned her eyes on her husband. “George!” she hissed. “That was uncalled for.”

“No, Martha,” Thomas came to George’s defense. “I asked him. I want to know.”

Martha pursed her lips into a thin line, disapproval practically oozing out of her as she spoke, “I don’t agree with this. It’s doing more harm than good.”

“No, Martha,” Thomas came to George’s defense. “I asked him. I want to know.”

Martha pursed her lips into a thin line, disapproval practically oozing out of her as she spoke, “I don’t agree with this. It’s doing more harm than good.”

“Neither do I,” Alexander piped up from beside Thomas. “Unfortunately,” he went on, refusing to meet Thomas’ inquisitive eyes, “it’s not our choice to make.”

“Wow,” Jack drawled from the doorway, wiping his hands on a rag—although it was a rag in name only, as Thomas had never seen so clean a fabric, and he doubted that it had seen more than a dozen wet dishes before today. “You almost sounded mature there. Are you sure you’re alright?” he teased.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Piss off, Jack.”

“Language,” Martha chided.

“Yes, ma’am,” Alexander said automatically, though there was no repentance in his voice.
Thomas hid a smile at his husband’s antics. Alexander had no right to be as adorable as he was.

Alexander stood up from the table with a grace that, if Thomas was entirely honest with himself, left him a little envious. He offered one of his hands to Thomas, who took it. Alexander drew him up. He held up one of Thomas’ hands to his lips, kissing it ever so gently, as he wrapped his other arm around Thomas’ waist and drew him closer.

“Stop it, guys,” came Patsy’s voice from over Thomas’ shoulder. “You’re giving me diabetes.”

Alexander shot her a smug grin, before stepping away from Thomas. “Well, c’mon, love.” He grabbed Thomas’ hand. “Open your gifts.”

Thomas huffed. “Alexander, you didn’t have to—”

“But I did anyway. Now go on, before they explode.”

Thomas tensed up. “Explode?” he echoed. What had Alexander—

Alexander rolled his eyes. “It’s a figure of speech. Shoo. Go on.”

Not knowing quite what to do, Thomas followed Alexander’s instructions. He stepped forward, coming to a stop next to the tree. He grabbed the gift closest to him, turning it over in his hands. It had the shape of a rectangle, wrapped in unassuming red paper. A book, in all probability. On top, George’s name was written in black, sharp letters.

At another nod from his father-in-law, Thomas hesitantly unwrapped the gift.

Alexander glanced over his shoulder. “Is that—” he began.

“Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book of Etiquette,” Thomas confirmed absentmindedly. Was that a hint? Thomas wondered. If so, it was about as subtle as an elephant in a china store. He glanced over at the king. “Is that a”—Thomas bit his lip as he searched for the word—”what is the English word for manège?” he asked Alexander in English.

“Roundabout?” Alexander suggested.

“Yes! That. Roundabout way of saying that I need to improve?” he asked George.

“There is always room for improvement at every level,” George said philosophically.

Alexander crossed his arms. “That wasn’t an answer, dad,” he objected.

His father quirked an eyebrow. “Did you expect one?”

“Touché.”

George inclined his head.

Thomas moved on to another gift. Its shape was similar to George’s gift, but where the first gift had been almost monotonous in its wrappings, the second one looked like it had been a victim of the rainbowcalypse. The wrapping paper was adorned in shades Thomas hadn’t even imagined could exist, and it was his job to know his colours. He carefully unwrapped it, revealing a notebook.

“I figured that you could use it to train the steadiness of your hands,” Martha said from beside George.
Thomas shot her a look that was in part grateful and in part strained. “Thank you,” he offered.

Patsy’s gift was of the fluffy kind.

“A teddy bear?” Alexander asked skeptically. “Really?”

Patsy merely smiled. “Never underestimate the power of free hugs,” she said cryptically.

Thomas’ lips quivered as he fought a smile. That was almost typically Patsy.

The last package was from Jack. Inside a box that featured enough reindeer to fill its reindeer quota and then some, was a pair of beautiful black gloves, along with a note that said, ‘To cover up hands and give off the impression of Professionalism.’

Thomas choked on a laugh. “Thank you.” He had a sneaking feeling that they would be useful whenever Thomas’ hands began to tremble and it all became too much for him. If he couldn’t stop being disabled, at least he could hide the evidence of it.

“You’re welcome,” Jack said easily.

Alexander stepped closer to Thomas again, wrapping a hand around his shoulder absentmindedly. He pressed another package, which he had pulled out of seemingly nowhere, into Thomas’ hands. “Oh, and Mr Burr left you a gift as well,” he said in a tone that might as well be talking about weather. He continued to chatter on about something, but Thomas ignored him, too busy trying to wrap his head around the fact that Aaron Burr, the person who, time and time again, proceeded to try to hinder Thomas and Alexander’s relationship in any way possible, and who most definitely still did not approve of Thomas, left Thomas a gift.

Thomas fought the urge to pinch himself. Had he accidentally stepped into the Twilight Zone? This was definitely not in Burr’s description.

Prompted by Alexander, Thomas cautiously opened the package. It revealed a photo album. Thomas flipped through the photo album, his eyes widening as he took in the photos of him and Alexander, taken over what had to have been almost six months—almost since the day Thomas had met Alexander. The photos, obviously taken personally by Burr, were ranging between everything from of Alexander’s America visit, to a few shots of Alexander’s proposal—and the overt breach of privacy would usually have incensed Thomas, but the gesture was simply invaluable to Thomas—and everything in between, coming together seamlessly to create a photo album that documented Thomas and Alexander’s relationship down to a tee.

It was… stunning. Thomas’ breath hitched.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

Alexander smiled. “I’m not the one who made the gift.”

“No, but you made it all possible,” Thomas argued. “Without your tenacity, none of this would have happened. Thank you for doing it all for me.”

Alexander’s eyes softened. “Of course I’d do something like this for you; I’d do pretty anything for you,” he promised.

Thomas’ brows creased in disapproval, even as his stomach fluttered, and really, wasn’t he past the infatuation? Clearly not. “Now, there’s no need for such drastic measures, darling,” he murmured quietly. He hadn’t noticed when he had switched back to French again.
“I’m not being dramatic,” Alexander said in all seriousness as he stared into Thomas’ eyes.

Thomas was vaguely aware of the rest of the Washington family, still present around them, but oddly enough, he didn’t feel crowded. Even the Custis siblings refrained from giving a sharp witticism that would inevitably unsettle Thomas.

Alexander wordlessly drew Thomas into an embrace. He leaned his forehead against Thomas’ so that they were touching.

“I think my gift would be more appropriate to open in private,” he teased Thomas with just the smallest hint of a waggle of his eyebrows.

Thomas flushed. “You did not—” he began, mortified by the implications of Alexander’s words.

Alexander seemed to realize how Thomas had interpreted his words. His eyes widened. “No!” he said loudly. “Nothing like that, I swear. I promised you that I’d never make you uncomfortable, and I don’t intend to break my promise.”

Thomas let out the breath he hadn’t realized that he was holding. “Thank you,” he said sincerely.

Alexander reached for Thomas’ hand, and squeezed it. “Tell me if I ever do anything to hurt you, okay?” Alexander said carefully. He moved forward and settled next to Thomas, then wrapped an arm around his shoulder. “I think this is something we need to talk about, Thomas. I never want to hurt you.”

“Not right now,” Thomas hissed, all too aware of the several pairs of eyes glancing at them surreptitiously.

Alexander inclined his head. “Alright; when we’re alone, then.”

Later, when they were alone, Thomas was meaning to bring up the subject, but that went out of the window when Alexander disappeared momentarily, only to return with an envelope in his hand. It was wrapped in magenta and emerald ribbons, with Thomas steeled himself, half in dread and half in anticipation, for whatever Alexander deemed a gift. He couldn’t deny that it left him both excited and scared.

“Here.” Alexander pressed the envelope into Thomas’ hands. “Merry Christmas, Thomas.”

Thomas glanced down at the gift in his hands. He turned it, but didn’t open it.


Thomas’ fingers were trembling slightly as he opened the envelope. Inside was a paper with a single phrase.

Thomas hadn’t noticed that he had frozen completely still, staring at the word as though it might actually leap out of the paper and bite him. Comprehension was eluding him, even as he grappled with it the way one would grapple with a lost bar of soap in the bath.

He was started by a hand on his shoulder, and unwittingly met Alexander’s eyes. “It’s the password to my laptop,” Alexander explained, as though Thomas hadn’t already figured it out. He bit his lip. “I… wanted you to have it. I trust you with it. And, you know… just in case.” Alexander didn’t
elaborate on what he meant, and Thomas didn’t need him to.

It was an enormous show of trust for Alexander to give Thomas his laptop password; Thomas knew just how much the computer meant to him, how much time and effort Alexander has put into that thing, how many hours he had poured over it, and how many invaluable files Alexander had on it. Thomas knew that no one but Alexander—and now, it seemed, Thomas himself—has access to the computer.

It was the meaning of the gesture, more than the gift itself, that struck a chord in Thomas’ heart.

“Thank you,” Thomas said breathlessly.

Thomas’s eyes flitted between Alexander’s for a brief second, hesitating, before he came to a decision. He bridged the distance between their lips, capturing Alexander’s lips in a kiss.

Alexander made a brief sound of surprise, before he closed his eyes in contentment and deepened the kiss. He wrapped one arm against Thomas’ neck and another around his waist, then pressed himself fully against Thomas’ body. Thomas’ grip on the paper loosened, and both the paper and the envelope clattered to the floor silently. Thomas couldn’t bring himself to care.

He breathed in deeply, sensing the scent that was typically Alexander—the smell of parchment, of the ink that was lingered all over Alexander’s body long after he had finished writing, of the chocolate shampoo that Alexander insisted on using and that Thomas would never admit that he loved, and the smell of a particular something that Thomas couldn’t for his life pinpoint but that he knew was just what made Alexander Alexander. Thomas carefully returned Alexander’s gesture, putting an arm around his husband’s waist in return, and felt his husband relax under his touch.

It was as though time itself had come to a stop, just for the two of them.

A quiet whimper escaped Thomas' lips when Alexander trapped his lower lip between his teeth. Alexander did the thing with his tongue that never failed to render Thomas breathless. He loved it, loved the little things that reminded him of just how well Alexander knew him and what he liked and didn’t like, loved the fact that Alexander knew him almost completely. It was calming, Thomas supposed, to have someone who knew him inside-out, yet didn’t reject him—what’s more, that person was still willing to be with him. It made Thomas feel accepted in a way that nothing else could.

Thomas couldn’t tell how long they remained like that—Alexander flush against Thomas’ body, both of their faces burning yet glowing with an excitement Thomas could not even begin to describe. He could feel the happiness practically radiating from Alexander, and was certain that his husband could feel the same. It was as though he and Alexander became of one body, their minds in harmony, understanding each other impeccably.

Thomas could stand there in Alexander’s arms forever, with nothing on his mind but his husband—no worries gnawing at him, no plans to be executed, no façades to put up, no life and consequences and burdens to deal with.

Thomas had never experienced anything like that—this feeling of an absolute connection with another human being—and he resolved to hold on to it for as long as possible.

Alexander fulfilled him, completed him, and made him more than the sum of his parts. He could only hope that he had the same effect on Alexander.
Alexander and Thomas stayed in the room for the better part of the morning, simply taking the time to re-familiarize themselves with each other’s presence again. At one point, Alexander made them hot chocolate, and they settled on the bed to read a book, Thomas cuddled up against his husband’s chest, resting between Alexander’s legs, with Newton sniffing his right foot every now and then. Alexander gently wrapped his legs around Thomas, before he began reading out loud from *The Silmarillion*. His voice enraptured Thomas, bundling him up in what could only be described as a security net. He felt safe, and at home, and like he belonged. Warmth emanated from his stomach, spreading through his body.

Thomas closed his eyes contentedly, and a quiet sigh emitted from his mouth. Alexander paused in his reading as he glanced down at his husband. His lips coiled up into a small smile, before he resumed reading.

It was nice, Thomas thought. Very nice. Almost suspiciously nice.

When the thought occurred to him, it was impossible to eradicate it. It evaded his grasp no matter how hard he tried to catch it. He knew that, realistically, nothing bad had to happen simply because something good was happening right now, but experience had a way of awakening bad habits.

If Alexander noticed the way Thomas had tensed up almost imperceptibly, he didn’t indicate it.

The entire family gathered again for dinner. Thomas drew in a breath sharply as he took in the table filled with what could only be described as classical Thanksgiving foods. He was once again blown away by Alexander’s dedication, because there was no doubt as to who was the prime architect—he internally huffed at the unintended pun—of this.

“What’s this?” he asked, mostly out of the desire to say something than because he needed clarification what a dinner with Thanksgiving food was meant to symbolize.


Thomas’ heart did an unexpected clench at those words. He couldn’t formulate his thoughts into a coherent sentence for several moments.

“You didn’t have to do this,” he finally said.

Alexander crossed his arms. “Yes, you keep repeating that,” he said, vaguely annoyed. “How can I get it through your head that I’m not doing these things because I have to, but because I want to? I want to make you happy—that’s what makes me happy.”

Thomas swallowed. He shook his head. “I—“ he began.

Someone cleared their throat behind them. “If you two are quite done being mushy?” Patsy asked pointedly. “I would like to eat sometime this week.”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Patsy, you’re decidedly unromantic.”

“I’m balancing you out,” Patsy said. “You’re almost hopelessly romantic, you sap.”

“She’s not wrong,” Thomas murmured into Alexander’s ear in French.

Alexander grinned up at his husband. “Admit it, you like it.” His eyes twinkled.
Well, Thomas certainly couldn’t deny it, could he?

Alexander declared that, before they eat, they go around the table and say what they were thankful for.

George, by a unanimous if unspoken decision by all participants, went first. “I’m thankful for the prosperity of the nation.”

Next was Martha. She reached for her husband’s hand, squeezing it lightly. “I’m thankful for how happy Alexander is—how happy Thomas makes him.” She shot a bright smile at the two men.

“I concur,” Patsy said. “I’m thankful for my friends and family—that we are all here to celebrate this holiday.” Her eyes raked around the table. Thomas spared a brief thought to her partner—did she have one? Was she married? If so, where was her partner? Was it a husband? A wife? The more he thought about it, the more Thomas realized just how little he knew about the Custis siblings.

Jack snorted. “I’m grateful as fuck for the fact that Trump didn’t win the American presidency, because Jesus Christ, that man would be a mess.”

Patsy rolled her eyes, even as their mother scowled. “Language, Jack,” she admonished.

Thomas stifled a grin, even as his posture was tense. Soon, it would be his turn, and he didn’t do well with speaking with people. He knew that, rationally, these were people he knew well, and that he had no reason to fear speaking in front of them.

Alexander was next. “I’m thankful for Thomas, the love of my life.” He reached over and grabbed one of Thomas’ hands, squeezing it gently.

Thomas’ throat clogged up at Alexander’s words. He found that he couldn’t speak, so he settled for nodding numbly, ducking his head when Alexander tried to meet his eyes, lest Alexander sees the tears in eyes. Instead, he chanced a glance down at their joined hands, resting on his lap. He felt a tremendous tug somewhere in his chest, and he took an almost involuntary tight breath.

Finally, it was Thomas’ turn. “I am thankful for you all, for your support and your perseverance, and for never giving up on me,” he said quietly, looking straight into Alexander’s eyes. He prayed that his voice wouldn’t tremble, because this was hard enough to say without his body betraying him. “You have no idea how much that means to me. I do not know where I would be without you,” he said frankly. “For all that I have endured, I do not regret a single second.”

Chapter End Notes

Tell me what you thought! Comments give me life, and all opinions are appreciated.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

In which Thomas travels to the States, smuggles biscuits by the crate, argues with James, and has a minor breakdown—not necessarily in that order.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is for defendedbymypen because she said there was a lot of fluff. So. Uh. Here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thomas was reading a well-worn copy of *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*, while Alexander was working on a speech on his laptop, one hand absentmindedly running through Thomas' curls. Abruptly, Thomas bookmarked the page, then closed the book slowly, careful not to crease any of its pages. "Alexander..." he began softly. "I've been thinking,"

Alexander paused mid-combing Thomas' hair. "Yes, love?" he asked softly.

"I want to go back to the States," Thomas continued before he could talk himself out of it.

Alexander's fingers stilled in Thomas' curls. "Of course," he said finally, oddly neutral, as though he was hiding his real emotions. "If that's what you truly want."

Thomas shook his head. “Not like that,” he corrected Alexander's misconception. “I don't want to stay there—God knows I've got nothing keeping me there. Although this does bring up an important point: why do you insist on letting me leave? You are allowed to fight my decisions, to show some resistance, to show that you care.”

Alexander leaned around Thomas, locking eyes with his husband. “Of course I care; never doubt that,” he said fiercely. “It's just that…” He swallowed. “The last time I tried to interfere with your free will, I very nearly lost you. I can't afford to go through that again—I don't think I could.” He stopped, taking a breath to steady himself. He forced a smile onto his lips. "Anyway, you were saying?"

Thomas eyed Alexander for another moment, silently calculating whether it was a fight worth having. Something flickered in his eyes. Thomas finally continued, “That I want to go back to the States for a while. No more than a week or so. There are a few things I didn't have time to do during my last visit, and quite a pile of other things has amassed during my... absence,” he said awkwardly.

Alexander let out a quiet “Oh”. He didn’t speak for a moment. “You're not going alone,” he said finally.

Thomas’ lips twisted into a scowl. “I’m not taking half of Royal Protection,” he protested immediately.
“I’m not asking you to,” Alexander replied in a voice that said that he had been about to do just that, “but you’re not going alone. You’ve already been subject to one botched assassination attempt. I don’t want to give them a chance to finish the job—especially since Burr still hasn’t caught the culprit.” Alexander sounded like he was offended by the mere notion.

Thomas shook his head. “They’re not going to. I promise you.”

“You can’t know that,” Alexander muttered darkly.

“I’ll be safe, darling.”

James pinched the bridge of his nose in profound exasperation. He absentmindedly wondered whether he would be arrested for physically assaulting the consort to the crown prince of England, because it seemed to be the only feasible way of getting Thomas to shut up and actually think about the sheer insanity that was pouring out of his mouth.

“No, Thomas,” he said slowly for what felt like the umpteenth time, “you are not going to smuggle biscuits into England. If nothing else, think of how it would look.”

Thomas crossed his arms—an impressive feat considering that he was clutching his cane in one of his hands and a bag of biscuits in the other. “I don’t care. I want my biscuits.”

Beside him, Newton was glancing between Thomas and James with a bemused look on his face, like he wanted to demand what was going on but was too polite to. Thomas absentmindedly scratched him behind his ear.

“You’re being unreasonable,” James told his friend.

“I’m being perfectly reasonable. I haven’t had a proper biscuit in months, and I will not be robbed of them again.”

James stifled the urge to roll his eyes. Although Thomas had gotten much better at English than he when he woke up a few months ago, he was still by no means as fluent as he was before. Adding insult to injury, his accent was almost painfully British, with the occasional Frenchism thrown haphazardly. To hear him spout off the virtues of the South in what had to be the epitome of a European accent was ironic, to say the least. “At least try to act like you’re a responsible adult. You don’t need”—James did a quick headcount, and nearly groaned—“four dozen biscuits.”

“No all are for me,” Thomas said defensively. His grip on Newton’s fur tightened, and the dog whined softly at the sudden pain. Thomas forced himself to loosen his grip.

“Not all are for me,” Thomas said defensively. His grip on Newton’s fur tightened, and the dog whined softly at the sudden pain. Thomas forced himself to loosen his grip.

James merely raised an eyebrow. “Really?” he replied skeptically.

“Really,” Thomas insisted. “Alexander needs to try those—surely you, a fellow Virginian, understand that!” He slipped over to French and added something, sounding appropriately outraged.

James blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

Thomas paused. James could almost see the cogs in his brain try to backtrack, switching back to English and trying to translate what he had said into a language that James was able to comprehend. “Alexander says that his biscuits are the real ones, but they are not. These are the real ones.”

This time, James did roll his eyes. He only hoped that he would be there the moment it dawned on
Thomas that he was becoming every bit as British as his husband was. His facial expression alone would be worth it, undoubtedly horrified at the way it wouldn’t even be a surprise. Yes, James was looking forward to it.

“Don’t get me involved in whatever cultural argument the two of you are having,” James replied instead.

Thomas huffed. “It is not an argument,” he pointed out. “I simply know that the American biscuits are superior to whatever thing that passes for biscuits over there. Those bloody things are undeserving of the name.”

Did Thomas even hear himself?

James placed his hands on his hips. “And how are you planning on getting the biscuits to England again?” he asked, hoping against hope that his question would, if not outright stop Thomas, then at least make him think a little before acting. Truly, Hamilton was a bad influence on his best friend.

“There is yet room in my suitcase, James,” Thomas replied, rolling his eyes.

“It’s ‘still’, not ‘yet, and your suitcase is barely passing the weight limit as is, Thomas!” James pointed out. “Besides, I’m sure they have canned biscuits in Brita—”

“That is that, Jem!” Thomas argued, lifting up the hand petting Newton to gesticulate. “They do not! They are entirely biscuit-less, and they do not even know it!”

“So your solution is to smuggle biscuits into the United Kingdom?” James asked incredulously. Newton pressed his head into Thomas’ hand again.

“If that is what it takes,” Thomas said solemnly. “I love Alexander too much to allow him to live another day without having a real, proper biscuit. I would prefer with gravy, but I can manage that on my own. I’ll tell them that it’s for the crown prince or something.”

“The security won’t care. Besides, you have a dog.” James gestured at Newton, who glanced at him inquisitively. “He’ll eat all of it before you even get through the check-in.”

“But I have to take the biscuits,” Thomas insisted. “And Newton is trained. He will not eat them.”

“You can’t, Thomas,” James insisted. “You literally cannot. The TSA agents will stop you before you can say mac and fucking cheese, and I for one do not want to be spotted being stopped in an airport security line over fucking biscuits. I’m a Senator—I have a reputation to uphold.”

Thomas’ eyes narrowed. “Of course. It always comes back to that, does it not?”

James spluttered. “Thomas, it’s my career! The thing I’ve devoted my whole life to! It’s important to me, and I’m sorry, but I’m not about to let it go down in flames over some biscuits.”

“I am not worth anything, is that what you are saying?” Thomas shouted, struggling against the instinct to switch back to French. It wouldn’t serve any useful purpose, anyway, and it would only annoy James further.

“You know, you wouldn’t even be having this problem if you’d flown in the Washingtons’ private airplane!” James remarked angrily.

“I told you—numerous times—that I will not have a report to la famille royale! My life will not be entangled in lies and entitlement and the promotion of aristocracy, and do not even get me started on
an economy sustained by *l'argent du contribuable*! You did not listen when I told you this before, *n'est-ce pas*?” Thomas snorted derisively.

James’ French may be abysmal, but he did understand the last part. “*Oui, n’est-ce pas,*” he parroted mockingly. “I did listen. It’s not my fault you refuse to listen!”

Thomas’ grip on his cane tightened almost imperceptibly. James’ words hit closer to home than he’d care to admit. They brought out his insecurities—his cane, the way he switched between languages like a confused gorilla, and the fact that he was annoying James to no ends. “I do not need your help if it is such a hassle,” Thomas retorted.

“*Fine,*” James snapped. Newton whined at the cutting tone in James’ voice. “Sort out your damn priorities, Jefferson.”

As Thomas watched James storm out, his eyes blazing with fire and fury that could very well be a weapon of mass destruction all by itself, he felt something heavy settle in his stomach. He didn’t want to lose James’ friendship over something as trivial as a few biscuits, but James was missing the point. It wasn’t a question of the biscuits themselves, so much as what they represented—Thomas’ origins. He felt that he was slowly losing a grip on who he was. It had been happening oh-so-gradually at first that he hadn’t noticed it, but after the hospital, the change was pronounced. He had lost his language, then his accent, and finally his intelligence. Thomas was desperate to retain at least a semblance of who he was before. Some days, when he looked in the mirror, it felt like he didn’t recognize the person in the reflection.

The biscuits represented *Virginia,* they represented Thomas’ life before Alexander. Thomas couldn’t afford to lose that as well. It broke his heart that James couldn’t seem to understand.

Fine. If James was going to be that way, Thomas was going to have to do it without him. He glanced down at Newton, who looked up at him with big brown eyes, before abruptly turning to face the security agent behind him. “Here,” he pressed half a dozen of biscuits into the woman’s hands, ignoring her quirked eyebrow. “Take these.”

“Sir?” the agent said carefully. Newton’s eyes conveyed the same sentiment.

“Put them in your pockets,” Thomas ordered.

“Sir, with all due respect, wouldn’t it be easier if you simply bought another suitcase?” the agent suggested, even as she pocketed the biscuits carefully as ordered.

Thomas’ eyes narrowed. “It is a matter of *principle*.”

“If you say so, sir,” the agent said, her expression clearly conveying, ‘You’re an idiot, but I’m professionally prohibited from insulting the members of the royal family’.

“I do,” Thomas said resolutely. He stuff the rest of the biscuits into his backpack, as well as the pockets in his pants and jacket.

It was going to be fine.

˚✧₊⁎坻０(example)

Two hours later, Thomas was forced to reevaluate that assessment. It was not, in fact, going fine. It was going the opposite of fine. The way the situation looked, it was headed towards literal disaster. From the looks of it, Newton seemed to be in agreement.
So maybe he was exaggerating a little, but really, his nerves had been twisted beyond recognition ten minutes ago, and the security agent behind him wasn’t helping, barely concealing her smirk.

Thomas, Newton by his side, was surrounded by three airport security guards, with a fourth one sitting by the x-ray machine and staring at Thomas’ jacket in mounting confusion. The sentiment was matched on the faces of the remaining security guards.

“Why are there biscuits everywhere,” the guard by the machine said, not even bothering to phrase it as a question.

Nobody paid attention to Newton since Thomas had been able to prove that yes, it was a service dog, and yes, he had obtained permission beforehand to keep him onboard.

Thomas fought the urge to fidget. He hadn’t quite been able to calm down since his meeting with James had gotten him all wound up. His anxiety wasn’t making it any easier, either. He watched with mounting apprehension as the machine guard put the biscuits through the x-ray machine for the fourth time, peering at the screen as though she might be able to uncover something new this time. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is a symptom of insanity, Thomas recalled absentmindedly. He couldn’t quite pinpoint the origin of the proverb, but, judging by the expression on the guards’ faces, he would indeed have a lot of time to do just that.

“Aren’t you the one who married that prince guy?” one of the security guards surrounding Thomas finally piped up, seemingly unable to constrain his curiosity any longer.

The guard next to him scowled. “Better question: Why do you need so many biscuits?” He put his hands on his hips. “Are you smuggling biscuits?” He paused, and something between horror and delight crept up onto his face. “Oh God, you are smuggling biscuits.” He added something under his breath that sounded suspiciously similar to “What the fuck, man.” The first guard shot him an admonishing look, to which the guard averted his eyes sheepishly. Newton whined quietly.

“Why is a prince smuggling biscuits?” the third guard asked, ignoring the dog. Thomas didn’t have enough energy in him to correct him, because no way in hell was he a prince. He was a prince-consort at the most, and probably not even that until Alexander took the throne. Thank God for small miracles. “What the actual hell is he smuggling in those biscuits?” the guard continued. The first guard transferred her glare to him.

The guard at the machine hummed as she tapped something on the screen. “You know, Your Highness, you’re the person math problems warned us about,” she said casually.

The third security guard snickered. “Satie, was that a joke? Why, I’m proud of you. Our baby’s all grown up.” He pretended to gush, his voice infused with enough sweetness to cause diabetes.

The machine guard looked up, her eyes narrowed and her lips drawn into a thin line. “If you speak that way to me again, I assure you that I’ll make good on the gift Canach gave me for Christmas,” she threatened.

Thomas tried to follow their conversation, chiefly with success. He understood most of the words, and filled in the gaps for the ones he didn’t. Still, it was more difficult than it had been with Alexander and Patsy and Martha, seeing as they spoke slowly, whereas the security guards’ speech pattern could be likened to rap more than to normal conversation. Adding to that the fact that their accent was as far from British as one could go, and Thomas was proud of himself for being able to keep up with them.’

The first security guard stepped up to the machine, where laid Thomas’ backpack, still stuffed with
biscuits. He grabbed a package, and took a biscuit, lifting it up to his nose to smell it. He wrinkled his nose. “They smell like biscuits,” he informed the rest helpfully.

The machine guard rolled her eyes. “Impressive deductive skills, Mr Holmes. I dare say your dog could do better—and don’t even think about eating it,” she added as the security guard began eyeing the biscuit speculatively. “We still don’t know what’s in them. Get Dixie down here.”

The guard snorted. “And have to listen to Lewis going on and on about how his precious dog is ‘smarter than his entire staff’? Thank you, but I think I’ll decline.” He crossed his arms, the left hand still clutching the biscuit.

“Well?” the other female security guard asked pointedly. “Do we know what’s in them yet?”

The machine guard sighed as she pressed a red button, then held out Thomas’ jacket to her coworker. “The only thing I can tell you is that there are no metal objects or any detectable explosives in them.”

“Good,” said the first security guard. “It would have been a waste of perfectly good biscuits.”

For the first time in almost twenty minutes, Thomas agreed with them.

“What is it in them, then?” the female guard demanded as she grabbed the biscuit the other guard was holding and lifted it up to examine it. She sniffed it. “Drugs? Marijuana? Cocaine?”

“Biscuits,” Thomas answered helpfully.

The guard stared at him for several moments. Just as Thomas had begun to squirm on the spot, she said, “With all due respect, sir, are you seriously expecting us to believe that you, a member of the royal family—and yes, Weatherby, you were right—are smuggling biscuits to England?”

“Yes?” It came out as a question.

The guard blinked. She lowered her hand, letting it fall back to his side. “What the hell. Okay. Fine. It doesn’t seem to pose a risk to the rest of the passengers, so it’ll pass. If the prince wants to smuggle drugs through biscuits, I’m sure as hell not going to argue with him.” She put the biscuit gently back in the package, and placed it back in the bag, before handing both the bag and the jacket back to Thomas. “Enjoy your trip, Your Highness.”

Thomas glanced behind him, to where quite a queue had built up behind him. Angry faces were staring back at him in varying stages of impatience. Some were whispering profanities under their breaths, while others looked on the verge of yelling at Thomas for holding up the queue—which Thomas, in all honesty, understood. He would’ve felt righteous anger too, if a random guy decided to block the line by bringing aboard, say, chocolate Santas.

He waited for the rest of his security team to get through the checkpoint, and watched as the head agent exchanged a few whispered sentences out of Thomas’ earshot. He glanced away, preferring to study the wall ahead of him, featuring a map of the airport, in favour of stressing himself out over the people behind him.

Finally, his security team joined him. “Ready whenever you are, Your Highness,” said the head agent, handing Thomas the biscuits Thomas had given him earlier.

Thomas drew in a deep breath, then let it out slowly. He forced himself to loosen the grip on his cane. “Alors, allons-y.”
Alexander blinked. “Thomas,” he began, then stopped. He didn’t say anything else for a long time.

“Alexander?” Thomas asked hesitantly. “What is—”

“Care to run that by me again?” Alexander interrupted him. “Because I could have sworn I’ve heard you say that you smuggled biscuits over to England. In your jacket, too, which, eugh.” He made a disgusted face.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “It’s not eugh,” he protested. “And you’ll try some.”

“I bloody well will not,” Alexander protested. “They’ve been in your pockets for eight hours.”

“But they’re good!” Thomas insisted.

“Maybe they were eight hours ago,” Alexander repeated, narrowing his eyes. “But right now? I’m not taking that risk.”

Thomas crossed his arms. “Well, I risked my honour and integrity to get them safely across the border for you, so yes, you will eat them. Besides, they are really good.”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “You're a dork.”

“I’m going to take that as a compliment,” Thomas said haughtily.

“Did James wheedle you into this?” Alexander asked suddenly, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

Thomas averted his eyes. “I don't want to talk about James,” he said evasively.

Alexander's posture shifted from irritated to concerned in the blink of an eye. His constant mood shifts were giving Thomas secondhand whiplash just from witnessing it. “What's wrong?” Alexander asked gently.

“Nothing.”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “If you're going to lie to me, at least do me the courtesy of not doing a half-assed job.”

“I'm not lying to—”

“Yes, you are,” Alexander gently but efficiently shot down Thomas’ protests. “I'm your husband. I've sat by your side for months. I think that I know you better than you know yourself.”

“You're fucking pretentious, you know that?”

Alexander didn't back down. “I'm simply concerned about you.”

“Fine,” Thomas snapped. “I think that I've lost James. I've estranged my bloody best friend over a box of pastries, because I was an idiot who prioritized food over a two-decade long friendship, and I just—I don't know what to do.” Thomas’ voice cracked at the last word.

Alexander held Thomas’ hands between his own. “It’ll be fine,” he said, sounding not at all reassuring. Thomas didn’t know which of them Alexander was trying to convince. “Madison wouldn’t just ditch you over something so petty.”
“But it’s not,” Thomas insisted. “It may feel petty, but it’s not. It’s a symbolization of everything that’s wrong with our relationship—the fact that he seems to value his career more than he values me, the fact that I’m turning into someone who neither of us can recognize, who’s a virtual stranger, and I keep telling myself that it’s fine, that he’ll accept me regardless of who and what I am, and I know that it’s not true, that it’s a lie, but I can’t help it, because if I stop believing it, then what do I even do and how do I go—”

“Stop,” Alexander ordered loudly, moving one of his hands from cupping Thomas’ to press a finger to his lips to silence him. “It’s no use worrying about that, especially when I know, just from the brief conversations I’ve had with him, that he won’t just abandon you because you’ve changed a bit.” Alexander must have seen the doubt on Thomas’ face, because he added, “Everyone changes—that’s part of being human, love.”

“Not to the extent that I have,” Thomas protested. “It’s as though I’m an entirely different person.”

“What did Thomas do to deserve a man as brilliant as Alexander?”

“Don’t know what I’ll do if that’s the truth though,” Thomas confessed.

Alexander shushed him again. “You’ll be fine,” he said confidently. “You’re an amazing person, and Madison would be a fool to throw it away.”

Privately, Alexander thought that he’d need to have words with a certain Virginian senator in the near future, friendships be damned.

“What the hell, Madison?” Alexander hissed into the speaker as soon as James picked up. “Are you deliberately trying to ostracize Thomas, or is lowering your best friend's self-esteem nothing but a game to you?”

“What the hell, Madison?” Alexander hissed into the speaker as soon as James picked up. “Are you deliberately trying to ostracize Thomas, or is lowering your best friend's self-esteem nothing but a game to you?”

“Wha—” James began, but Alexander didn't let him continues.

“Tell me—was it fun?” Alexander continued, his words cutting into James like the biting chill on a cold winter morning. “Was it fun making your best friend feel like actual garbage? And no, he didn't tell me that explicitly, but he didn't have to,” he added sharply.

“I didn't mean it like that,” James retorted. “I didn't mean to hurt him.”

“Well, newsflash, bright head,” Alexander snapped, “Thomas didn't take it this way. You're best friend thinks you're ditching him.”

“I didn't ditch him,” James told Alexander.

Alexander scoffed. “He’s your best friend, someone who can't walk on his own and is barely fluent in English, and you just fucking abandoned him at an airport because he was trying to bring something from his home. What the fuck is wrong with you?” he demanded.

There was silence from the other side of the phone. “I didn't think,” James finally said.

“That much is painfully obvious,” Alexander growled. “You did not think. Isn't that just typical of you Americans?” he hissed.
“Don’t start with that idio—” James began.

“No!” Alexander yelled. “I will not stop! I will not give up on Thomas, even if you clearly already have! You can’t just do things like that!”

“I haven’t given up on Thomas!” James yelled back just as loudly.

“Yeah? Well, that’s exactly what it feels like!” Alexander snapped.

He absentmindedly wondered about how this would look from an outsider’s point of view—the crown prince and heir to one of the greatest empires in human history engaged in what essentially amounted to a screaming match with a constitutionally elected representative of the oldest democracy on Earth.

“You know what this reminds me of?” Alexander went on before James had any time to speak. “It reminds me of your party’s rhetoric. ‘Get the government out of your life’, isn’t it?” Alexander scoffed. “What you’re really trying to say is, ‘get the government out of poor people’s lives’.”

“What are you—” James began, but was once again interrupted.

“You have to realize that it doesn’t mean what you meant, what matters is how it came out! It sounds bad when you say it like that—especially when I know that you mean it, too! You may not have given up on Thomas, but that’s how it seems to him, and I care too much about my husband to see him suffer. I don’t care whether you’re Santa himself—fix this,” Alexander hissed before ending the call, pressing the red button with more force than strictly necessary.

He took a few calming breaths as he glared at the phone as though it was its fault that Thomas’ best friend was a bloody asshole.

In that moment, it didn’t matter to him who James was—what mattered was that he had hurt Alexander’s husband, and that was just not okay.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: the airport scene is based on real experience, with chocolate santas in lieu of biscuits, because a certain parental unit decided to smuggle a dozen chocolate santas over the border and the authorities were Not Amused

Comments are better than chocolate. Feed the author.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

In which the assassin is dealt with, and there’s angst because what else is new.

(Or, Alexander is reckless and Burr pays the price.)

Chapter Notes

Here’s my Christmas present for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alexander sighed in frustration. He was sorting through the notes he had on Thomas’ assassination in a valiant if futile effort to review the information. He hadn't actually thought that it would help him figure out anything new, seeing as he had gone through them a thousand time before, but it was better than doing nothing.

He massaged his temples, trying to stave off a headache. Damn it, it was bloody frustrating. It felt like the answer was constantly eluding him, staying just out of his reach. What was he missing? Whom was he missing?

Missing.

Alexander sat up straighter, his fingers trailing through his hair as his hands fell to his side.

Missing. That was it. The realization washed over him like icy rain on a chilly autumn day, sending shivers along his spine. He couldn't stifle the quiet sigh that escaped his mouth. It was so obvious, in retrospect. The answer had been staring into his face all along. Why he hadn't thought of it before escaped him.

He put down his pen abruptly, not paying attention to where it landed with a soft clatter. He pushed himself away from the desk with enough force to send the precariously-stacked mountain of files he had been reviewing careening to the floor.

He paid no attention to the chaos, however, as he stood up and surveyed the room. Now where had he—

His eyes zeroed in on the bookshelf on the far end of the room. There. He crossed the room, coming to a stop in front of the shelf, a determined look on his face. He pulled out a large volume of ‘The American Dream: North Atlantic Trade Relations Through The Years’—a book that, although very informative, had been almost mind-numbingly boring, the author having the tendency to drone on for chapters on end about the fiscal models now commonly accepted as obsolete, and while Alexander agreed that it was useful to know how various ideas affected markets of the past, he failed to see the relevance of the markets in Imperial China, 260 BC on the federal banks in early 18th century America.
For a moment, nothing happened. Alexander rolled his eyes, because it was just typical that it would be today of all days that the bloody mechanism would give out. Then, suddenly, the shelf moved, making a quarter’s turn to reveal a safe. Alexander felt his lips curl up in satisfaction. He opened the safe with a few quick clicks and turns, reaching into it to retrieve a non-descript phone and a small pistol. He checked the safety on the firearm, then grabbed a round of ammunition before closing the safe again and putting the thick volume back in the rotating bookshelf. He strapped the pistol to his waist, pocketing the ammo as he did so, before putting on his jacket.

Alexander made a point of dusting the bookshelf regularly in cases just like these, so that no traces would be left behind to indicate that anything had been moved.

He spared a thought to Thomas—no doubt already asleep in their bed, Newton curled up at his feet. Alexander debated waking Thomas to say goodbye, before discarding the idea. Thomas would try to dissuade him from his plan, and, when that failed, would call Burr and tell him everything.

No, that wouldn’t do. Thomas honestly worried too much about Alexander sometimes. Alexander knew exactly what he was doing—he would be just fine.

Alexander needed a way to get away from his protection detail first, though. He knew that Burr hadn’t reduced his detail to its normal size. It was like they were on constant red alert since the wedding. It was vexing. Oh, well.

Finally opening the door, Alexander made a show of preparing for a trip to the gardens. The agents, well used to the crown prince’s sometimes bizarre whims, didn’t even bat an eye at his words. Alexander set off at a brisk pace, his mind miles ahead of his body, an action plan already formed in his head. It would be easier to lose his detail in the woods. Not easy, no—hopefully not—but easier. Besides, Alexander has had a lifetime of practice in escaping the attention of his handlers. It was time to put his skills to the test.

Alexander was glad to discover that it took a not inconsiderable amount of energy to shake off his protection detail. It seemed that Burr had taken the assassination attempt to heart, and was actually increasing the guards’ training. Good. It meant that Thomas would be safer.

He eventually managed to slip away, leaving the guards to search through the forest. He headed in a direction known only to himself.

He turned on his phone and checked the map, grateful that he had the forethought to download the local area online. It had been more along the lines of taking every precaution possible than actually believing that any new information would be discovered—he had given up on that a long time ago—but he was infinitely grateful for it now.

The phone silently informed him that he had 2.3 km left to walk. Alexander sighed, squared his shoulders, and prepared himself for a long walk.

Alexander came to a stop in front of a small house. It didn’t look like anyone had lived in it for a long time. Alexander let his gaze slide over to the warehouse next to the house. It looked someone had abandoned it in all haste.

Alexander glanced up at the address on the house. He came to a stop as he mouthed it quietly. Just in case, he told himself. He didn’t plan on calling the police, but he needed to be prepared for all
eventualities. It seemed to be working out well, so far.

Alexander checked the door. It was unlocked. Ignoring the uneasy feeling in his stomach, he entered the house. Inside, it was unassuming. Quaint. Not what Alexander had expected. Granted, his expectations had been of an evil layer with a miniature volcano with bubbling lava, but he rather thought that he was justified in not having expected… this.

“Enjoying the sights?” asked a voice from being Alexander.

The prince swirled on his heels, coming face to face with the speaker. The man was tall and of a sturdy build, which would give him a distinct advantage, should a physical fight ensue. Then again, Alexander hadn't trained in hand-to-hand combat his entire life for nothing, and out of the two of them, it certainly wasn't Mr Tall-And-Muscular who was a famous marksman. Alexander liked his chances very well, thank you very much.

Alexander shifted into a defensive stance. Somehow, he doubted that the man would be amenable to just letting Alexander put him in handcuffs and follow him to the police station—not that it was what Alexander intended to do with him. He was Alexander's to deal with.

If the would-be assassin noticed any change in Alexander, he didn't let it show, instead simply studying Alexander as one would a new species.

“You have me at a disadvantage, I'm afraid,” Alexander murmured. “You know who I am, yet I have no idea who you are.” It was a lie, of course. Alexander knew perfectly well who Andrew Jackson was, but, if Alexander's hunch was right—and it usually was—the words would rattle Jackson.

He wasn't wrong. To his satisfaction, Jackson’s nostrils flared in dismay. “Don't you recognize me, Your Highness?” He clucked his lips. “And here I thought I had made an impression on you.” His shoulders sagged. “Very well. Andrew Jackson's the name. I work as your Deputy Head of Staff.”

Alexander feigned a moment it realization. “I remember now. You’re the little man in the background.”

Jackson scoffed. “I’m not just some unimportant person whose only purpose is to stand there and look pretty while you lot prance around and act like drama queens.”

“No,” Alexander agreed calmly. His voice was cold enough to freeze helium. “You kill us.”

Jackson shrugged noncommittally. He didn’t take Alexander’s bait.

Alexander tilted his head. “Why did you try to kill me?” he asked suddenly, cutting straight to the chase.

Jackson rolled his eyes. “I didn't try to kill you, specifically,” he said plaintively. “I would have settled for Mr Jefferson just as well.”

“That’s Mr Jefferson-Hamilton-Washington to you,” Alexander corrected him sharply, a glint in his eyes.

Jackson snorted. “Mr Jefferson,” he emphasized, “simply happened to be the one to reach for you glass.”

Alexander crossed his arms. “Okay, I'll bite,” he said. “Why did you try to kill me?”
Jackson shrugged again. “Because I despise everything you stand for,” he said simply. “You seek to dilute the ancient traditions that have ruled this country since the dawn of time. I want to keep the royal bloodline pure—preserve it, as it were.” He smiled. “Nothing personal, Your Royal Highness. If anything, you should be grateful—after all, I’m saving you from a dire degradation. The blood needs to remain pure.”

Alexander stared. “Grateful?” he echoed disbelievingly. “Grateful for what, exactly? The fact that you nearly killed the love of my life?”

Jackson scoffed. “He’s not the love of your life, Your Royal Highness. He’s simply a fantasy, an ideal. The idea of him might be good, but that’s not real. None of it is. You would do better to forget about him and focus on ruling. Trust me, Your Highness, I’m not the bad guy here. I’m on your side. I just want to help you,” the man said eagerly.

Alexander’s eyes blazed. “You’ve helped quite enough,” he snapped. “And I really don't see how killing me would have helped me.”

Jackson grimaced. “Maybe not you specifically, but it would have benefited the royal family,” he said offhandedly, sounding as though he was discussing the weather rather than the attempted murder of members of one of the most influential families in the world. “Out of curiosity, how exactly did you find me?” Jackson asked, something strange in his voice that Alexander, for the life of him, couldn’t identify.

Alexander’s lips twisted into something resembling a smile. “You weren’t on the guest list,” he said simply.

“Ah,” Jackson drew in a sharp breath. “I see. Well.”

Their eyes met, and they seemed to come to a silent understanding. In an eerily coordinated move, they both pulled out their guns at the same time. They stared at each other for a long moment, a stand-off if Alexander had ever seen one.

Jackson eventually grimaced in dismay. “I’m terribly sorry for this, Your Highness,” he said, and there was actual regret in his voice, before something shifted behind his eyes, and Alexander knew, a microsecond before it happened, that Jackson was going to shoot him. He didn’t have the time to react before he was pushed aside and a bullet pierced through his palm. He fell down to the floor with a scream, and watched in astonishment as Burr, having appeared seemingly out of nowhere, aimed a gun at Jackson and fired off a few rounds. One of the bullets pierced Jackson’s right lung, taking his breath away. Alexander could have sworn that he had heard the sound of a breath hitching. Before Burr could react, Jackson aimed the gun at Burr and shot him in the chest, determination in his eyes.

Alexander saw red. Before Burr’s body even hit the floor, he gripped the gun he had been clutching earlier and shot Jackson in the chest twice. Jackson collapsed in a heap.

A searing pain coursed through his body as Alexander stood up, and he wanted nothing more than to lie down on the floor and sleep for a week, but he couldn’t afford it right now. He staggered over to where Burr was lying, and sunk down onto his knees. Ignoring his bleeding shoulder—he really shouldn’t, his inner doctor told him, to which Alexander promptly told the doctor to shut up—he leaned over Burr, putting a hand over his mouth to check for a breath, pressing two fingers to his throat to check for a pulse.

Nothing.
Suppressing the urge to break down in tears, Alexander pressed two fingers to his throat to check for a pulse.

Shit.

Shit shit shit.

Burr couldn’t—he couldn’t do something like that to Alexander. He was his oldest friend and his most constant companion. True, he and Lafayette were close, but Burr had always been there for Alexander, even when Alexander himself didn’t know that he needed him.

Burr couldn’t just die on him. That was not fucking okay.

He fumbled with his phone, cursing when it in all haste accidentally touched the wound on his left hand. He had to pause for a second, swallowing a pained cry while clutching the phone in his good hand, before he carefully dialed the very people he had sworn he wouldn’t.

“112, please state the nature of your emergency,” said a pleasant male voice on the phone.

“There’s been a shooting,” Alexander said promptly. “The perpetrator is dead, I think. My friend”—Alexander swallowed—“is also dead.”

“I’m sending a police car and an ambulance to your location,” the man said. “What is your address?”

Alexander rattled off the name he remembered on the warehouse plaque. The man hummed. “The services are on their way,” he reported. “Are you hurt?”

“Yes, I’ve been shot.”

“Where?” the man asked matter-of-factly.

The man’s calm served as an anchor for Alexander. “My left palm, sir,” he replied dutifully.

“Do you see an exit wound?” the man asked.

Alexander shook his head in response, then remembered that the man couldn’t see him. “No, sir.”

“Have you tried to stem the blood flow?” the man pressed.

Alexander cursed himself internally. “No, sir,” he admitted.

“Can you stay awake by yourself?” the man asked.

“Yes.”

“Are you in shock?”

“I don’t think so,” Alexander paused. “No,” he continued, “I’m not.”

“Good. Elevate the wound above the heart, and apply a pressure bandage. Then if it’s still bleeding, take your fingers and apply pressure to the brachial artery. Do you know where the brachial artery is? It’s the one along the long of—”

Alexander sighed. “I know where the brachial artery is,” he said. He was beginning to be grateful for the long hours he had spent listening to John ramble on about anatomy.
“Continue to apply pressure and try to stem the bleeding. If it stops, I want you to make a makeshift bandage. Apply pressure to the wound, and prevent infections from setting in,” the man ordered.

“Do you know how to make one?”

“Yes, sir. I’ve served in the military,” Alexander told the man. He fumbled briefly with the buttons on his jacket, then made quick work of ripping away a strap of his T-shirt.

“Good. Do not remove the bandage when it becomes soaked, but apply new ones atop it. Do you experience any dizziness? Is there a chance you might have a concussion?”

“I don’t think so,” Alexander said absentmindedly. He shifted the phone to his shoulder as he used his uninjured hand to tie the strap around his injured palm, holding the fabric with teeth whenever necessary. “I—” Alexander’s voice faltered as he glanced over at Burr’s body again. He switched his phone back to his hand. “Sir,” he took up again, “what do I do with my friend?”

“Have you checked his breathing and pulse?” the man asked.

“Yes, sir,” Alexander reported. “There’s nothing.”

The man sighed. “Normally, I would have you try CPR, beginning with compressions, but you are in no state to work with a wounded hand.”

“Sir, I can still try to do CPR with the hand that isn’t wounded,” Alexander protested. “That one’s still okay.”

The man hesitated. “You will find that CPR is infinitely more difficult to carry out on an adult using only one ha—“

“Still, it’s better to try it than to not,” Alexander said, moving into position. He again put his phone on his shoulder, then placed his uninjured hand on Burr’s still chest.

The man sighed again. “I’m afraid, sir, that there isn’t anything else I can help you with, in that case,” he said neutrally. “The ambulance will be with you momentarily.” With that, the man disconnected the call.

Alexander glanced down at Burr. He pressed down at his chest, gasping as the pain tripled in intensity. He gritted his teeth, biting back the pained cry that threatened to erupt from his throat.

He set to doing compressions. The pain didn’t abate or even diminish. If anything, each movement felt to Alexander as though he was being cut into, the carver leaving longer and uglier marks with each try. Tears formed in his eyes, but he merely swallowed, focusing on nothing but the body in front of him. Burr needed his help, and Alexander would make sure Burr got out of this unscathed if it was the last thing he did.

God, it was all Alexander’s fault. He was the one who sneaked out of the palace. He shouldn’t have gone. No, actually, he didn’t regret that. He regretted not being good enough to lose Burr’s trail. He should have done better. Burr wouldn’t have gotten mixed up if he had.

*If Burr hadn’t gotten involved, you’d have been dead,* said that voice inside his head.

*Shut up,* Alexander replied.

If that was the price for Burr’s life, he would have gladly paid it.

Moments blurred together, becoming one continuous string of
Alexander sent an absentminded thanks to the adrenaline coursing through his veins—if not for that, and noradrenaline, he would have collapsed alongside Jackson a long time ago.

It felt like an eternity before he heard the sound of an approaching ambulance, though it couldn’t have been more than a few minutes. Suddenly, he felt hands on him, pushing him away from Burr’s body, as other figures came into view. Several were kneeling by Burr’s body, checking for vital signs and muttering when they didn’t find any. Out of the corner of his eye, Alexander saw a stretcher.

Suddenly, he saw someone’s face in front of him. A woman was talking to him. What was she saying? Alexander tried to focus on her voice. “—kay? Sir? Do you—” She stopped, then turned to the man next to her. “I think he sustained a concussion,” she said matter-of-factly.

“I’m fine,” Alexander snapped.

The woman turned back to him, one eyebrow rising past her receding hairline. “Oh, good. Is your hand injury your only injury?”

“Yes.”

Alexander let himself be led away. He watched, out of the corner of his eyes, as another pair of medics crowded Jackson’s corpse, murmuring between each other. The police officers were doing… something. Alexander didn’t pretend to understand what it was they were doing. He didn’t exactly have time to watch crime series. It looked effective, at any rate, so Alexander dismissed them.

He let himself be led away by one of the paramedics, a blanket slung over his shoulders. He glanced over his shoulders at Burr’s body. A shiver went through his body. Unbidden, images flashed through his mind. He clamped down on the nauseating thoughts. It wouldn't do to concentrate on it, not now.

He was taken to a hospital—the same hospital, the back of his mind noted absentmindedly, as the one where Thomas had spent those accursed months. It was almost ironic, really, how it was now Alexander who needed their help. It seemed that he couldn’t stay away for even a few days.

He wondered what Thomas would say if he found out. When he found out, he corrected himself, because at this point, Alexander really didn’t see how he could hide something of this magnitude from his husband.

He was rushed into the emergency room, where two doctors were already on standby, awaiting Why weren’t they taking care of Burr? He needed their help far more than Alexander did. It was just a hand. Aaron had been shot in the bloody chest.

“If you’ll follow me, sir,” one of the nurses said as she led Alexander away, through corridors—left, straight ahead, left again, right, straight ahead, left—until they came to another room with some machines that Alexander had a vague recollection of having seen before, and, were he not exhausted and sustained only by adrenaline, he might actually be able to list their names and functions. As it was, they all looked fairly similar to Alexander. To the left was large beeping machine, followed by quiet machine one, small beeping machine, and quiet machines two through four.

“What are—” Alexander began, then hissed as a doctor pressed a few fingers to his palm. “What are you doing?” he snapped.
“Trying to save your life, Your Royal Highness,” the doctor said calmly, “which is made infinitely harder by the fact that you refuse to cooperate,” she said reproachfully. “Now, I will remove your bandages, and apply a professional tourniquet. It will feel uncomfortable, maybe even painful, and it should, because it’s a sign that it’s applied properly,” the doctor went on.

Alexander wanted to argue, wanted to protest and scream and demand to know why they weren’t taking care of Aaron, but it was as though all fight had suddenly gone out of him. He closed his eyes, barely paying attention as people shuffled around him, doing this and that, talking in muffled voices that drifted in and out of Alexander’s mind without really registering.

He didn’t notice when he fell asleep.

When Alexander woke up again, there was a nurse leaning over him. Alexander blinked as the nurse stepped back, and took a look around the room. While he had apparently slept on a hospital bed, he wasn’t wearing a white gown, so that was a plus.

Only then did he register a small but continuous flow of pain. He glanced down at the source. His hand was wrapped up in a bandage, atop which was a tourniquet—one Alexander had a vague recollection of seeing applied before he fell asleep.

There were a thousand questions that he wanted to ask: When would he be able to use his hand again? Would he need therapy? What about writing? When could he go back to Buckingham—to Thomas? Where was Jackson? Was he dead? He must be dead, right? Alexander shot him in the bloody heart.

There was, however, one most pressing question on his mind.

“How is Aaron?” he asked expectantly, thumbing the bandage around his hand. “My friend?”

The nurse hesitated. “Your friend didn’t make it,” he informed Alexander mournfully. “He was already dead when we got to him; he had been shot through his heart. There was nothing we could have done.”

Alexander clenched his uninjured hand.

Fuck it all to hell. It was his fault.

(Everything was his fault.)

The silence woke Thomas up.

He turned around in bed, pressing his face into the pillows, before the noises coming from his phone could no longer be ignored. He contemplated stuffing the phone into a pillowcase to muffle the sounds and go back to sleep, but that would require almost more effort than simply waking up.

The bed was getting cold without Alexander beside him, at any rate. Time to get up.

He went about his morning with only minimal pain. It was a good day. Now, if he could only find his husband, that would be great. Alexander hadn’t said anything about a meeting, had he? Thomas racked his brain for several moments, picking apart memories of last night. No, he concluded. It didn’t seem like that.
Where was Alexander?

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

Thomas’ brows creased. “Enter,” he called as he put down the pen he had been practicing with. The progress he was making was far too slow, but at least there was progress. It could be worse, he told himself.

“Your Royal Highness,” said a woman whom Thomas vaguely recognized as one of Alexander’s aides, and nope, Thomas was still not used to people titling him like he was an ancient ruler of Mesopotamia or Habsburg or something, “there’s been an accident.”

Warning bells went off inside Thomas’ head. “What kind of an accident?” he asked, even as he grabbed the cane and slowly stood up.

The aide wouldn’t meet his eyes. “A car is waiting for you outside, sir,” she informed him in the way that said nothing at all. “The driver will take you to the hospital.”

Thomas’ thoughts came to a screeching halt. The hospital? What the everloving—

Shit.

Thomas closed his eyes. “Does it have anything to do with Alexander?” he asked anxiously.

“I am not at liberty to say,” the aide said, all but confirming Thomas’ suspicions. “If you will follow me, Your Highness.”

Alexander, what have you done?

“What happened?” was the first thing out of Thomas’ mouth when he entered the waiting room. He ignored the crowd of curious onlookers outside, making a beeline for his husband—his injured husband, who was sitting on a bloody hospital bed, when Thomas himself had just barely gotten out of one.


“Shit, Alexander, this isn’t the time for jokes!” Thomas hissed. He gripped his cane tighter. Newton glanced up at him at the movement. “You almost died!”

“Yeah, well,” Alexander retorted, his lips twisting into a scowl. “Aaron did die, so no need to lecture me about how my ‘actions have consequences’.” He made air quotes with his unbandaged hand.

Thomas froze. For a moment, he found that he couldn’t speak. “Burr’s dead?” he finally asked, dread filling his voice.

Alexander’s nod was hollow. “Shot in the chest. He was dead before we got here.”

Thomas couldn’t help but notice that even Alexander’s pattern of speech was different. Usually, he could go on and on for minutes about the most minute of details, but now, it was as though he had clammed up and was refusing to speak of what had occurred.

It was infuriating. Thomas needed to know.

Burr was dead.
“Agent Mulligan will replace him, of course,” Alexander went on, voice bland and face carefully devoid of any emotion.

Thomas clenched his hands into fists. “Is that all you have to say?!” he demanded. “Do you care not?! Burr was more than your protector and guardian: he was your friend! Did he truly mean nothing to you?!”

“Of course he meant something to me!” Alexander snapped unexpectedly. “Don’t ever try to imply that I didn’t care about Aaron Burr; he was one of my oldest friends, and he had been through hell and back with me!” Alexander slashed a hand through the air to emphasize his words. “Don’t you ever”—he stabbed Thomas’ chest with his uninjured finger—“ever imply that.”

“Then tell me: what were you thinking?” Thomas yelled, not even bothering to try with English. “Going after him on your own? Are you insane?”

“Thomas, love—”

“No!” Thomas barked, “You don’t get to ‘love’ me! You—you could have died! God fucking damn it, Alexander, I thought you were going to die!”

“Thomas, please—”

“I’m just now getting better, and you want to go and get yourself killed?! After—after everything?!” Thomas shouted before rounding on Alexander and grabbing him by the lapels. “You listen to me, Alexander Hamilton,” he hissed. “You don’t get to die. You don’t get to leave me, understand? You are going to stay, got it? Stay here, stay with me, stay alive.”

Alexander blinked up at Thomas for a moment before nodding.

Thomas slowly released him. “Good,” he said. “Good. God, you scared me.”

“Thomas,” Alexander said slowly, “I’m okay. Really. That was barely a scratch.”

Thomas choked. “Barely a—you broke an arm! You walked in covered in blood! How is that okay by any definition?”

“But it wasn’t my blood,” Alexander pointed out. He swallowed. He didn’t know how to tell Thomas what had happened—what price Alexander had paid for finding the assassin.

“I didn’t know that!” Thomas yelled, his arms flailing about uselessly.

Alexander’s hand, the one that wasn’t wrapped in a cast, found Thomas’. He squeezed it tightly. “I’m sorry,” he said quietly.

Thomas sighed and rested his head on Alexander’s shoulder. “It’s oka—not okay. I’m still pissed, and you’re still a massive prick, but I accept your apology,” he said.

Alexander turned his head to kiss Thomas’ temple. “Guess what?” he whispered.

“What, you asshole?” Thomas muttered.

“That was really hot.”

Thomas took a step back and stared at his husband. “Are you serious?” he asked. “You honestly think this is the time? I’m still mad at you, Alex!”
“I’m just saying!” Alexander defended, “It was attractive! I can’t help it that you’re bloody gorgeous when you’re angry!”

“You’re just an ass is what you are!” Thomas shouted.

“Yeah?” Alexander’s eyes shone with unexpected anger.

Thomas snorted. “Yes.” Next to him, Newton whined anxiously, no doubt sensing the tense air between the two men.

“Well, you”—Alexander took a step forward. He stabbed Thomas’ chest with his finger—”are hogging the pillows. Every night.” He stabbed Thomas’ chest repeatedly.

“You still bite your nails. It’s disgusting.”

“You eat all the popcorn.”

“You sleep with the window open.”

“Yeah, because you forget to shower and the whole bedroom stinks! I can’t fall asleep in a sty!”

“You keep stealing my books,” Alexander accused. “If you wanted to read them so damn much, why didn’t you just ask to borrow them?”

"I don’t know, maybe because you never listen to me?!” Thomas returned hotly. “For all of your words, you never seem to want to talk about our problems! How was I supposed to ask you about books?!”

Alexander crossed his arms. "I wasn't aware that there were problems," he drawled.


Alexander scowled. “You still don’t accept yourself, do you?” he asked unexpectedly. “You're still convinced that you're not attracted to men. You utter hypocrite,” he spat.

Thomas took a step back, nearly tripping over Newton in his hurry. The scowl on his face was briefly replaced with one of utter pain before morphing back into glare. “Well, then,” he said quietly, “maybe I should just leave.”

The room was silent for a moment, and Thomas hoped—no, prayed—Alexander would tell him no, tell him to stay, just as Thomas had told Alexander to stay only minutes ago.

Alexander was at a loss for what to do. He’d learned from his mistakes—he wasn’t going to keep Thomas anywhere against his will. Instead, he turned away, very obviously hiding his face, and his emotions, from Thomas’ view. “If that's what you want, maybe you should,” Alexander said at length. He felt his heart break even as he said the words, but if that was what Thomas truly wanted, then Alexander wasn’t going to—couldn’t—stop him. Thomas wasn’t a puppet for him to play around with. If he no longer wanted to be around Alexander, then so be it. And if Alexander’s heart broke with every second that passed without an answer from Thomas—well, that was no one’s business but his own.

Alexander held his breath, wanting more each moment to cling to Thomas and beg and plead for him
to stay, *please stay*. He wanted to bury his finger’s in Thomas’ curls and kiss him until they were both blue in the face, to tell him he loved him and that he was *sorry*, if Thomas would just *stay*.

But he didn’t. He *couldn’t*. This was *Thomas' choice*, and Alexander couldn’t make it for him.

That thought was the only thing that kept Alexander in place as Thomas walked past him to the door, slamming it shut as he left.

Alexander felt his knees give way as he crumpled to the floor, Newton nudging at his hand.

Chapter End Notes

*Les thomas is Miserable.*

Merry Christmas!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

In which Lafayette is the voice of reason, and Alexander and Thomas shout at each other. In the middle of London, because clearly that's a reasonably choice of location for a private fight.

Chapter Notes

I don’t know whether anyone actually reads those, but just in case you do: I’m not going to be able to publish regularly on Mondays, due to lack of written material and a lot of material to study hanging over my head. I’m still going to publish as often as I can :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Where the hell is your husband?” Lafayette demanded as he all but marched into Alexander’s room.

“Gone,” Alexander muttered under his breath, not bothering to look up from the documents he was reading.

“Gone?” Lafayette echoed disbelievingly.

“Yes.”

Lafayette knelt down next to Alexander. “What do you mean, gone?” he snapped.

“He left.”

Lafayette felt his jaw drop to the floor. “Left?” he all but screeched. “Mon Dieu, what did you do, Alexander?!”

“We had a fight. It’s not important,” Alexander explained. “What is important is that he wanted to leave.”

“And you just let him? Good Lord, how did the two of you get this far?” Lafayette shrieked.

Alexander finally looked up to meet Thomas’ eyes. “A lot of fighting, an assassination attempt, and enough kitschy romance to fill at least three harlequin novels,” he said dryly. “What would you have me do? Just keep him here, like a dog on a leash?”

“Oh, I don’t know, how about you use those clever words of yours and apologize?!” Lafayette exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air. “I swear, children, the both of you.”

“But—”

“No,” Lafayette snapped. “No buts. Your husband, who needs a cane just to be able to walk, whose service dog you’re currently petting, who can’t write, who can barely type, who is suffering from
severe anxiety and post-traumatic stress, and who has trouble speaking English, is wandering about London—presumably without Mulligan—and you want to just hide in your room?”

“I’m sure he’ll be fine,” Alexander muttered, sounding more confident than he felt.

Lafayette crossed his arms. “He’s most certainly not. Now, you have a choice,” he said in a voice that implied that there wasn’t much of a choice after all. “You can stay here and mope for the rest of eternity as you think back to how the love of your life slipped through your fingers because you were too stubborn to admit that you can be wrong—and don’t bother trying to argue with me; I know it was somehow your fault, and even on the off chance that it wasn’t, you should have learned the art of nodding and appeasing your spouse by now—or you can run after him. He can’t have gotten far. He’s walking on a cane. Besides, I’m sure that Newton can track him down.”

Thomas was indeed walking around London. He had no clear destination in mind. All he knew was that he needed to get as far away from Buckingham—from Alexander—as possible. He needed to put some distance between them, needed to be able to think without anger and frustration and love clouding his judgment.

Apparently, it wasn’t enough that Thomas’ self-confidence was shot to pieces after months of painstakingly slow recovery and everyone mother-henning him every second of his existence—no, now his husband just had to get into a stupid, stupid argument with Thomas for the sake of arguing. Or was it Thomas who started it? Thomas dismissed the thought. It didn’t matter. The important part was that apparently, his husband didn’t love him, not as much as Thomas loved him—or, if he did, it wasn’t enough to run after Thomas and stop him from leaving.

Those excruciating few seconds after he had so stupidly blurted out that he should leave, during which Alexander remained so oddly silent—so unlike him—was the longest moment of Thomas’ life. How he had wished for Alexander to just tell him that no, he wasn’t fucking allowed to leave, that Alexander wanted him by his side, that he needed him. He had waited for his husband to run after Thomas, to stop him, to tell him that he was wrong, that he loved Thomas more than life itself—like you love Alexander, his treacherous mind whispered—and that he just wanted Thomas to stay by his side until the end of days.

Thomas snorted bitterly. He had been fooling himself all along.

He just wished that Alexander had flat-out told him that he didn’t love him. It would have spared them both a lot of heartache, among other things. Wasn’t Alexander supposed to be good at honesty? At transparency? Wasn’t that his thing?

Clearly not when it came to Thomas, because Thomas didn’t matter. Alexander would always, always, put the kingdom first, then himself, then Thomas.

Thomas wished that he could just forget about him, forget that it all happened, but he couldn’t. Every step he took was a painful reminder of just what he had sacrificed for Alexander’s sake. It was all he could do not to crumble down where he stood and cry until there was nothing left that could hurt him ever again.

Thomas wished that he could wish that he had never met Alexander Hamilton, but he couldn’t. He was still in love with that stupid, obstinate, short-tempered jerk. He wished that he wasn’t.

Every now and again, some person would point at him and whisper. Thomas tried to ignore the whispers all around him, even as his head felt like it was being relentlessly assaulted with Mjölnir
itself.

Suddenly, Thomas stumbled. His hand instinctively wrapped itself around something—a balustrade? a chair? Thomas couldn’t tell—and he used it to steady himself. His vision became blurry. Just as he thought that he had zeroed in on something substantial, anything to anchor himself, the world, as though designed specifically to mock him, was swimming before his very eyes in weird squiggly waves, making it impossible for him to focus on anything.

He fought the urge to lean over and throw up.

He wished that he could call James, but he couldn’t dial, couldn’t use his phone, didn’t even have his phone on him. On top of that, he couldn’t remember James’ number. How could he not remember his own best friend’s number? What was wrong with him?

Thomas hadn’t realized how shallow his breathing had become until his breath hitched and he couldn’t catch any oxygen shit he couldn’t breathe how was this happening where was he where was the mask where was Alexander—

He fumbled through his pockets, searching for the familiar shape. His fingers wrapped themselves around something, but he couldn’t pull it out. Why couldn’t he pull it out? What was happening to him?

Suddenly, he felt an object be pressed against his lips. He felt a hand cupping his face—a hand as familiar to him as his own, if not more. A hand that had been taking care of him for months. Just that fact brought comfort to Thomas, even as he also wanted desperately to recoil from the touch. He didn’t need anyone to take care of him, dammit. He was self-sufficient.

(Who was he trying to convince?)

Familiar words broke the silence around him. They soothed Thomas even in their tone. He could understand them. He held desperately onto that familiarity with a surprisingly firm grasp.

“Thomas, relax,” came his husband’s voice from somewhere to his last.

Thomas tried, he really did, but he just—

He couldn’t do it.

It was too much—everything was too much. He had gotten himself in deeper than he could handle, and now he couldn’t get himself out.


Thomas did his best to follow his husband’s directions. He could feel the cloud in his mind slowly dissipate, giving way to clarity. Reality crashed down around him. His husband was half-crouching next to him, supporting Thomas’ weight when it was clear that Thomas couldn’t support himself. With the one hand that wasn’t bandaged up

Just a glance at the bandages reminded Thomas of why he was in the middle of London in the first place. He squeezed his eyes shut.

“Get away from me,” he wanted to tell Alexander, but strangely, his words were stuck in his throat, as though unable to leave his tongue. All that came out of his mouth was a low growl.
Thomas could practically imagine Alexander’s face, the concern twisting his features into something different, something else.

“Thomas.” Alexander’s voice was resigned. The small part of Thomas’ heart that hadn’t already broken, shattered at his words. “I love you. Never doubt that. You matter so much to me, you can’t even imagine. I literally can’t imagine living without you. I don’t know what I would have done if you had disappeared.”

Thomas huffed. “A few hours ago, you didn’t seem to mind that,” he said hollowly.

“A few hours ago, I was frozen in fear—fear of you abandoning me. I didn’t want you to leave, but it was your decision. I didn’t—I couldn’t—influence you the way I did before. Your decisions are your own, and yours alone.”

“Don’t you realize that I wanted you to stop me?” Thomas all but shouted, heedless of who would overhear. At this point, he figured that half of London knew that they were fighting. Who even cared.

Alexander glanced away. He bit his lip. “I didn’t know. I wanted to stop you. I couldn’t,” he said helplessly.

“Bullshit,” Thomas snapped. “Do you even think, Alexander, or is that big brain of yours just for decoration? In what scenario would I not have wanted you to stop me? I literally went against everything I believe in to be with you. Do you think I’m enjoying living as a physical embodiment of everything I despise? Do you honestly think so little of me? Why else would I be here, if not because I love you?”

Alexander flinched away at the words. “I didn’t think.”

“Exactly,” Thomas shot back viciously. “You didn’t think.”

“Thomas, please. Let’s go home. We can talk there, I promise—”

“No!” Thomas was yelling now. “Let’s talk about this right here, right now! You’re just going to avoid the subject otherwise. You’re going to be oh-so-busy with this and that, with signing those documents and reviewing that treaty and whatever the hell else you even do all day long. I certainly don’t know.” He snorted derisively.

“Not this time,” Alexander promised, his eyes wide. His words were bordering on frantic. “I swear, Thomas. I just want to go home. With you.”

Thomas glared. “And what makes you think I want to go with you?”

“The fact that you just yelled at me, in the middle of London, about how you wanted me to stop you from leaving!” Alexander returned in the same voice.

Thomas wished that he could have crossed his arms. As it was, he could barely keep himself upright.

“I’m hardly going to go anywhere with someone who doesn’t love me,” he said quietly. “I may be dumb, but I’m not masochistic quite yet.”

He felt Alexander stiffen up next to him.

“Thomas,” his husband said slowly, “you do know that I love you, right?”

Thomas very pointedly didn’t answer. He glanced down at his hands, examining them like they held
the key to all the questions in the universe.

Thomas heard a sigh. The hand that had been cradling his face moved to Thomas’ hair.

Thomas’ eyes snapped up to meet Alexander’s. “Will you stop it already?” he hissed. “I’m not a fucking dog for you to pet every time the subject gets a little uncomfortable.”

“Do you think I would have been taking care of you for months if I didn’t love you?” Alexander asked quietly, ignoring Thomas’ words, though he didn’t try to touch his hair again.

Thomas didn’t want to respond, but it seemed that Alexander needed an answer. “Survivor’s guilt?”
It wasn’t really a response.

Alexander took it as one anyway. “If that was all, I would have dispatched someone to take care of you. I wouldn’t have gone myself if I didn’t really care.”

“You’re never going to love me now that I’m an idiot. And don’t bother denying it. I heard that sigh from earlier. It was a ‘you’re so dumb, why do I even bother with you’ sigh.”

“That wasn’t it at all,” Alexander immediately refuted. “It was a ‘I wish that my actions could convince you just how much I love you’ sigh.”

“Well maybe if your actions weren’t shit —”

“It’s not as if I’ve ever done this before!” Alexander yelled. “I don’t know how to handle this any better than you do!”

“If you just listened to me —”

“I do!”

“Shut up, Alexander!” Thomas shouted. “You’re not listening to me! You never listen to me. You always tell me that you are, but you’re not. Not once.” Thomas paused, glaring at Alexander, expecting him to interrupt. Instead, Alexander just stared at him, the look on his face inscrutable. Thomas took a deep breath and continued. “You say you’re listening, but you just don’t. I know you think you are, but there’s a difference between hearing what I’m saying, and understanding and respecting what I’m saying. If I tell you that you scared me, I expect you to apologize and promise not to do that thing again. I’m not lying, and you have no right to tell me that you hadn’t. You can’t read my mind, so stop trying to convince me how I should feel.”

Alexander looked searchingly into Thomas’ eyes. “Thomas, I’m—”

“Yes, you’re sorry!” Thomas threw up his hands. “You’ve already said that. Don’t you get it? An apology isn’t going to cut it this time. You need to actually change your behaviour, rather than shower me with pretty promises that you will, because I’m tired of always being disappointed when you ignore me.”

Thomas shook off Alexander’s hand on him. He pushed the mask away from his mouth. “I’m not just someone for you to play around with and then discard when you’re bored! I’m an actual living human being!”

Alexander’s eyes flashed with ill-concealed anger. “A human being who’s so deep in internalized homophobia that I’m surprised that you haven’t choked on it yet!” he finally snapped. “You’re always running away from your problems! You can’t seem to face the fact that you are attracted to men! You’re treating me like I’m an exception to the rule, rather than the rule itself. Face it,
Jefferson,”—Alexander’s lips twisted into a mocking smile—”you like dick.”

“Alexander!” Thomas cried, scandalized. “That’s—”

“True, and don’t even try to deny it,” Alexander went on, brutally honest.

Thomas shoved down the burning feeling of shame as a substantial crowd began to gather around the two of them, attracted by the commotion. For the first time, Thomas was grateful of the fact that they were talking in French, rather than English. He shuddered to imagine what would have happened if someone had understood the words Thomas and Alexander were hurling at each other.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Thomas saw men in darker uniforms navigating the crowd gracefully. RaSP agents, if he had to take a guess. He only hoped that their efficiency has improved since their wedding.

A man stepped forward. He whispered something into Alexander’s ear, who shook his head. The man frowned, but backed away again. He began barking orders to the agents in dark uniforms, who nodded quickly before disappearing back into the crowd of people.

Thomas swallowed. He was in this now—there was no way he was backing away, especially not when he had a unique chance to finally tell Alexander and make him listen. “Oh, so now you’re on-board with the whole sharing thing, are you?” He snorted. “A little too late for that.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean?” Alexander demanded, distractedly rubbing his free hand against his cast.

Thomas glared. “If you can’t figure it out, you secretive asshole, then you’re even more stupid than I’d given you credit for.”

Alexander sneered. “In case you’ve forgotten, I’m not the dumb one out of the two of us.”

Thomas flinched at his words, stumbling back as though struck. He stabilized himself on his cane. Alexander covered his mouth with his one free hand, his eyes widening in horror as he processed the words he had just spoken. “I’m sorry,” he blurted out regretfully. “I didn’t mean—”

Thomas’ hand curled itself around the cane until his knuckles turned white. “No, you did.” His voice was colder than Alexander had ever heard him. “You did. We’ve been dancing around this subject for long enough. I’m not as intelligent as you now”—Alexander opened his mouth to object, but Thomas ploughed on relentlessly—”and I know that you’re pretending to be fine and supportive and all, but we both know that’s a lie.” He scowled. “You pity me,” Thomas all but spat.

“I don’t,” Alexander finally got a word in edgewise. “I don’t appreciate having pity aimed at me, so I don’t pity you. It’s a useless feeling, and it helps neither of us. Besides, for the most part, you’re still as smart as you were before,” he went on, his voice filled with something akin to zeal.

Thomas glowered. “That’s not what it feels like,” he told Alexander. “You treat me like I’m a fragile doll that would shatter as soon as you let me out of your sight. I’m not.” He paused. “I’m not,” he repeated quietly.

Alexander’s eyes glinted with an emotion Thomas dreaded to identify. “I’m sorry,” Alexander said again.

Thomas scoffed. “You keep saying that, but your actions belie your words. You don’t even tell me that you’re going off to find the blasted assassin! You’re supposed to share those things with me!” he
yelled, mindless of their audience. “You’re a secretive asshole, and you never accept help!”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “That’s rich, coming from you,” he taunted. “You need to learn how to accept help. You refuse to even entertain the possibility that you’ll get better eventually; and you will get better, I know you will—if you can tolerate”—Alexander huffed—“accepting help, because right now, it feels like you’re shutting me out.”

Alexander took a step towards Thomas. He lifted up his hand, as if reaching out to Thomas. His hand froze mid-movement, before falling uselessly back to his side.

“I’m not shutting you out!” Thomas shouted in frustration. The cane was the only thing that stopped him from throwing up his hands into the air.

“But you are;” Alexander told his husband. “You’re shutting me out all the time, and you can’t face your situation. We’ve had this conversation before, remember? Nothing’s changed since then. You avoid dealing with the problems in your life and you don’t appear to want to get better. It seems to be all or nothing with you—you want instant results, or you give up immediately. You don’t go to physical therapy when I’m not there to harass you into it.” Alexander paused for breath. “You need to come to terms with these circumstances, with yourself, and begin to ask for help.”


Alexander shifted. “That’s because I don’t need help.”

“Liar,” Thomas hissed. “You’re a liar and a hypocrite. You need help just as much as the next person—being a genius doesn’t exempt you from being human. You’re not infallible, Alexander. You need to eat, for one thing. You need to sleep. It’s literally tearing me apart to watch you work yourself halfway to death and have you ignore me when I urge you to take care of yourself.”

It was as if all the energy had gone out of Alexander. His shoulders slumped. “I’m sorry,” he said for the third time. This time, the apology felt more genuine, somehow. “I shouldn’t have brushed you off. I know that you’re only trying to take care of me, and I appreciate it—really, I do. I just have a bad way of showing it. I promise that I’ll try my best to do better. Please give me another chance?”

By the end of his speech, Alexander was begging.

Thomas’ eyes softened faintly at Alexander’s anguished expression. “Only if you give me another chance,” he said suddenly. Alexander blinked at the uncharacteristic display of remorse. “You’re not the only problem here, it seems.”

“You’re not a problem,” Alexander kicked up a fuss immediately, because of course he did.

The smile on Thomas’ face still held little mirth. “No, but my behaviour is. I won’t lie—the concept of being attracted to men still frankly terrifies me. I know that it’s not healthy to bottle up your problems, but the idea of stopping, of having to handle them—well, that’s even worse. The thing that you have to understand is that I didn’t exactly grow up in the most inclusive environment.”

He almost expected Alexander to interrupt him. He didn’t know whether to be pleased or disappointed when his husband didn’t.

“Nevertheless, I know that it doesn’t excuse my actions, or the way I shunned you when you reached out to me. I’m still trying to come to terms with”—Thomas gestured between Alexander and himself—“this, but”—he swallowed—“I can’t do it alone.”

The corners of Alexander’s mouth slowly curled up into a smile. “Is that your way of requesting my
“help?” he asked hopefully.

Thomas couldn’t help but return the smile. “I guess.”

“I’ll do everything in my not inconsiderable power to help you, if you’ll let me,” Alexander vowed. “And I promise to try to listen to you, and to be more forthright with you as well, whenever I can—which, now that you’re my husband and your clearance has risen significantly, is a great deal more.”

Thomas’ brows creased. “Don’t make promises you can’t keep,” he told Alexander somewhat roughly.

Alexander’s mouth drew into a thin line. “I may not be able to keep them,” he conceded, “but then again, I just might. I won’t know until I try. In any case, I have to try to do better, or I’ll have given up before I’ve even started, and you deserve better than this sorry excuse of a person for a husband. I need to do better, for both of our sakes.” He swallowed. “I don’t think I could live if you’d left me,” he confessed suddenly.

Thomas melted into the hug. It was in moments like these that he appreciated Alexander being very tactile a person, because he was also very huggable. He pressed his face into Alexander’s neck, letting himself just breathe in the familiar scent.

He vaguely heard the snap of a camera, but didn’t bother moving. They had made themselves look like fools already—there was really very little dignity they had left to lose.

“Don’t do that again, okay?” Alexander pleaded, “Please. Don’t leave, don’t walk out, just… don’t.”

Thomas bobbed his head into Alexander’s shoulder. “I promise,” he muttered. He might regret it later, but for now, he meant it. “I won’t if you won’t.”

Alexander cradled Thomas head. He turned slightly, pressing a light kiss to his husband’s temples. “Let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year! I'm hoping 2018 will be better than 2017, because God do we need Better right now.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Alexander has no security. Alexander needs no security. Alexander laughs at your safety and health regulations.

Alternatively,

Security what security Hamilton just wants Burr back

Chapter Notes

Would you look at that? I'm back! With a mostly-written fic. I'm going to try to try to resume publishing every Sunday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Who are you?” Alexander all but demanded. He crossed his arms, trying to stare down the taller man in front of him.

The man stood his ground. “I’m Hercules Mulligan, Your Royal Highness. Your new chief of security.”

“I don’t need a new chief of security,” Alexander growled. And he didn’t, dammit. He needed Aaron back.

Mulligan had the gall to quirk an eyebrow in silent challenge. “On the contrary, sir,” he replied stoically, “it has become obvious that you are, in fact, in desperate need of a security detail.”

“I didn’t say that I didn’t need a security detail,” Alexander snapped. “I said that I don’t need you.” He was lashing out and he knew it. Rationally, he knew that what had happened wasn’t Mulligan’s fault, but Alexander wasn’t known for thinking rationally when it came to those closest to him—and Aaron had certainly qualified.

“I beg to disagree,” Mulligan said calmly. “Your actions make it quite clear, if nothing else.”

Alexander clenched the fingers on his left hand into fists. He smothered the urge to punch Mulligan. Knowing the kind of people who were in the Protection Command, the man would both have the time to step out of the way of Alexander’s fist, and knock Alexander out, both before Alexander even had the time to finish the motion. Ninjas, the lot of them. Besides, Alexander still had the disadvantage of wearing a cast. That significantly lowered his chances of a victory.

“Fine,” he snapped. “But don’t harbour any illusions that we’re friends or anything. We’re not. You’re my bloody bodyguard, and frankly, I’d rather you were anywhere but here, but here we are. Just”—he unclenched his fist, slashing the air in frustration—”stay out of my way. Protect Thomas. That’s the best way you can be of service. I’ll be fine. I know my way around a gun.”
Mulligan said nothing, but the look in his eyes said everything his lips didn’t.

“I do!” Alexander insisted. “After all, I’m alive, aren’t I?”

*Only because Burr stepped in, the tiny voice in the back of his head piped up. Without Burr, you’d be as dead as he is right now.*

Alexander suffocated that voice.

“I am,” he snapped at Mulligan. “Leave me fucking alone.”

Alexander sighed as he settled in the armchair opposite Thomas’. “How are you doing?”

“As well as could be expected,” Thomas murmured without looking up from the book. Alexander squinted at the title. *The Little Prince.* Of course.

Alexander drummed his fingers against the armrest in irritation. “That’s not an answer,” he pointed out.

Thomas tightened his grip on the book almost imperceptibly. “It’s the best answer I can give you.”

Alexander huffed. “And you’re calling me out on hiding stuff. You couldn’t be more secretive if you were James Bond himself.”

“James Bond isn’t actually all that secretive,” Thomas countered. “He’s all about flash and pomp and stout and drama. A”—he bit his lip in thought—“a *theatrical* entrance. That’s it.”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “While I’d love to spend the rest of the afternoon debating the merits of James Bond with you—and rest assured, I have a lot of material saved up—that wasn’t what we were talking about. You’re deflecting. Tell me how you’re feeling.”

“Would you just stop pressing?!” Thomas suddenly yelled, clutching the book in his fists, crumpling the edges of the pages at odd angles. “You’re not making me feel any better by being so damn intrusive!”

“Well, I wouldn’t have to be intrusive if you just told me how you’re feeling!” Alexander retorted, his fingers digging into the armrests of the armchair.

Since when was it so hard to just *communicate*? It almost felt as though he didn’t know Thomas anymore—as though he was talking to a virtual stranger.

“How do you think I’m feeling?! You’re smart; use that impressive brain of yours and *take a guess*!”

Alexander forced himself to take a calming breath before addressing Thomas. “I know you’re going through a rough patch and that, right now, it feels like the world’s ending, but—”

“A rough patch?” Thomas echoed disbelievingly. “I’d hardly call it a rough patch! I was unconscious for ten weeks, only to—”

Alexander’s lips drew up into a thin line. “How long are you going to be bringing it up?” he asked in exasperation.

Thomas scowled. “For as long as it takes! For the rest of my life, if I have to! In case you didn’t notice, it was a *life-altering experience*!”
“That’s what marriages tend to be!” Alexander growled, shifting forward. He made as if to stand up, then thought better of it.

“I’m not talking about the bloody marriage, you moron! I was unconscious for ten weeks, only to wake up and discover that my husband wasn’t the person I knew! It’s like I’m talking to a stranger.”

Thomas’ words hung between them in the oppressive silence that followed.

“Alexander,” Thomas said quietly, “talk to me. Please tell me I’m not alone in this.” That I’m not going crazy went unspoken.

Alexander hesitated. He could lie, could tell Thomas that he still knew his place in his relationship, that he knew where they were heading, that Thomas was the only one who needed to find his way.

But he had made a promise not to lie to Thomas.

“You’re not,” he replied in much the same voice.

Thomas let out a soft breath. He didn’t speak for a moment. “Good,” he said at length.

“Good?” Alexander echoed in bewilderment.

“Good,” Thomas confirmed. “That means that we’re both in the same place. I’m not alone,” he repeated.

“You’re not alone,” Alexander asserted.

“We can fix this. Fix us,” Thomas continued. “It’s not unsalvageable.”

Alexander’s mind was working overtime. “A well-defined problem is halfway to being solved.”

“We can start over,” Thomas said excitedly.

Alexander shook his head. “Not start over entirely. There’s a lot of our relationship that I’d like to keep.”

Thomas smiled. “The dates.”

“The arguments,” Alexander picked up.

“The coffee shop.”

“The library.”

“The Harry Potter debates.”

“All those times you kissed me in front of everyone.”

“Horsey McHorseface,” Thomas said with a snicker.

“The rides in the woods.”

“You dragging me halfway across this place just to show me the blasted strategy room.”

“You practically barging your way into Buckingham and forcing your way into an audience with the king. With me,” Alexander retorted, barely holding back a giggle.
“Burr,” Thomas suddenly said, his voice delicate, as though afraid that the single word would shatter
the newfound peace between himself and Alexander.

Alexander’s smile slipped. “He needs to be remembered.”

Thomas leaned forward. His fingers slipped into Alexander’s. “He will be,” he promised solemnly.

Alexander leaned in. He trailed a thumb across Thomas’ knuckles, then placed a kiss to Thomas’

Alexander held back a sigh as he watched Thomas tap a pattern known only to himself into the table.
“You know, you have to go to the physical therapist at some point,” he pointed out.

“I am going.”

“Without me.”

“Didn’t you promise me that you’d be here for me through it all? Forever, if it so took?” Thomas
snapped. He knew that he was being unfair, that he was being more irritable as of late, but he
couldn’t do anything about it. “Or was it just another lie of yours?”

This time, Alexander did sigh. “I didn’t lie,” he placated Thomas, “but at some point, you’re going to
get tired of me following you everywhere, of always having to rely on me. You’re going to want to
be independent, Newton excepted”—he gestured at the dog curled up at Thomas’ feet—“and part of
that independence is going to therapy yourself. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t have anything against
going with you, but you’re going to have to learn—”

“Liar,” Thomas said calmly. “You do mind going with me to therapy. It’s taking precious time out of
your precious schedule,” he said with a slight sneer. “And don’t lie to me; you promised that you
wouldn’t.”

Alexander bit back a growl. “And you promised that you wouldn’t try to run away from your
problems, didn’t you?” he shot back. “Your dependence on me, leading to this power imbalance in
our relationship, is a problem. Don’t run away from it.”

“Excellent evasion.”

“Fine!” Alexander snarled. “Sometimes, I mind going with you. There are a myriad of things I could
do being with my time, ways in which I could be helping my—our—country, that I can’t, because
I’m in therapy with you.” Alexander leaned in closer. “But Thomas, you’re missing several vital
points here. One, in case you haven’t noticed, I need physical therapy as well.” He gestured at the
cast around his arm. “And second, yes, I sometimes mind going to therapy with you, but I mind it far
less than I’d mind if you suddenly cut me off, or if I didn’t know how you were doing, or if
something, God forbid, happened to you again. A bit of grumbling is a small price to pay for
knowing that you’re safe and sound and improving. I think you underestimate just how much you
mean to me.” He suddenly smiled. “Yes, I love this country more than I love life itself, but that love
pales in comparison to the kinds of emotions I feel towards you.” His uninjured hand clasped
Thomas’. “Do you understand what I’m trying to say here?”

Thomas was silent for a long moment. “I think that I do,” he said finally. His posture shifted, and his
back straightened. “I think I’d like to go alone to physical therapy,” he said with more confidence
than he felt.
Alexander’s expression softened. “For what it’s worth, I’m proud of you.”

Thomas carefully squeezed Alexander’s hand, the Thank you between them unspoken.

“Who’s the new guy?” Thomas asked curiously, absentmindedly leaving a page marker at one of the paragraphs.

It had been three days since Alexander had gotten out of the hospital—four days since Thomas’ life changed irrevocably yet again.

Alexander tensed up at Thomas’ question. He didn’t look up. “He’s... new.” Alexander said it the way people would say ‘Comic Sans professionalism’ or ‘ketchup on steak’ or ‘that creepy guy who's always talking about conspiracy theories at the gas station’, all but spitting the words. “Not that we need him,” he added. “He’s gratuitous, and his continued presence here is nothing but a nuisance.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Yes, but who is he?” he pressed.

Alexander’s lips thinned into a line. “No one important,” he said curtly.

“He’s always following you,” Thomas pointed out. “He can’t be that unimportant.”

Alexander was being oddly evasive. That, more than anything else about the man, put Thomas on edge. Alexander might be reckless; he might talk without thinking through his words; he might hide important information from Thomas in a vain attempt to shield him from what he perceived to be harsh truths; but Thomas could not deny that Alexander’s instincts were impeccable.

Alexander’s fingers thinned around the quill he was holding in an attempt to teach himself how to write with his left hand. He didn’t offer a reply to Thomas’ question, nor did he give him any explanation.

Just as Thomas was beginning to lose hope of ever receiving one, his husband acquiesced. “He’s Aaron’s replacement.” There was bitterness in Alexander’s voice, and understandably so.

“Oh,” Thomas said quietly.

Well. That explained Alexander’s odd behaviour.

It seemed to have been the wrong thing to say. Alexander’s eyes snapped up, an furious spark in them. He fixed Thomas with an angry look. “‘Oh’?” he parroted. “That’s all you have to say?” His voice was deceptively soft, not unlike the calm before a storm.

Thomas swallowed, suddenly uncomfortable. “That’s not what I had—” he tried to backtrack, but it seemed to have been too late.

“My best friend is dead, a bullet through his chest—possibly his heart —and all you have to say”—judging by how hard Alexander was clenching the quill, Thomas figured that it was only a matter of time before it would snap—“is ‘oh’?” The fury in Alexander’s voice was growing by the second.

“That was not what I had—"

“He was my best friend—my only friend, for a long time! He was my confidante! He gave everything he had for my sake!” Alexander’s lips curled into a hollow smile. “And I, like the fool that I was, went off gallivanting, and tried to play the hero, and look where it got us!” He threw up
his hands into the air, in equal parts frustrated and infuriated with himself.

It suddenly occurred to Thomas that Alexander hasn’t had time to properly deal with Burr’s death—hasn’t allowed himself to deal with it, hasn’t allowed himself to process it. If he didn’t think about it, he could trick himself into believing that it hadn’t happened. Mulligan’s presence was an obstacle in that.

This meant, however, that when Thomas had brought up the subject, there was no way for him to avoid the topic. It shouldn’t have surprised Thomas that Alexander’s reaction was to shut down completely and refuse to talk, and, in a way, it didn’t.

Now, it was as if the proverbial floodgates had been opened, and there seemed to be no way to close them again.

“Ever since I was a little kid, Burr’s been by my side,” Alexander went on. “He’s always been there. He was there when I got Horsey McHorseface; he was there when I first learned how to ride a bike; he was there for my graduation; bloody hell, he was even there when I first kissed John!” Privately, Thomas thought that it was creepy, but then again, he was in no place to talk, seeing as Burr had present at his and Alexander’s first kiss as well. “He was a constant presence in my life, a crutch if I ever had one, and when he died, he left behind this… this hole that I can’t fill, however much I try. I’m without my anchor—drifting aimlessly as I try to figure out how to proceed.” He huffed. “And even in this, I miss him, because I could have normally asked for his advice, and he would have rambled off some infuriatingly cryptic but ultimately surprisingly helpful tip that would have helped me. But…” He gestured helplessly, almost as if he didn’t even know what to do with his arms. “I can’t focus on his death, can’t let myself process, because if I do, I’ll have to come to terms with the fact that I inadvertently killed my best friend.”

Thomas didn’t know what to do. How did one, after all, go about helping a man whose entire life had been turned upside down? A man who believed that he had led his oldest friend to slaughter and had done nothing to stop it? A man who was even now trying to stem the tears were running down his cheeks against his will.

Thomas did the one sensible thing he could: he pulled Alexander into his shoulder and simply let him cry. He didn’t offer words of consolation, because he knew that, for now, Alexander would see them as naught but empty platitudes. No, right now, he could but comfort him as best he could and let him pour out the venom that has been poisoning his heart and choking him ever since Burr’s death.

Thomas would do what Alexander had done countless times for him: he would simply be a steady presence by his side.

“I think that I’m making progress,” Thomas suddenly piped up from where he was sitting on the couch across from Alexander. He was absentmindedly petting Newton, who was sitting by Thomas’ side obediently, looking up at him, the expression on his face showing nothing less than adoration.

Alexander put down the quill he had been using to annotate some document or other. Honestly, Thomas thought, Alexander was probably the only person he knew who still used an actual quill to write. Most people would have given up after the fifth time their hands were stained with ink beyond recognition, but not Alexander—no, he claimed that it was easier on his hand, and that, with how much writing he was doing, it was really the only reasonable pen he could use.

“Thank you,” Thomas said quietly. He didn’t offer any other words.

Alexander smiled, before suddenly tilting his head. “What do you think of this?” he asked as he pushed a document towards Thomas.

Thomas’ brows crinkled in bewilderment. He made no move to pick up the document, or even look at it. “Isn’t that classified?” he asked.

Alexander’s smile only broadened. “Indeed, but you’ll find that your clearance level has gone up considerably since our wedding.”

Thomas’ eyes widened. He finally glanced down at the paper in front of him. “May I…?” he wanted to ascertain, gesturing vaguely at the paper one more time.

Alexander nodded. “Go ahead. Read it.”

Thomas stared at the paper for another second. He bit his lip, before shoving the paper away from him with enough force to upset the stack of papers in front of Alexander. “No,” he said decisively.

Alexander blinked, nonplussed. “And whyever not?” he asked, a little impatience leaking through his voice.

Thomas crossed his arms, the movement slow but steady. “I told you a long time ago that I would not play second chair to your lead,” he told Alexander, then, when Alexander continued to stare uncomprehendingly at him, added, “I will not get involved in royal business. I am your husband and husband only.”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Yes, I remember,” he said impatiently, “but if you’d actually read this damn thing, you’d know that it talks about the political situation in Iran and Iraq. I’d have thought that, with how much you used to be interested in politics back when we met, you’d want to read something that’s actually up-to-date.”

Thomas glowered. “I won’t help you.

Alexander positively growled. “Are you really so full of yourself that you refuse to help the entire world solve that particular fuck-up?” he challenged. “Use that brain of yours and help.”

“I wasn’t the one to start it.”

“No, but you can help us end it.” Alexander sighed, leaning back into the couch next to Thomas as his energy seemed to be siphoned out of him. “Treat it as a mental exercise, if you want to—a way of keeping your mind in shape.”

Thomas snorted. He turned sharply towards Alexander. “I can think of at least a dozen other ways to—” His words were cut off by a sharp hiss. “Damn it,” he swore as he pressed a hand to his
Alexander’s eyes immediately softened to concern. “Are you alright? What happened?”

Thomas shoved away Alexander’s prying fingers. “I’ll be fine,” he told Alexander. “I simply moved quicker than I should have.” There was a not indiscernible tone of bitterness in his voice.

Alexander’s expression didn’t change. “Are you sure? I could call Doctor—”

Thomas glared at Alexander again. “Unless you want me to call doctors on you, you would do well not to finish that sentence,” he warned.

Alexander opened his mouth to protest.

Thomas rolled his eyes, before grabbing the paper lying in front of him. “If I read this, will you shut up about my shoulder?” he said in exasperation. Despite himself, he couldn’t deny that he was curious as to the contents of this document. He blamed it on his innate curiosity and the politically-charged environment that he had grown up in that had practically forced him to become politically savvy.

At Thomas’ words, Alexander’s eyes glinted with something akin to… satisfaction? gratification? pride? Thomas didn’t want to study it too closely, because he had a sneaking suspicion that he wouldn’t like what he would have found.

Alexander eventually nodded.

Thomas let out an exaggerated sigh. “Okay, then. Let me read this.”

He proceeded to skim the document, all too aware of Alexander’s expectant eyes on him. He looked up sharply. “Stop staring, will you?” he snapped. “I can’t concentrate with you looking at me like I’m an alien zoo specimen.”

Face flushing with embarrassment at having been caught, Alexander looked down again at another file he was in the process of reading, though his eyes kept flickering back and forth between the paper and Thomas when he thought that Thomas wasn’t looking.

Thomas finally finished reading the report. He sighed, before saying, “This whole thing is bullshit. It needs to be re-written entirely.”

Alexander’s eyes were immediately back on Thomas. His brows furrowed in confusion. “What do you mean?”

Thomas gestured at the paper. “It says right here that the relations have ‘long been filled with tension and violence’, which, while true, doesn’t provide one iota of useful background information for what they talk about later. There’s not even a mention of the 1958 Iraqi coup d’état, which is, frankly, disgraceful. That’s been the single pivotal aspect of their relations for the past sixty years, and that’s just not something that you can afford to exclude in a report about two countries’ modern relations. That’s like omitting to mention the War of Independence in a report about the relation between the United Kingdom and the United States.

Even looking past all that, right here”—Thomas pointed at a paragraph roughly mid-page—”they’re talking about expanding the limit on the import of Iranian cars and construction materials into Iraq, which even I realize won’t work as a means of improving their relations. Don’t tell me that you’ve missed it.” Thomas’ voice was reproving as he threw a brief glance at Alexander, who looked down, ears reddened.
“I hadn’t been sure that it would have helped, but I had hoped that—”

“Well, you thought wrong,” Thomas cut him off. “Unless you royals are in possession of some piece of information that changes the game entirely, Iraq isn’t in such dire need of cars and construction materials that they can’t produce themselves or import from countries other than Iran that they would change their stance on the ownership of that oil well at the border.”

Alexander shook his head. “Not in this case, we don’t,” he told Thomas.

Thomas scrunched up his nose. In this case? He resolved to ask Alexander about that at a later date, preferably when he wasn’t neck-deep in highly classified paperwork about Middle Eastern relations—not that he could actually see why they were classified, as most of this information was easily Googleable.

Thomas sighed. He rubbed Newton behind his ear. “So what’s the actual problem? This”—he waved the paper in the air—“doesn’t say.”

Alexander leaned forward, eagerness in his eyes. “It’s about that well, if you can believe it.” Thomas could, actually. He motioned for Alexander to go on. “A team of scientists from various European countries have discovered that the capacity of the well isn’t, as the world has thought, thirteen million liters, but five times that. As a result, the Iranian Prime Minister has decided to move forward and file an official claim regarding the well, because, well, money.” He shrugged. “As you can imagine, the Iraqi government wasn’t too delighted with that, and they began throwing a fuss and demanding to have the results re-tested and the scientists fired from their jobs for falsifying evidence.”

“Were they?”

Alexander snorted. “Of course not. When that was denied by a private meeting of the European leaders, they came to us, practically begging for help.”

Thomas tilted his head. “Why England?”

“Our relative monetary independence, as well as our reputation for objectivity in these matters.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “That’s nothing short of stupid.” He opened his mouth to continue, then scowled. He shook his head.

Alexander saw the look in his eyes, and leaned forward again. He placed a hand on Thomas’ knee, drawing his attention to him. “No, by all means, go on,” he encouraged.

Thomas glanced at him uncertainly, then saw that Alexander was deadly serious. He drew in a breath. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” he said, before launching into another rant.

Alexander was listening to Thomas, was watching as his eyes lit up as he spoke, as he gesticulated with as much force as he could afford, as he spoke at length about the subject on a depth that most people could only dream of, as he made connections that almost everyone else would have missed.

Yes, Alexander thought absentmindedly even as he was annotating Thomas’ off-handed remarks about Iranian obstinacy, this was exactly what Thomas had needed, even if he had refused to admit it. It was Alexander’s job as Thomas’ husband to keep him healthy, not only physically but also mentally, and this was one way to go about it.

Besides, Thomas Jefferson was clearly an asset, and Alexander wasn’t one to waste resources.
There was one thing about this situation that Thomas couldn’t help but find slightly amusing, although he dared not mention that to Alexander lest it triggers something.

Alexander was hilariously, adorably, impatient about his arm taking its sweet time to heal. He had no use of his dominant arm, which Thomas could certainly sympathize with, and it made him so amusingly angry not to be able to write—not to be able to communicate his thoughts onto paper or onto a laptop or even onto a phone as quickly as he would have liked.

Thomas gave him a week before he would become ambidextrous. In the meantime, however, it was a new sort of entertainment, and one that amused Thomas to no ends.

Alexander was not a good patient. He was, in fact, not even a patient patient. He was unwilling to wait, was unwilling to let his hand have its due rest, was unwilling to stop or change or even allow himself a good night’s sleep because it was a ‘waste of time’ and he ‘could be doing so many better things’, and it was slowly but steadily driving the therapist absolutely mad.

Thomas did his best to return the favour from the beginning of his therapy—back when Alexander was a steady presence at his side during those long hours, coaxing him to persevere and catching him when he was about to give up—and tried to temper Alexander’s frustration with how slow physical therapy was going, but was met with only partial success. Alexander didn’t take well to people mothering him, or even seeming like they did.

“Would you stop it?!” Alexander snapped when Thomas reached out to steady Alexander when he wobbled. “I’m hardly a child.”

Thomas let his hand drop limply to his side, and he forced himself to face Alexander’s scrutinizing stare head-on. “I know that you are not,” he said, his voice as calm as he could muster; if it was shaking ever-so-slightly, neither of them remarked on it, “but I care about you; I worry about you; and I want to help you.”

“I don’t need any help,” Alexander retorted sharply. Even yours.

Thomas clenched his hands into fists. He was silent for a moment as he considered what he was about to say. “Remember when you accused me of not accepting help?” he finally murmured. Alexander froze. “Well, right now, you are doing exactly what you professed to hate in me.” Thomas’ eyes were pleading now. “Let me help you as you helped—as you are still helping—me.”

Alexander didn’t reply immediately, too busy processing Thomas’ words. Thomas let him take his own sweet time, knowing that Alexander would eventually reach the same conclusion that Thomas had.

“I… I apologize,” he whispered at length, so quietly that Thomas had to strain to hear him. “I didn’t think.”

“No, you didn’t,” Thomas agreed.

Alexander sighed, before he tentatively reached out for the hand Thomas had withdrawn. He glanced down at it, as though he was seeing it for the first time, then squeezed it.

“I’ll try to do better,” he offered. “If I relapse… Call me out on it, won’t you?”

“I most certainly will,” Thomas assured him, gifting him with the slightest of smiles. “After all, if I don’t, who will dare face the great and fearsome dragon?”
That got a corresponding smile out of Alexander. “You’re incorrigible,” he told Thomas. “How about we make a deal? If you don’t fight the therapist, who’s just trying to do her job, I’ll try to speak more English?”


“I can neither confirm nor deny that,” Thomas said innocuously. “But do you want to take that chance?”

Alexander snorted. “You really should have become a politician.”

Thomas’ smile turned a little wistful. “If I did, though, I would never have met you,” he pointed out softly. “You are the best thing that happened to me in a long time; I wouldn't give that up for anything.”

Alexander's eyes softened. “I love you too.”

The therapist cleared her throat. “As much as it warms my heart to see so lovely an exchange, we do have some work to do.”

Alexander groaned but let himself be led away.

Thomas smirked behind his back, until he heard the therapist’s voice call out, “Mister, don't you dare leave. Don't think that you're done for the day.”

Thomas’ groan matched Alexander's.

Chapter End Notes

There's been a few requests as to Alexander's reaction to Burr's death. So. Here it is.

Good? Bad? Cringe-worthy? Tell me what you thought!
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

In which Thomas has Questions, and JK Rowling regrets all of her life choices. (Also, Alexander is a bad patient, but what else is new.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alexander endured a total of eight weeks in the cast, before the doctor finally cleared him. During those weeks, he had been both more snappish and more compassionate than Thomas had ever seen him. Thomas, for his part, has had the odd comments aimed at him.

Alexander also managed to avoid speaking to, addressing, or indeed even acknowledging Mulligan’s existence, for all that the man was practically Alexander’s shadow. Thomas would have thought it impressive, except for the fact that every time Alexander gave Mulligan the Silent, Cold, And Distant, Please Go Away treatment, Thomas saw that Mulligan’s face fell, just a little. It wasn’t obvious, not by a long shot—Mulligan was a professional—but Thomas had gotten good at interpreting nonverbal body language in the two months since he had woken up and found himself unable to communicate with the outside world.

It was a little heartbreaking to watch, made even worse by the fact that Thomas knew just how kind Alexander could be, if he tried. Christ, one only needed to look at how he had treated Thomas! It was a stark contrast, and not one that Thomas was entirely comfortable with. This side of Alexander was… unsettling. He could not claim that it was new, per se—no, he remembered that Alexander could be cruel if he so wanted. He was a charming man who was capable of being terrible, and right now, it showed.

Still, Thomas reasoned that at least part of it was Alexander’s frustration at not being able to work, that he was simply channeling onto the most convenient target. He sincerely hoped that it would change once Alexander got out of that cast.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Alexander getting rid of the cast did nothing to stem his dislike of Mulligan—not, it seemed, constant flow of arguments and babbling.

“The root of my annoyance with the racist, sexist, and homophobic kinds of statements,” Alexander was saying as he crossed the length of the library back and forth, “is that people somehow believe that, just because you are born a certain way, it gives them the right to crack certain jokes or say certain things and degrade you from being a human being to an object for them to view and play around with.” Alexander was gesticulating wildly, and Thomas ducked so as not to be hit by his left hand as it flew around in a virtual whirlwind of motion. His right hand, Thomas noted, was somewhat calmer, but still very much not still as it was supposed to be.

At this rate, Alexander would ascend to the throne before his arm was fully healed.

“The minorities don't insult the majority the way the majority insults the minority,” Thomas’ husband went on angrily. Had this been a cartoon, Thomas figured, there would have been lightning bolts over him. As it was, he was just a very, very angry coffee gremlin—albeit a royal one. Not that that
helped. “The oppressed don’t insult the oppressors the way the oppressors insult the oppressed!”

“The oppressed have the right to be angry,” Thomas contributed. “They’re oppressed. It’s right in the name. But what is this—”

“And the oppressors doesn’t see it!” Alexander snarled. “They see it as harmless jokes, which it's not. They're not harmless; they enforce a certain belief, and they further systematic oppression and discrimination—a belief ruled by tradition and close-mindedness and an unwillingness to change or think outside the box.” He came to a sudden stop, and fixed Thomas with furious violet eyes. “Have you ever heard a woman catcall a man the way a man would catcall a woman?” Without waiting for a response, he went on. “No. Because they are afraid, and they are aware of their ‘place’, and they understand how it feels when you are the target of such behaviour. Let’s take another example.” Let’s not. “Have you ever heard a, let's say, homosexual man insult a heterosexual man solely on his sexuality?”

Thomas waited a beat to see whether it was another rhetorical question, but this time, Alexander seemed to await an actual response.

“No,” Thomas answered slowly, measuredly.

“Exactly!” Alexander exclaimed triumphantly, resuming his pacing. “Because if we do insult the oppressors, we know that they'll only dig in their heels deeper.”

Thomas nodded. “It’s garbage.”

"Why, then, is it acceptable for a person of colour to be discriminated against, based on the amount of pigment in their skin, but the moment a ‘normal’ and white person is, it's an ‘outrage’ and ‘strictly taboo’? Honestly, the very phrase 'person of colour' is polarizing because it, once again, creates an Us and a Them.” Alexander didn’t seem to mind that he was explaining it to Thomas, a literal live person of colour. Then again, Alexander would, given half a chance, give a detailed explanation of ‘gay’ to an actual homosexual couple, complete with at least four examples and two flowcharts.

“You do realize that you are probably the last person that should say that they are oppressed, right?” Thomas said slowly, hoping that it came off as a lazy drawl. “You’re literal royalty. You’re what little girls dream of marrying, and what little boys dream of being.”

Alexander stopped mid-step. Carefully, he turned to face Thomas, a mask of deceptive calm on his face.

“If I don’t do it, then who will?” Alexander challenged. “I’m not being overly arrogant when I say that I’m one of the most famous people on Earth right now. Surely I should be using my influence for good?”

Thomas crossed his arms. It was admittedly made more difficult by the fact that his arms still refused to quite function, but he managed. “If you’re so open-minded,” he retorted, “maybe you should consider treating Mulligan a little better; the least you could do is stop giving him the Winter Soldier treatment. He has done nothing to deserve your wrath.”

Alexander stared. “He has—Of course he has done wrong! He replaced Burr! Burr can’t be replaced!”

“It was only a matter of time before he was replaced. Mulligan was simply chosen. He didn’t shoot Burr, nor did he make a—a virgin sacrifice in the hopes that Burr would die and he would get his job. It isn’t Mulligan’s fault that Burr is dead,” Thomas replied hotly.
Alexander stilled as his shoulders tensed up. Thomas instantly regretted ever opening his mouth, because he knew, he knew, what the next words out of Alexander’s mouth would be.

“No, it’s my fault,” Alexander said demurely. “I killed Burr.”

“No, you didn’t,” Thomas refuted immediately. “Jackson killed Burr.” He wondered whether he would have to hit Alexander upside his head with his cane for him to get it through that thick head of his.

He had a feeling that this wasn’t the last time he would be having this discussion with Alexander. He may accept the concept in theory, but there was a large chasm between accepting it and believing it. Convincing yourself that something was not your fault, when you believe that it is, is easier said than done.

“I may not have pulled the trigger, no, but I led him to Jackson. If I hadn’t been there, he wouldn’t have been caught in the crossfire.”

“You don’t know that,” Thomas tried.

Alexander quirked an eyebrow. “Actually, I kind of do. That’s how cause and effect works.”

“Putting aside the matter that, philosophically speaking, cause and effect is a sketchy theory at the best of times, as Hume kindly pointed out, what I meant is that yes, he may not have been caught in this particular crossfire, but what about another? It had been his job to protect you, so he would have gotten involved in all sorts of situations. Who’s to say that Jackson wouldn’t have simply come into Buckingham, guns blazing?”

Alexander scoffed. “Because we have screening tests?” he retorted sharply.

Thomas pursed his mouth. “If he is smart enough to smuggle in ricin without tipping off some toxin test or other, I do not doubt that he would have been able to smuggle in a firearm.”

Alexander threw up his hands into the air. “Why does it matter?” he asked loudly. “Because then, it wouldn’t have been my fault. I wouldn’t have been the one who made it possible. People need to be held responsible for deliberate indirect consequences!”

“Such as…?”

“Such as this! Burr’s death! If I hadn’t gotten it into my head to play the ‘hero’”—here, Alexander made mocking air quotes—”then Burr would still have been alive and well and stoic and not Mulligan,” Alexander all but snarled the last bit.

Thomas heaved a sigh. He made a split-second decision, and, before Alexander could process what was happening, he crossed the room, only leaning on his cane a little, and enveloped Alexander in a hug. It wasn’t the best embrace, nor was it the most comfortable, but Alexander seemed to melt in his arms anyway. He sagged against him until there was no space between them and no space around them, until the world itself seemed to fall away, leaving just the two of them to hover in a nothingness that was in part pure bliss and in part unsettling and eerie.

“I’m sorry,” Alexander choked out, and Thomas realized with a start that there were tears running down Alexander’s cheeks. He hadn’t noticed when Alexander had started crying, and silently cursed himself for it. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I—” His breath hitched. “I was there, and I did nothing, and I watched as Jackson took out that gun, and I knew that he was going to use it but I did nothing, and now it’s my fault that Aaron’s dead, and I know that you all don’t say it but you believe it, you all do, because how could you not? Aaron’s is dead and I’m not, ergo it’s my fault, because
he shouldn’t even have been there—I was supposed to have been there alone, but I was stupid and reckless and overconfident and I didn’t notice that Aaron had followed me, and it’s all my fault.” He glanced up at Thomas, bloodshot eyes blinking up at him. “I would do anything to take back my actions. Anything. I just—” A sob shook through his body, and Thomas shuddered. “I just want Aaron back.”

Oddly, so did Thomas. In the short time that he had come to know Burr, he had become a constant presence in his life, providing steadiness even when Thomas felt like his world was turning upside down. Alexander wasn’t the only person for whom Burr’s death had left behind an emptiness that no one knew how to fill.

“It’s okay,” Thomas said softly as he gently cradled Alexander’s head. “It’s going to be okay.”

Alexander leaned away from him just enough that he was able to glare mutinously at Thomas. “Don’t give me empty platitudes,” he snapped. “I know that it’s not going to be okay, and pretending like it is isn’t going to bring Burr back.”

“It’s not,” Thomas conceded, “but nothing is, and right now, my priority is to make you feel better, because it is going to be okay, eventually. And don’t protest,” he said when Alexander opened his mouth to argue. “For once, I’d like to have a calm moment with you that does not end in a shouting match or one of us storming off in a huff.” Right now, his goal—his only goal—was to assuage Alexander’s fears, be they founded or unfounded.

Alexander favoured Thomas with a look that Thomas was intimately familiar with; he always looked at him like that when he thought that Thomas was being particularly slow on the uptake. It was a look that was in equal parts I hope that you are not nearly as stupid as you appear to be and I fear that you truly are this thick.

Alexander maintained the glare for a few moments, before his expression shifted into something lighter, something almost akin to good-natured pouting. Thomas stifled the impulse to punch the air in victory.

It was no use planning further ahead than the moment, as Alexander was about as stable as an alkali metal in water, or peroxides in, well, just about anything. Thomas would take what he could get.

When Alexander had brought up the idea of marriage counselling, Thomas had been silent for a long moment, mulling it over, before agreeing.

He had been scared, at first—scared for what it meant for him, for them, for their future. After all, happy couples didn’t go to marriage counselling, right? What if something was going wrong? What if Thomas was the one going wrong? Alexander hadn’t indicated that he had been anything but happy, so—so what was happening?

Thomas did not know, and he did not like being kept in suspense.

Thomas came out from the first session with a thoughtful look on his face.

It was going surprisingly well, all thing considered. Thomas had thought that, given that Alexander had been the one to propose it, he would have a lot of things that he would have liked to discuss, but mostly, Alexander liked having another setting to talk. Thomas liked to think that it allowed him more freedom to express himself, because God knew that it did for Thomas, and Alexander, more
than anyone else, deserved to have a safe space where he could talk about his problems rather than shut them out.

Alexander might have been onto something with the therapy sessions after all. Maybe, if they had tried it before, Alexander wouldn’t have run off after Jackson like a zealous first-year Gryffindor eager to prove his ‘bravery’. Maybe they wouldn’t have had their falling out. Maybe Thomas wouldn’t have gotten lost in the middle of London.

*Maybe, maybe.*

That way lies madness.

˚
✧
₊⁎
❝
᷀
ົ
≀
ˍ̮
❝
᷀
ົ
⁎⁺˳
✧

So Thomas may or may not have a *problem* with Harry Potter. Or several.

In the interest of accuracy, it wasn’t so much a problem as *glaringly many inconsistencies* that kept piling up one after another, until Thomas was faced with a mountain-like pile of Harry Potter-related questions.

There were, however, a few benefits to being the husband to the crown prince of Great Britain. One: he had Joanne Rowling’s private number (not that he had used it that many times; he just… *had it*); two: he had met Mrs Rowling personally; and three: Thomas could bombard her with questions.

Which he did.

**To: The Queen (no, not Martha)**

Do you have a moment? I have some questions about Harry Potter.

Specifically, the wizarding world

**From: The Queen (no, not Martha)**

Go ahead.

**To: The Queen (no, not Martha)**

Are there any taxes in the wizarding world, or does everyone just… not pay for anything? If there are no taxes, how is the Ministry being funded? Is it all donations from third-party individuals like Lucius Malfoy, or is it a private company? Is it a good idea to have a private company in charge of making policies? They’re bound to be biased.

And what about the tuition costs of Hogwarts? I cannot imagine that it’s all for free. Don’t the teachers need to be paid? How is Hogwarts funded, then? Is Hogwarts a private school? Are there private/public schools for witchcraft and wizardry? What about early education? Do the wizards learn math or spelling or anything? What do the purebloods deem ‘necessary’ to their kids’ success, ie what do the kids *need* to learn? Do wizards teach their kids themselves, or do they all hire tutors? If so, how come we’ve never heard of that? Also, who pays for the train? Does it go from the
Hogwarts budget? Who, for that matter, owns the train? Is there revenue for the school? Maybe the tuition? Hogwarts Gringotts account, does it have any?

Can there be WiFi in the Room of Requirements if you wish for it? Isn’t that kind of a paradox? Do Muggle-borns get the password to the WiFi?

What about basic survival skills? Do normal wizards know how to even cook? Not, as in, Molly Weasley, but normal, average, wizards and witches. For that matter, where does Mrs Weasley get her food? Is there a food market of sorts, maybe on Diagon Alley, or does everyone grow their own food?

Also, the specifics to Gamp's Laws of Transfiguration: who/what decides what qualifies as money? Is it only elements such as Au and Ag and Co, or can it also be paper money? (Ie: can Muggle money be multiplied using magic?) Why can liquid be conjured but not food? Liquid is more essential for someone’s survival than food, so what’s so different about it? Is it on a molecular level? But what about flowers? Living beings? Can *those* be conjured up? What’s the exact limit?

And last but not least: why are wizards so anti-progress? Why is the government limited to the Ministry of Magic and Wizengamot, which is literally just a bunch of aristocrats? Who gave them the right to decide right and wrong, when they are not an elected body—they are not even a legitimate government. I’d call this tyranny.

There was a long pause. Thomas fought the urge to fiddle with his phone, before giving in.

Finally, his phone chimed. Thomas hastened to look at the text.

From: The Queen (no, not Martha)

...

I regret my life choices.

It was a few days later, when Alexander was sprawled out on one of the couches while Thomas was going through his exercises, as per the request of his therapist, that the subject came up again.

“I heard that you had some questions for Jo,” Alexander said casually.

Thomas glanced up. Alexander had tucked himself in on one of the couches with an assortment of documents that needed his immediate attention. He always needed to read some report or other, always needed to work work work, despite that Thomas kept telling him that he couldn’t keep this up, couldn’t work himself into an early grave and no, Hamilton it wasn’t a challenge, and really, someone as smart as him really ought to know that the brain functions best when it has had some rest and some nourishment.

Apparently, Alexander didn’t get that memo.

Thomas grimaced. He didn’t know how to phrase what had happened without sounding pretentious and elitist. He finally settled on, “I was… curious.” Granted, it had taken him quite a while to figure out what he was going to ask, and in what order, and then translate it to English and finally type it
out, but it had been worth it.

Alexander let out a hearty laugh. “Love, did I say that it was anything but a positive thing?” He was looking at Thomas with a fond look. “You have an inquisitive mind, and whether you apply it to world economics or the Jack the Ripper murders or, indeed, the world of Harry Potter, I love it.” He reached out to Thomas, putting a hand around the back of his neck and just letting it stay there.

Thomas basked in the moment, watching Alexander’s lips crack wider and wider into a smile. His breath hitched. It was in moments like these that his world zeroed down to Alexander—to his smile, to his twinkling eyes, to his laugh, even down to his ridiculous hair.

Alexander’s laughter filled Thomas with joy, his kisses with excitement, and his smiles… his smiles made Thomas’ heart leap.

“I’m glad,” Thomas said simply, and that was the end of that.

Alexander was rarely quiet. He was a virtual whirlwind of energy, always swirling hither or or storming elsewhere, moving, talking, gesticulating, but always in motion. Thomas marvelled at how he even had the energy to do all those things; he himself sometimes barely felt up to the task of getting up from bed, let alone go about his duties with as much enthusiasm and resolution as Alexander did.

Alexander really was something else.

Thomas absentmindedly hummed under his breath as he skimmed the bookshelf for a specific book. He had been sure that he had seen it here only last week. Where on Earth had it—Ah. There it was. With a triumphant grunt, he pulled out the book with his right hand, his left curled around his cane for steadiness.

When he turned around, the book safely tucked against his chest, he was met with Alexander’s inquisitive, if silent, eyes. With a jolt, Thomas became aware of the fact that his humming had turned into fully-fledged singing.

Well. It wasn’t as if the song was classified or anything—though, knowing Alexander, he’d probably have the clearance to hear all about it anyway.

“‘When you say nothing at all’,” Thomas offered as a succinct explanation.

He didn’t explain the irony in it; the fact that Alexander was rarely, if ever, quiet, but that it was those rare moments that assured Thomas of his affections because Alexander didn’t feel the need to talk, to fill the silence. He could just be, with no expectations hanging over him.

Alexander may have told Thomas that he loved him, but, unfailingly, he said it best when he said nothing at all.

He didn’t explain any of that to Alexander; it would just have made him sound like a sappy teenager whose hormones were raging in full.

Thomas stopped when he realized that Alexander was staring at him, in equal parts amused and baffled, and there was something almost akin to wonder in his eyes.

“Yes?” he asked expectantly.
“That was the most adorable shit I’ve ever heard,” Alexander said, snickering under his breath.

*Shit.* Thomas had spoken out loud. That wasn’t meant to have happened. He really needed to get his brain-to-mouth filter under control.

“*Shush,*” he replied intelligently.

“No, really, it’s very sweet,” Alexander assured him, and Thomas would have been inclined to believe him had a shit-eating grin not slowly blossomed up onto his face.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Just because *you* have the emotional range of a teaspoon, does not mean we all do.”

Alexander clutched his heart theatrically. “And there he goes, quoting *Harry Potter,*” he declared loudly. “Why, my good sir, you have won me over!”

“You are a”—Thomas grasped for the right word for a moment—”*trolleur!*”

Alexander made a shallow bow. “Guilty as charged.” The smirk had yet to vanish from his face.

Thomas shook his head. “You are lucky that I love you,” he teased Alexander.

To his surprise, the expression on Alexander’s face turned wistful.

“Don’t I know it.”

For some reason, the words, though clearly not meant for Thomas’ ears, caused a warm feeling to stir in Thomas’ stomach.

God, he loved Alexander.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Two steps forward, one step back. Or, two steps forward, bounce off a wall, and backpedal into the person behind you—who just happens to be your spouse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Thomas stood corrected. Couple therapy was an actual nightmare.

The problem wasn’t so much the therapy part, as the couple part, although Thomas would gladly have done without the former, too. Whenever he talked, he felt Alexander’s eyes on him, and it felt as though they bore down to his very soul, exposing his every secret and baring his innermost desires for the world to see.

Yes, Alexander knew him well; too well, in fact. That was the crux of the problem, wasn’t it? With him present, Thomas couldn’t lie, because Alexander saw through him.

He took another deep breath.

“I did not hear the question. Could you repeat the question?”

The therapist’s eyes narrowed at Thomas, and Alexander’s followed suit. Something was off about Thomas.

The therapist cleared her throat. “How is the physical therapy going?” she asked again.

And there it was again—pursed lips, downcast eyes, a minute shift in body language. It told Alexander more than any answer of Thomas’ could.

Evidently, Thomas was set on not giving any verbal answer, and, when coaxed by the therapist, only offered a nondescript “Good,” that Burr would have been proud of, and nope, let’s not go there.

Alexander sighed, then turned to face the therapist. “He’s avoiding help. Again,” he added with a pointed look in Thomas’ direction.

The therapist frowned. “Why are you avoiding help?” she questioned Thomas. “Is there a reason in particular why you won’t accept himself?”

Thomas tensed up. His hands clenched almost unwittingly—Alexander took a quick glance, and saw that his palms were turning white—and he squeezed shut his eyes.

Thomas opened his mouth, then froze, going completely still. A shudder went through Alexander’s body as he watched his husband shut down—for there was in reality no other word for it. Thomas started shivering, and clutched at his forearms as if to keep himself warm despite the fact that it was a solid twenty-five degrees inside.
Alexander realized with a start that Thomas was having a panic attack, and his mind went blank.

Shit shit shit.

Suddenly, he was falling, falling, falling, down a spiral, as panic built up inside him, the pressure mounting until it felt like he was going to explode.

Distantly, it felt as though he was watching himself through another’s eyes—a body, frozen still, unmoving like a statue set in stone. As if through a haze, he saw the therapist reach forward, pressing a hand to Thomas’ figure.

Alexander had fucked up. He had fucked up in a major way. This was his husband, and Alexander just barged in like he normally did and shattered any barriers that Thomas had put up to make it all sane and possible to deal with, and Alexander had just taken them down and no no no—

He was aware of the fact that he had a panic attack and he needed it to stop but he couldn’t seem to be able to and this really was the lousiest possible time for his body to decide to stop doing his bidding.

In the recesses of his mind, Alexander recognized that this wasn’t so much a panic attack as a guilt attack because he forced Thomas into this.

He couldn’t do this right now this couldn’t be happening he needed to stay calm and collected for Thomas Thomas Thomas Thomas needed his help God what did he do—?

Deep breaths, Hamilton.

Breathe in. One, two, three. Breathe out. Four, five, six.

That’s it. Calm and collected.

Steady.

Thomas needs you.

You’re doing this for Thomas.

When he finally felt in control of himself, he shifted, falling onto his knees before Thomas, and placed his left hand on Thomas’ cheek. “Thomas, love,” he murmured quietly, switching to French, “listen to me. Follow my voice. Everything is fine. Relax. You’re safe. This—whatever it is—isn’t really happening. You aren’t in any danger.”

Gradually, Thomas’ breathing even out, and Alexander felt him loosen up under his touch, although he still didn’t open his eyes.

“That’s it,” Alexander rumbled. “You’re doing great. Just listen to my voice and allow yourself to unwind.”

Alexander surreptitiously glanced at the therapist, who was sitting a distance away from them, as though knowing that, right now, there was nothing that she could do but to give them the space they so desperately needed.

When he glanced back at Thomas, he saw that his eyes were open; they were studying Alexander, in equal parts consternated and amazed.

“That’s it…” Alexander breathed softly, the name leaving his lips with a certain reverence.
That, apparently, was enough to jostle Thomas out of whatever reverie he had fallen into. He fixed Alexander with a perceptive look. “Alexander.”

“I’m sorry.” The words escaped Alexander before he could fully think them through, but once they left his mouth, he didn’t regret having said them. “I’m sorry that I forced this on you.” Even to his own ears, Alexander sounded defeated.

Thomas waved him away. “It’s not your fault that I’m a fuck-up,” he offered, blasé about it.

“Don’t,” Alexander snapped unexpectedly. He forced himself to take several deep breaths. “Don’t call yourself that. You’re not. You’re brilliant, and you have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I’m weak,” Thomas spat. “I become apoplectic the moment you even bring up the subject of physical therapy. It’s a weakness, and I hate it.”

Alexander let out a shaky breath. “I know, and I hate that I can’t do anything beyond what I’m already doing to help you. I wish that I could take your pain, because better me than you, but I can’t, and it’s killing me inside bit by bit, but there’s nothing that I can do about it. But here’s the thing: neither can you. You’re doing your best—better than anyone would have done in your position, which you shouldn’t have been placed in to begin with—and I want you to know that I’m proud of your progress. You can’t be doing better than your best. I just…” He sighed. “I wish that you would accept my help, however little I can offer.”

Thomas grasped his hand, squeezing it. Alexander couldn’t tell whether he was trying to offer Alexander reassurance, or get it; it could have been both.

“I know that I promised that I would,” Thomas whispered, “but I can’t seem to be able to. I shut you out when you try to help me; I realize that. I want—no, I need—to stop doing that, but I… I don’t know how.”

Alexander offered him a crooked smile—the first since the beginning of their therapy session. “I don’t quite know how, either,” he admitted, “but whatever it takes, we will do it together. Just remember that I’m not trying to pry, I’m not trying to destroy your life or take away your freedom of choice; I’m just trying to help you as best I can. If you tell me to stop, I will. No matter what it is, I’ll stop. I need you to trust me on this, okay?”

Thomas considered his words for a minute. “Okay,” he eventually agreed.

Alexander’s smile widened, before he stood up. He offered Thomas a hand, which the other man took with a grateful look. He helped Thomas up, his hand coming to rest around Thomas’ waist, both as a steadying measure and as a constant and comforting reminder of his presence.

“I believe, ma’am, that we’ve had enough for today, yes?” Alexander addressed the therapist, phrasing himself so that there was no real way for her to disagree—not that she would: she knew Thomas’ limits, and she knew very well what happened when one was pushed too far, but still. Better safe than sorry.

She nodded as she too stood up. “Yes, Your Highnesses.” She hesitated, her eyes flickering between the two men, before she continued, “If there isn’t anything else, I’ll see you both on Friday.”

“Friday it is,” Alexander said agreeably.

She spared them another carefully calculating glance, then offered them both a shallow bow before leaving.
There was silence for a few moments following her departure. It wasn’t a comfortable silence, but it wasn’t *un* comfortable, either, Alexander mused. It just *was*.

It was broken, of course, by Alexander.

“Do you fancy a walk? I hear the gardens are beautiful this time of the year,” he teased.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “You always think the gardens beautiful,” he pointed out. “But yes, that sounds lovely. Let me get dressed first though, or you will have a popsicle for a husband.”

Alexander’s laughter followed them both down the halls.

˚✧₊⁎

Alexander would have liked to say that everything was flawless afterwards, that Thomas confided in him, that he sought Alexander’s help, that he lost that desperate look in his eyes that told Alexander that he didn’t believe that he had ever get better, but the truth was that he didn’t. It made sense, in a way. Life wasn’t a thing that could be fixed with one conversation, or one flip of the switch. It was a constant uphill battle, a constant effort against the tide that tried to sweep them under. Still, Alexander rather thought that they managed fairly well.

And after the incident in therapy, Thomas *did* make more of an effort to be open to Alexander’s offers of help, even if he looked reluctant every time he accepted. He was uncomfortable with having to rely on someone else—of that, Alexander was certain—but it was slowly, ever so slowly, getting better.

Any progress was still progress, as far as Alexander was concerned.

Chapter End Notes

Opinions? Good? Bad? Let me know what you thought!
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Diary entries, Thanksgiving, and vacations in France.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

[From the journal of George James Alexander Jefferson-Hamilton-Washington:]

I know that I haven't written as much in you lately, and for that, I apologize. One could say that I've been busy.

The last time we spoke—yes, I am aware of how silly that sounds, but bear with me, Elicote—I have just gotten out of the hospital, and had tried to write to you with my left hand, which had failed spectacularly. A lot of things have happened since. For starters, I have become ambidextrous, thus the reason why I am writing to you with my left hand.

Onto the update, then.

Things are slowly getting better.

Thomas' therapy is helping. Even if he hasn't exactly taken to his physical therapy like a fish to water, it has been going well. He is slowly regaining the use of his arms, and he is relying less and less on his cane, although I have a sneaking suspicion that he will not ever truly stop needing it.

Newton, bless his soul, is as lovely, as loyal, and as enthusiastic to help Thomas as ever.

As for myself, I'm recovering. It's not a smooth process, nor is it quick by any measure, but I'm better now than I was before, and worse than I will be in the future.

I have convinced Thomas to try couple therapy. It hadn't really been because of a specific problem, although we do have some that, as much as an opportunity to just talk. Thomas had been skeptical at first, but to my relief, he has come around since. Unfortunately, everyone has their setbacks, and Thomas is no exception. He still has the odd panic attacks, although I am glad to say that they have lessened; I, for my part, have both good days and bad days. Life is as life was. We’ve made a lot of headway though, and I can’t express enough how proud I am.

Let’s see. What else have I missed?

(... This almost feels like a 5+1 thing (it's an internet meme).)

I have recently begun assuming some of Dad’s responsibilities. Some of them are… interesting, to say the least. I won’t bore you by listing them (and if I’m completely honest, I don’t quite remember all of it), but suffice to say that my meetings with certain individuals have been very enlightening, and it was not a little bit satisfying to watch...
heir faces during the meetings.

Patsy is planning to start a foundation to help improve the quality of education of orphans in the suburbs. I’m hoping that she will succeed, of course—she seems very invested in this.

Jack is… well, Jack.

Martha has planted a new pear tree in the royal gardens. Right now, it looks quite pathetic, but I have no doubt that by the time Martha’s done with it, it will be magnificent.

I hope that I am improving when it comes to communicating with Thomas. Thomas isn’t say anything, but I’m taking the lack of news as good news. I’m trying to listen more, although I don’t know to what extent I am succeeding. Thomas… He has been getting better about accepting help from me, although I can see that he is still reluctant. He is actually beginning to face his problems. ‘unfortunately, although I’ve been telling him that he will get better, he seems averse to the idea.

I find myself quite enjoying the quiet moments together with Thomas. There have been swells and ebbs in the solidarity of our relationship, yes, and I won’t deny that there have been conflicts, and minor spats, and almost-brawls—when are there not? It’s Thomas, after all—but I wouldn’t change it for the world.

Alexander wasn’t blind. He may occasionally come off as somewhat oblivious, but he wasn’t blind, nor was he stupid. He could see what was in front of him, especially when that something concerned his husband.

Thomas was slowly but steadily losing his connection to the American culture.

He saw that Thomas missed his home, but now, there was a detachment whenever he talked about it. Thomas saw that too.

Thomas was slowly but steadily losing his connection to the American culture, losing even his memory of it, and it terrified him.

If Alexander thought about it, this had been long in the makings. Thomas hadn’t really been to America for a long time, except that one time to visit James before their wedding, and he didn’t exactly keep in touch with many friends there. To him, America was becoming more and more simply a workplace, a way of making a living, for all that both he and Alexander were wealthy enough on their own that neither of them would have had to work for a single day if they didn’t want to.

He was losing a part of his identity, and Alexander was at a loss as to how to help. Here, in Europe, there weren’t that many Americans around for him to befriend and preserve his roots, and in any case, Thomas didn’t like socializing on the best of days.

Alexander knew all too well how it felt to realize that something precious, something one has treasured one’s whole life, was beginning to slip through one’s fingers, and the powerlessness that came with it. Yes, Thomas may retain the memory of the greater things, the general idea of how things were done, but he would eventually forget the details, and, in Alexander’s experience, they made all the difference.
Alexander remembered that his mother was kind and compassionate, but he had forgotten her smile. He remembered how passionate John would get about his causes, but he couldn’t recall John’s brilliant eyes, or whether John liked tomatoes on his toast. The small things were the first thing to go.

Just as well as he knew that, so it was also clear to Alexander that Thomas was desperate to safeguard his culture. Alexander saw how much Thomas was struggling, and it broke his heart a little, because there was nothing he could do truly remedy the situation. Every solution he could possibly offer was short-term—nothing that would truly fix the underlying issue.

Privately, Alexander thought that the problem was made worse by the fact that Thomas’ family, bar Jane and Mary, still wasn’t speaking to him. It would certainly go a long way if Thomas could still talk to the people he had grown up with, the people who had raised him and cared for him and provided safety and comfort and familiarity, and who now, apparently, discarded him like he was but a cheap toy that had broken during playtime. They would have been enormous help, but, like the pathetic excuses for human beings that they were, they abandoned their own blood when he needed them the most.

Ned Stark Seal of Approval not given.

Alexander decided that a plan was needed.

This was how the Washington family came to spend the 22nd of November—”November 22,” Thomas corrected, and Alexander didn’t bother fighting the smile that sneaked its way onto his lips—gathered around the table that featured, among other things, a turkey.

“What is the point of the turkey, anyway?” Jack was asking as he helped himself to the mashed potatoes.

Everyone blinked, before they as one turned to Thomas, who flushed.

“I… Honestly, I do not know,” he admitted.

Alexander didn’t bother stifling a smile. “Actually, turkey wasn't on the menu when the Puritans and the pilgrims celebrated Thanksgiving long ago. In fact, back in 1621 during the first documented ‘Thanksgiving’, the day was more focused on religious ceremonies than dinner,” he said helpfully. “When dinner was served, historian Andrew Smith believes that the actual main course was probably fowl or deer.”

Martha smiled, and Patsy gaped. “How do you know these things?” she demanded to know.

Alexander shrugged. “I guess that Thomas’ encyclopedic tendencies have finally rubbed off on me,” he teased.

Patsy rolled her eyes. “You're too adorable,” she told Alexander.

Alexander grinned. “Thank you. Now, the first big dinners were said to have taken place in the late 18th century, but while it really took off after the Civil War, New England reportedly celebrated years earlier. There, they celebrated a successful harvest, and decided to eat turkey because it was pretty plentiful. This celebration was all about giving thanks for good land, and good fortune as far as crops were concerned. Today, of course, Thanksgiving is definitely all about gratitude.”

“You haven't answered the question of why one must eat turkey in particular,” Jack pointed out.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Let me get to that, okay? Well, William Bradford wrote in his journal, it was apparent that wild turkeys were incredibly easy to access in the Plymouth area. At the time,
turkey was often regarded as being a plentiful American meal. And, yes—it was definitely plentiful. Back then, before factory farming took over the industry, turkeys often weighed up to 60 pounds.” Alexander chuckled. “You can see how cooking one was probably a bit more of a struggle than it is today. Anyway, Sarah Josepha Hale—who was an America writer in the late 18th century and early 19th century, should also get a bit of credit for spreading the word that turkey was the king of the Thanksgiving table. She campaigned for Thanksgiving to be an official American holiday. Her influence definitely helped shape the day into what it currently is today, since she, as she was a writer, made sure to note that turkey was a popular dish for the big feast through the written word. In fact, in her book Northwood, an entire chapter was dedicated towards eating delicious turkey on Thanksgiving. As people are impressionable, obviously her adjectives helped make this a desirable choice.”

Jack blinked. “So… the reason people eat turkey is because someone went ‘oh, this is filling’, and some woman said ‘well, that sounds like fun’?” he deadpanned.

Alexander snorted. “Essentially yes.” He was smirking.

Thomas narrowed his eyes. “You are”—he made a convoluted hand gesture—”smiling maliciously.”

“Smirking,” Patsy filled in.

“Smirking, yes,” Thomas said triumphantly. “Why are you smirking?” he asked Alexander, who shrugged.

“You know, just… thinking…” he deliberately drew out the word.

“Careful, you might strain yourself,” Thomas quipped, and watched as Martha covered her lips to hide her sudden onslaught of laughter.

Alexander scrunched up his nose. “You’re terrible,” he declared, much to the amusement of the rest.

“Methinks the lady doth protest too much,” Patsy joined in.

“You’re slaughtering Shakespeare,” Alexander complained, but the smirk never wavered from his lips. He cleared his throat. “But yes. I’m just thinking about how utterly pissed the conservatives would be if they found out about”—he gestured around them—”this. The king,”—he indicated his father—”celebrating Thanksgiving—as unBritish a holiday as one could get.”

“Yes,” Martha agreed, “they would be.” She reached for her husband’s hand, and squeezed it. “Then again, since when do you care about what other people think? Weren’t you the one to tell me, as a kid, that the king can do what he wants?”


It was a good motto to live by.

Nobody spoke for a moment, each person enjoying their food.

Then, Thomas looked down at Alexander. He rolled his eyes at something he saw in Alexander’s face. He booped his nose gently, effectively catching his attention. “I can see what is happening in that head of yours,” he told Alexander.

Alexander swallowed the clementine he had been chewing, before speaking up. “I certainly hope not.” He let out a bright laugh, the sound of it making Thomas’ heart swell and beat with increasing speed and volume.
“I do,” Thomas insisted.

Alexander crossed his arms. “Tell me, then, O Wise Guru,” he challenged.

Thomas adopted a thoughtful look. “You are considering going in front of all of Parliament and declaring that ‘you are their future king, and the king can do what he wants’ the next time they create trouble about something.” He leaned back in his chair, letting one hand fall down to the side of his chair where Newton was sitting patiently by his side. He scratched Newton behind his ear absently, proud of how fluid his movements were becoming, and felt glowing satisfaction at how the dog all but melted under his touch.

Alexander pursed his lips. “That… wasn’t so far away from the truth,” he admitted. “It would probably be the shortest statement I would have ever made, though, in the interest of accuracy, I’m not a king—not yet, and hopefully not for a long time—so my word wouldn’t hold that much sway right now.”

Thomas, of course, found Alexander’s very near admission disproportionately entertaining. “Careful, love. The last time that the British king said something similar, thirteen colonies revolted,” he teased, momentarily forgetting about the four pairs of eyes watching the back-and-forth between the two of them.

Alexander shot him a mocking glare that did nothing to hide the fondness in his eyes. If Thomas found this amusing, if this made Thomas happy, then who was Alexander to take that away from him?

“We wouldn’t want that, now would we?” Alexander finally replied.

Thomas pretended to think. “Oh, I am not so sure. I am still of the belief that the people would have been happier with a republic.”

Alexander was on the verge of snapping back something along the lines of Thomas minding his own business, when he recalled Thomas’ accusing words. An apology isn’t going to cut. You need to actually change your behaviour, rather than shower me with pretty promises that you will, because I’m tired of always being disappointed when you ignore me. The words froze on his tongue.

“You’re right,” he finally admitted. “I could stand to be knocked down a few pegs.”

Thomas furrowed his brows. “Hey, you know that it was a joke, right?” he said with some concern.

Alexander sighed. He rubbed the bridge of his nose, before lowering his voice to a whisper. “I know, but I can’t help but remember what you told me.” Even though it had been years since they had had that conversation, there was no need for clarification.

An eerie silence fell over the table; Thomas was at a loss as to how to reply, while George, Martha, Patsy, and Jack glanced between Alexander and Thomas, some more subtly than others, while pretending that they were focused on their food.

Finally, Thomas found his tongue. “Thank you,” he whispered, unable to express the full extent of his gratitude to Alexander.

Alexander gave him a smile that told Thomas more than any words could. He reached for Thomas’ hand underneath the table, then lifted it up to his lips and kissed it gently. He did not release it. Thomas held Alexander’s eyes, and saw an almost overwhelming fondness in his eyes.

Patsy cleared her throat, clearly anxious to alleviate the nigh on palpable tension. “Potatoes,
anyone?"

“What do you think about a vacation?”

Thomas snorted. “It would do you a lot of good,” he shot back, strangely non-committal.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Charming, as always,” he retorted, before he looked up at his husband again. “But really, what do you think? I’d like your honest thoughts.”

Thomas inclined his head. “I cannot deny that the thought does have its appeal,” he said slowly, “but you’d go crazy. I know you. Where is this coming from?” he abruptly switched tracks.

Alexander shrugged. “It’s just that been such a long time since we’ve had time to simply enjoy one another’s company,” he explained. His words, although nonchalant, were belied by the tone of his voice.

Thomas’ eyes narrowed, but he didn’t press the point. Instead, he stretched and sighed contentedly. “Well… France is nice this time of the year…” he trailed off pointedly.

Alexander shook his head. “You are incorrigible,” he told Thomas.

“And yet you love me,” Thomas parried.

Alexander shook his head, a teasing smile on his lips. “God only knows why, Monsieur Enjolras.” Thomas scoffed at that. Alexander studied Thomas for a moment. “But seriously, where do you want to go?”

“I told you: France.”

Alexander blinked at the instantaneous response. “Why France?” he asked, curious despite himself.

“Because France.”

Alexander crossed his arms. “Wow,” he said sardonically, “how convincing. Truly a worthy culmination of thousands of years of the evolution of rhetorics.”

Thomas stuck out his tongue at the other man. “You’ve clearly never had a really good baguette.”

Alexander waggled his eyebrows. “Oh, believe me, I have.” The innuendo was virtually visible in the small lines of his smirk.

Thomas groaned. “Why do you have to make everything to a dick joke?” he asked rhetorically.

Alexander shrugged. “It’s fun.”

Thomas fought the urge to throw up his hands in frustration.

The future king of England, everyone.

“But I don’t see that a piece of bread should be the deciding factor when one tries to determine the destination for one’s vacation,” Alexander went on more somberly.

Thomas crossed his arms as well as he could manage. Alexander ducked in order to avoid being hit with the cane that Thomas waved around. “Boring,” Thomas complained.
Alexander’s eyes narrowed. “Boring?” he challenged. “Are you calling me boring?”

“I do not know, am I?” Thomas shot back.


Thomas blinked, nonplussed. “Iceland? Why Iceland?”

“Because it’s exciting,” Alexander replied in the tone that implied that he could, and would, outstubborn Thomas, and was just daring Thomas to test it.

Thomas stared. “I… guess that works.”

Alexander beamed as he leaned forward and placed a light kiss to Thomas’ lips. “So glad that’s sorted out, then! We leave first thing tomorrow.”

With that, Alexander swirled on his heels and stalked off, leaving Thomas gaping.

What the hell had just happened?

Hi, dad!

We are having a great time on Iceland. Yes, the southern part is a bit clichéd and overrun by tourists, but the northern part, along with its extant nature, is nothing short of beautiful.

I’ve dragged Thomas to Latrabjarg (yes, the puffin place). He had been whining about the long road, but he was completely taken by the puffins. I now have more photos than I know what to do with. I think I’m going to need a new hard drive.

There’s virtually no traffic, which is nice, but the ‘highways’, which honestly resemble our average roads, have a 56 mph limit, which is ridiculous and quite frankly the Dept for Transport would be having a field day if they saw what was going on. The Icelandic Dept for Transport seems to be of the opinion that if you want to off yourself, they shouldn’t make it harder than it needs to be. Truly Darwinism at its best.

Anyway, as I said, there’s no traffic, but there’s sheep. A lot of sheep. They keep crossing roads. Thomas has calculated that there are approximately 0.72 sheep per minute, or 1.38 minutes between sheep. It’s crazy. These things are everywhere.

Anyway, it’s fun, the food is odd but delicious, and the people are very nice. (Wish Mulligan would go away though.) We are about to go on a whale safari.

Hope everything is good back at home!

Alex

Chapter End Notes

Good? Bad? Atrociou? Tell me what you thought!
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In which there’s Twitter, breakdowns, and horseback riding. #everything is good and nothing hurts

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Watching Thomas rant, Alexander reflected, was entertainment in itself. Especially when the subject was Markos Monroe’s true loyalties. Especially especially when Thomas’ diatribe was in English, which was charming in itself.

“Markos lost everything when he lost his mother, and again when Venice took over!” Thomas was saying as he transversed the room, his cane echoing against the marble floor. Thunk, thunk, thunk. “For years, he’s cultivated a reputation so that he could take over the city and actually help the people of Venice, because, deep down, he is not a bad person.”

Was Markos Monroe a villain or an antihero? Discuss.

“ And then his brother—his fucking half-brother—comes along, and this guy literally has no claim on the city except that he acts like their mother Anna, and he destroys years and years of Markos’ hard work like it was nothing, and honestly, even if Markos had been evil, I still would have been able to sympathize with him because that right there is cruelty!” Thomas threw up his hands. “Markos simply got blinded by his goals, and could not see the—” He paused for a long moment, before letting out a frustrated growl. “Why can I not remember?!?” he yelled.

“He couldn’t see the forest for the trees?” Alexander suggested gently, his voice soothing.

“Yes! And I could not remember!” Thomas’ eyes flashed with anger. “It is such a basic idiom, is it not?” Alexander watched as his hand clenched the handle of the cane until his fingers turned white from the effort.

“I thought that I was better than this,” Thomas breathed, and it was all Alexander could do not to break down himself at the resignation, at the fatality, in his voice. “I thought I was past this.” Alexander didn’t think that Thomas realized that he had switched back to French mid-sentence. “Jefferson, you know that this is something that you’re going to have to live with for the rest of your life,” he muttered to himself under his breath, an undertone of finality audible in his words.

For the lack of other words, Thomas looked devastated.

Alexander inched to reach out to Thomas, to shake him out of whatever whirlwind of thought that he had fallen into, but he didn’t know what effect it would have on Thomas—would it actually help Thomas, or would it only make things worse? Alexander didn’t want to make things worse, didn’t want to hurt Thomas, but it was obvious that something needed to be done.

When Alexander blinked again, adjusting to the reality in front of him, Thomas had crumbled to the floor. Alexander took a step towards Thomas, but the other man only seemed to collapse in on
himself, drawing himself further away from Alexander with every step Alexander took towards him. His French became jumbled as he kept talking, his words coming out faster with every passing moment.

Thomas was having a breakdown in front of Alexander, and he had slipped into French, *and Alexander didn’t know what to do.*

Alexander knelt down on the floor a small ways from Thomas, making sure to keep some distance between himself and his husband. “Hey, Thomas,” he whispered, “can you hear me?”

No response.

Alexander fought the urge to hit himself. *Of course* Thomas wouldn’t react, least of all not right away; it was never this easy. “I’m going to go with ‘you can hear me’,” he declared loudly enough for Thomas to hear even through his onslaught of French. He gave Thomas a once-over, and decided to chance and get a little closer still to him. Thomas didn’t react, but Alexander didn’t dare bridge the distance between them, not quite yet—it could simply have been a fluke.

Instead, he did what he was best at: he talked. “Relax, Thomas. You are safe, and you are alright. You have been alright, and you will be alright, I promise you. You have been doing just fine.”

He judged Thomas again, and saw that, bit by bit, Thomas was—if not disentangling his limbs, then at least unfurling, like a flower that had sensed sunlight and was desperately reaching out for it.

Alexander took another chance: slowly, without making any sudden moves, he closed the distance between himself and Thomas, and tentatively reached out to him. His hand felt heavy as it lay on Thomas’ shoulder, but Thomas didn’t flinch, nor did he shrug it off. Indeed, he did the opposite: quick as a snake, before Alexander could have done more than blinked, Thomas turned to Alexander and latched onto his arm with all his might. Whereas before, Thomas didn’t want to let Alexander anywhere near him, now, he was hanging on to Alexander like his very life depended on it.

“You are better,” Alexander was now whispering into Thomas’ ear over and over again, having latched onto Thomas’ previous comment. “You are better. You’ve been getting better. This is just a temporary setback. You’ll get past this, like you always do. This is not the thing that does you in.”

Thomas showed no response to Alexander’s words. He didn’t show recognition or even *understanding.* Alexander wasn’t sure that Thomas even heard him.

For a moment, Alexander contemplated calling Gilbert, because yes, Alexander was fluent, but at this point Thomas was slurring and babbling, and Alexander felt powerless to stop it.

But no. This wasn’t Gilbert’s business, and as much as Thomas and Gilbert’s relationship has improved since the wedding, Alexander doubted that Thomas would be very grateful for dragging the Frenchman into one of Thomas’ breakdowns, especially with the peace they had made still so fragile—and yes, it didn’t escape Alexander’s notice, no—and Alexander wasn’t about to betray Thomas’ coincidence.

“Thomas,” Alexander took up again, “can you look at me?” He didn’t hope for much of a reaction, at this point, as Thomas hadn’t reacted either of the first two times that he had called out to him, but the third time’s a charm.

To his surprise, Thomas did lift up his head and met Alexander’s eyes, even if his look was somewhat dazed. His speech, which had sped up every now and again, trailed off.

“That’s it, love,” Alexander murmured, feeling an almost compulsive need to fill the silence that
reigned between them. “That’s it. Relax. Look at me. You are doing great. This is just a minor setback, but you won’t let it keep you down. You’ll rise above it, I know that you will—you always do. I couldn’t be prouder, and there’s no one by whose side I’d rather be, or have by my side, than you.”

Alexander inched closer still to Thomas until their knees were touching. He experimentally wrapped an arm around Thomas’ waist, and drew him closer. Thomas pressed his face into the nook of Alexander’s neck, nuzzling gently. Alexander moved the hand not already holding Thomas to Thomas’ hair and ran his fingers through Thomas’ hair.

“I love you, Thomas Jefferson,” he breathed quietly. “I love you so very much. I can’t express how much I love you. Remember that I’m here for you, and that I’ll always be here,” he said as he began to massage the back of Thomas’ head, “whether you want me here or not,” he couldn’t help adding mischievously. “And don’t ever, ever, believe that you need to be anyone but exactly who you are. You are not a failure, Thomas, do you hear me?” He didn’t seem to need any response from Thomas—not that Thomas was in the right mindset to give him one, anyway. “You are not a failure, nor are you a disappointment.” Alexander heaved a sigh. “I know that you probably find it difficult to believe—it’s easier said than done, after all—but please try to remember, alright?” He leaned forward and placed a soft kiss to Thomas’ forehead. “Now come on.” Alexander helped Thomas stand up, then guided his husband to a couch. “My back won’t be thanking me for this tomorrow.”

Finally, finally, that coaxed a smile out of Thomas, and, as he wrapped an arm around Thomas and positioned them comfortably, Alexander didn’t bother fighting against an instinctive sense of relief.

Thomas was going to be okay. They were going to be okay. It would take time, but they would be okay.

Rachel Burden @rachelburden
#PrinceAlexander #ThomasJefferson spotted at this couple’s wedding! https://t.co/rFwt2eal80

Alexander Hamilton @AdotHam
To be fair, there was free cake there.

Thomas Jefferson @Montiviolin
@AdotHam You break into other people’s weddings to eat cake. The future king of England, everyone.

Alexander Hamilton @AdotHam
@Montiviolin You were there with me.

Thomas Jefferson @Montiviolin
@AdotHam Only because you dragged me along.

Alexander Hamilton @AdotHam
@Montiviolin Don’t lie, you secretly enjoyed it.

Thomas Jefferson @Montiviolin
@AdotHam You are insufferable.

Alexander Hamilton @AdotHam
@Montiviolin Meh, you love me.

Alexander Hamilton @AdotHam
@Montiviolin Also, you got free cake.

Brian Lee @brian14rem
@AdotHam @Montiviolin #relationshipgoals

 Hearing the words “I have a surprise for you,” from Alexander never boded well, in Thomas’ experience.

Thomas put down his art book, where he had been practicing sketching. “I dread asking, but what is it?” When Thomas glanced at his husband, he saw that Alexander was smiling—nay, beaming—at him. Thomas’ eyes narrowed. “Alexander,” he prompted.

Alexander’s smile softened when he heard the caution in Thomas’ voice. “It’s nothing dangerous, I promise,” he assured his husband.

Thomas scoffed. “Alexander, your definition of ‘dangerous’ doesn’t match mine.”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Okay, but in this case, it’s really not dangerous, neither by my definition nor by yours.”

Thomas politely refrained from reminding Alexander that he wasn’t a good judge of that, either. He folded his hands in his lap. “Okay,” he finally conceded. “What is it?”

The bright smile returned. Alexander reached for Thomas’ hand. “Come on,” he said persuasively. “I have something to show you.”

Thomas sighed as he got up, not as reluctant as he had been only moments ago, only leaning briefly on his cane when he stood up. Alexander looked up at him, the smile still in place, and Thomas felt any qualms that he might still have had melt away as though they were nothing but a fleeting spark easily snuffed out by the hurricane that was Alexander. His husband wordlessly tugged on Thomas’ hand, propelling him to follow him.

Thomas trailed after Alexander outside, still bewildered as to where they were going but blindly trusting Alexander that he wouldn’t just lead Thomas someplace isolated and murder him in cold blood.

Out of a list places Thomas had expected Alexander to lead him to, the stables had been fairly low on the list; the only reason the had been on the list was because Alexander was, well, Alexander, and liked to show off, and what better way to do it than to show off his skills in horseback riding? Even as it tore a bit at Thomas that he couldn’t do it, he couldn’t help but enjoy the occasional displays of talent that Alexander treated him to.

Thomas cast a quick glance at Alexander. Yes, what he was wearing could reasonably be used for horseback riding, even if it wasn’t Alexander’s usual attire.

He didn’t say it, but he was already looking forward to whatever it was that Alexander had in store for him today.

His eyes were drawn to the trance of the stable, where, without a doubt, Aemon was waiting for her master. Sometimes Thomas wasn’t sure whether Alexander spent more time with his husband or his horses. It should come as an insult, but, knowing Alexander as well as he did, it didn’t.

Thomas watched as Alexander's tongue darted out to wet his lips, and he swallowed hard, suddenly
overwhelmed by the desire to close the distance between them, but a voice in the back of his head, quiet yet so very insistent, reminded him that this was really not the time, Jefferson, get a grip.

Thomas forced himself to remain still instead of reaching out to Alexander. He was an adult, dammit, not a hormone-riddled teenager.

“Well?” Thomas leaned on his cane, although this time, it was less of a question of needing support, and more simply that Thomas was, at heart, a drama queen who needed to show his nonchalance every now and again. “What brand new trick are you going to show me today?”

But even as he was asking the question, Alexander was shaking his head. “No,” he said simply.

“No?” Thomas echoed in disbelief. “You mean to tell me that you have dragged me all the way across the castle for nothing?” There was a note of incredulity in his voice.

Alexander grinned. “Did I forget to mention that today is a little different?” he teased.

“Different?” Thomas wasn’t sure if he liked ‘different’. “Different how?”

Instead of replying, Alexander strode over to the stable and wrenching open the door, before gesturing at Thomas to follow him. Thomas did just that.

Alexander paused by Aemon’s box, but, to Thomas’ surprise, he didn’t make a move to open it. He simply patted her on the snout, murmured a quiet “Later, girl.”, before continuing onward, and did not stop until he came to Postlethwayt’s box.

Thomas blinked. Out of Alexander’s three horses, Postlethwayt was the one he had seen the least of. Horsey McHorseface was Alexander’s first horse, and it was clear that he had a special place in Alexander’s heart; Aemon was the bright favourite that Alexander fussed over and pushed harder than anyone bar maybe himself; but what was Postlethwayt? What, if anything, made him special?

Alexander reached out to the horse, and petted him on the snout, before motioning for Thomas to approach them. The last vestiges of any hesitation Thomas might have felt faded away as he stepped up to Alexander’s side.

“Now are you going to tell me what you’re up to?” he asked idly.

Alexander turned to face Thomas. “I’m so glad that you asked!” he chirped cheerfully, and ignored Thomas’ muttered “I have been asking you for the past ten minutes!” “You”—Alexander unlatched the hatch to the box—”are going”—he opened the box—”to go horseback riding!” He beamed at Thomas.

For a moment, Thomas could do naught but stare at Alexander in bemusement, before his words sunk in and he blanched. He hoped that none of the alarm he felt showed on his face. It was only when Alexander’s smile shifted to an expression of concern and a “Thomas?” escaped Alexander’s lips, that Thomas was jerked back to reality.

“Are you insane?” he demanded, before shaking his head. “No, stupid question. Of course you are bloody insane!” It was an attestation to how much Thomas’ grasp of the English language had improved over the past few months, that he didn’t slip back into French. “You do remember that I need a cane to walk, right?” Thomas lifted up the object in question for emphasis. “How do you expect me to—”

“I also distinctly remember that you were— are —an accomplished equestrian,” Alexander cut in. He took a step towards Thomas, his fingers twitching like he was just itching to touch Thomas. “And
you’ve made so much progress since getting out of the hospital that yes, I do think you ready for this.” With that, Alexander put his hands on his hips and gazed at Thomas, a challenge in his eyes, as though daring Thomas to contradict him.

Thomas glared at Alexander. “Well, you may think that I am ready, but I believe that I have the final say,” he retorted petulantly.

Alexander inclined his head. “Yes, it’s true,” he acknowledged, “and if you truly don’t feel up to it, I won’t force you.” Still, Alexander made no move to shut the door to the horsebox. “But look me in the eyes and tell me that it’s not just fear talking.”

Thomas swallowed. He glanced away without a word. He knew that, should he chance a look at Alexander in that moment, he would see a shit-eating grin playing on his lips.

“Why Postlethwayt though?” Thomas asked, even as he reached out to pet Postlethwayt again. He turned his head just a little, to be able to see Alexander.

Alexander’s smirk widened, and Thomas knew, in that moment, that Alexander knew that Thomas knew that Alexander knew that Thomas had wordlessly given in.


Thomas shrugged. “I mean, what about Horsey McHorseface? Isn’t he, well, calmer?” Older horses usually were.

Alexander snorted in a very much undignified fashion. “Him? Are you crazy? Horsey McHorseface is bloody insane. Don’t let his age fool you. He’s as spry as any fool I’ve ever come across.”

Thomas was about to offer a scintillating response, but a twinkle in Alexander’s eyes stopped him. Now that he thought about it, it wasn’t entirely out of the realm of possibilities. Stranger things had happened, after all.

Alexander was still watching him with that expectant expression of his.

Thomas heaved a sigh. “Very well,” he acquiesced, putting into words what he and Alexander already knew.

Alexander scoffed. “Do try to tone down the enthusiasm, will you?” he said sarcastically, before disappearing briefly into Postlethwayt’s box. He re-emerged presently with the horse in question, and Thomas’ eyes were drawn to Postlethwayt almost unwittingly.

He had never felt apprehensive about riding a horse before, but it would have taken a special kind of courage—or stupidity—to be in his situation and not to feel alarmed at the thought of what he was about to do. In fact, Thomas knew of only one person who wouldn’t have been afraid. Unfortunately, as luck would have it, that same person was now trying to convince Thomas—Thomas, a certified cripple—to ride one of his horses.

Thomas shook his head and took a steadying breath. Horses could sense fear, and Thomas wasn’t prepared to hand that much power over to an animal he had just met, docile or no. He needed a clear head if he was going to do this, and it was becoming clearer with every minute that yes, he was going to do this, crazy though it sounded.

After more nagging than a normal person would have been able to tolerate, Thomas put on enough protective gear that Alexander cracked a joke about Thomas being able to go into hockey. He thought about declining Alexander’s help with getting up onto Postlethwayt, but decided against it. It
was going to be difficult enough to retain his balance on the horse once he was on it; there was no need to make the process between now and then harder than it needed to be.

Thomas heaved an almost involuntary sigh once he was sitting firmly in the saddle. He waited for a moment to see whether the horse would react, but Postlethwayt seemed content to await Thomas’ instructions.

Thomas drew in another breath, then let it out.

This.

This was what he had been missing.

Even without looking at him, Alexander’s smugness was almost palpable. It would have been vexing if Thomas wasn’t so swept up in the moment. To his immense joy, although he was nowhere near as good as he remembered having been, his handicap wasn’t as much of a deal breaker as he had feared.

Maybe, just maybe, this wasn’t going to end in the disaster Thomas had internally predicted.

“Okay, move,” Alexander’s voice cut through Thomas’ cloud of joydreadexcitement.

Thomas blinked. “What?” What was Alexander doing now?

Alexander rolled his eyes. “I’m getting up onto Postlethwayt with you,” he explained, as though to a simple child.

Thomas was on the verge of asking why, before he realized—although he wasn’t a complete novice, it was clear that Alexander—and Thomas, too, come to think of it—would feel much more secure in the knowledge that Alexander was up on the horse with him. Truth be told, Thomas didn’t have much control of Postlethwayt, and should he decide to bolt, or revolt, or do anything, Thomas wouldn’t have been able to reign him in; Alexander would. Yes, Alexander seemed to trust Postlethwayt with Thomas, but Thomas had yet to extend the same trust to the horse in question. Thomas quickly warmed to the idea.

With a few nimble moves, Alexander got up onto the horse in front of Thomas. Thomas gingerly put his arms around Alexander's waist, hoping that it didn’t feel too much like he was hanging on for dear life because he knew what kind of things Alexander liked to get up to, and he had no intention of falling off.

As Alexander took the reigns and urged Postlethwayt into motion, Thomas let himself relax. He laid a cheek on Alexander’s shoulder, and let out a contented sigh. Alexander turned slightly, and gave Thomas a gentle smile.

Thomas let his eyes wander around as Alexander guided Postlethwayt along, taking in the sights, content to just listen to the sounds of the forest around him, the hooves of the horse clattering against the ground, the leaves and branches rustling in the wind, the chirping of the birds that would soon leave for winter.

It was a magical moment, and nothing could break it.

Alexander pulled the horse to a happy, then turned his head to gift Thomas with a brilliant smile, and for a moment, Thomas forgot—forgot that his life for the past several months resembled recovering from a nightmare more than anything else; forgot that he still wasn’t fully healed, and in all probability never would be; forgot that his life was a mess and that someone had tried to assassinate
him; forgot that he still needed help to be able to do some basic functions like opening the bloody door; forgot about the time he had spent in a coma tha he would never get back; forgot that his own family hated him and had all but disowned him; forgot that his best friend was a dick and Alexander’s was dead; forgot all the misery that had befallen him in that very short span of time.

He forgot all that, and allowed himself to let go of it all, even if for but a moment, and he couldn't be happier.

Chapter End Notes

I've finally finished the whole thing. All that's left is to post it :)

What did you think of this chapter? Remember: comments are the best gift you can give!
"Thomas, we need to talk," Alexander said seriously one day.

Thomas froze mid-movement. He couldn’t fight down the feeling of dread that filled him at Alexander’s serious words. He let his arm fall down limply to his side.

What had happened? What did Alexander want to talk about? Was it anything Thomas had done, or not done? Anything he had missed? Thomas mentally went through a list of what had happened in the past few days that might have piqued Alexander’s attention, but nothing stood out—or at least, nothing that he and Alexander hadn’t already discussed.

What was it, then?

The feeling of foreboding intensified. Did Alexander want to break up with him? Had he finally gotten to be too much for Alexander? Too exhausting to always take care of, and support all day, and reassure at his every step? It must be exhausting. Thomas wouldn’t blame Alexander if he finally got enough; God knew that it was impressive that he had remained with Thomas for this long.

Still, maybe things weren’t completely set in stone yet; maybe Thomas could still convince Alexander that he was worth staying with, if he changed a little, if he just tried harder and got better and was more useful. Alexander liked usefulness, didn’t he? He could prove that he was useful. He was smart enough—maybe not Alexander-smart, not anymore, but he was still smarter than an overwhelming part of the world populace—and he could help Alexander.

He was strong enough, independent enough. He could do this.

Blind to Thomas’ internal crisis, Alexander led Thomas to a couch, and gestured for him to sit. As though through a haze, he watched himself sit down on the couch, guided by Alexander’s hand, and bloody hell, Jefferson, this was the opposite of showing Alexander his independence.

Still, he couldn’t find it in himself to shake off the hand Alexander put atop his own as he took a seat next to Thomas. The proximity did little to reassure Thomas. Maybe Alexander simply wanted to make Thomas comfortable before breaking his heart. Alexander was considerate like that.

When he noticed that the shorter man had begun to speak, Thomas forced himself to focus on Alexander’s word. He was saying something of import—maybe he was explaining just why he couldn’t stay with Thomas. It would be in Thomas’ best interest to listen, then, if he was to offer counterarguments.

“—but before I am willing to fully go into that, I wanted to check with you,” Alexander was saying. Thomas blinked. He understood all of the words separately but not their joined meaning. He glanced
at Alexander quizzically, his bewilderment mixing with the dread he was sure was as glaringly obvious on his face as a Picasso painting at a museum.

Alexander took a deep breath. “There’s no subtle way of going about it, so I’m just going to be blunt: do you want to have kids?”

Thomas blinked. “That… wasn’t what I had been expecting,” he admitted under Alexander’s expectant eyes.

Alexander frowned. “What had you been expecting?” he asked curiously.

Thomas opened his mouth, then closed it again. If he voiced his apprehensions, it would do naught but start another argument with Alexander, and that was precisely what he had been trying to avoid. “It doesn’t really matter,” he said evasively, and watched as Alexander’s lips drew into a thin line. He watched as Alexander opened his mouth, no doubt to demand that Thomas be truthful with him, and hastened to ask, “Why the sudden question?” A sneaking suspicion suddenly made its way into the forefront of his mind, and he frowned. “Is someone pressuring you to have kids? Is it the Parliament?” He was going to kill every last member of that blasted body of government.

But Alexander was shaking his head. “No, no one’s pressuring me,” he assured Thomas, who fixed him with doubtful eyes, knowing that there was more to the story than Alexander was saying. Alexander held his eyes for a moment, before glancing down to examine his hands. “But they might start soon,” he admitted. “Before I’m forced to have that discussion, I want to know: are you comfortable with kids?”

“And if I say no?” Thomas asked carefully.

Alexander shrugged. “Then I die childless, and upon my death, the throne goes to my cousin, or her children.” He paused. “Like I said, it’s not the end of the world, but I’d—”

“Like to have kids?” Thomas finished for him.

Alexander nodded wordlessly. He couldn’t help but look a little hopeful.

Thomas was silent for a moment, processing what he had just heard.

“I can’t say that kids is anything I’ve ever given serious thought to,” he admitted at last, and watched as Alexander’s face fell, “but I’m not immediately opposed to it,” Thomas added.

Alexander glanced up into Thomas’ face, searching for deception in his words. Thomas let him look, knowing that he would find none.

“I’d like kids,” Alexander finally repeated, an impenetrable look flashing on his face. “Very, very much. Not now, maybe,” he hurried to assure Thomas when he saw that a look of panic crossed Thomas’ face, “but eventually, certainly.”

He was staring at Thomas expectantly, waiting for what Thomas would say. Thomas, for his part, felt his throat clog up.

So. Alexander didn’t want to break up with him. He wanted to know whether Thomas was okay with them having kids.

Kids.

Thomas hadn’t been lying when he said that he had never thought about it for very long, apart from
as a distant concept that he didn’t have to contemplate just yet. For all that he had grown up in a large family, the concept of him personally having kids had been something to contemplate in the future.

The future, it seemed, was right now—and yet, Thomas was as ill-prepared to answer that question as he had been when he had been an awkward teenager who faked a migraine every time a girl rejected him.

I don’t know, he wanted to say, except that it didn’t seem quite right—Alexander was right there, awaiting an answer, his violet eyes looking so hopeful despite it all. Thomas bit his lower lip. He never could bear to disappoint Alexander, and this time was no exception.

“You’d be its father.” It wasn’t a question.

Alexander nodded. “At least the first one’s.” The first one’s? God, what was Thomas getting himself into? “If we have a kid, they need to be biologically related to me, so that they can inherit the throne.” He pulled a face. “Quite honestly, I don’t fully trust my cousin and her kids with the future of England.”

Ah. So that’s what was happening. Thomas was supposed to lie down and think of England and keep himself from imagining Alexander with another? Was he even capable of doing that? a part of him asked.

Yes, another part answered. For Alexander, he was capable of anything.

Thomas swallowed, then forced himself to meet Alexander’s eyes. “Who’d be their mother?” It wasn’t agreement, not quite yet, but he was getting there, and judging by the curl of Alexander’s lips, Alexander knew that as well.

Alexander winced. “I don’t have any clear candidates quite yet,” he conceded, “but I do have a few female friends that wouldn’t mind.”

“And I suppose that you’ve spoken about this to them?” Thomas asked. It came out sharper than he had intended.

Alexander looked at him in surprise. “Yes, as a matter of fact, we have. Back when John and I were together, I spoke with a few of my friends, who said that, should it come down to it, they’d be honoured to… do it,” he finished, seeming as awkward about the subject as Thomas himself felt.

Good.

Alexander was his, and no one else’s.

Thomas shook his head. Once again, the ghost of John Laurens came back to taunt him. Thomas tampered down on the feeling of panic that threatened to overwhelm him. Alexander had clearly been talking about settling down and having kids with Laurens. Who was to say that he wouldn’t go ahead with it this time, when he saw what a disappointment Thomas was?

No, Thomas decided. Alexander wouldn’t see him as a disappointment, because Thomas would do his best not to be one. He would work harder than he ever had before, to become a person that Alexander could be proud to call a husband.

Take that, John Laurens, Thomas thought vindictively.

Thomas slowly bobbed his head. “I’m okay with that,” he said with as much conviction as he could muster. “I’m okay with us having kid.” And if he wasn’t... Well, he had at least nine months to get
used to the idea.

Alexander studied him for a moment, searching for something, before he nodded, having obviously found whatever it was he had been looking for. He stood up. “I’ll call Eliza and ask whether her offer still stands,” he announced.

Thomas blinked. “What… Like, right now?” he asked in bewilderment.

Alexander smiled. “They say that there is no time like the present,” he replied mischievously.

Thomas tightened his grip on his cane. Fuck. The nine months were looking more and more like a realistic estimate.

Alexander gave Thomas one last once-over before he silently left the room. Thomas’ eyes followed his movements. Once Alexander was out of sight, Thomas collapsed gracelessly into the couch.

It just… It didn’t seem real.

He, Thomas Jefferson, had just had a serious conversation with his partner about having kids.

If the partner in question hadn’t been male, Thomas was certain that his mother would have been proud of him. As it was, Thomas’ grandparents were surely rolling in their graves. That was okay though. This was Thomas’ life, and his alone. He loved his family a lot, but ultimately, they had no say as to whom he would start a family with.

Family.

Kids.

Fuck.

Thomas was definitely not ready for this.

Eliza Schuyler was annoyingly, disgustingly, flawless. As beautiful as any woman Thomas had ever seen, charming to a fault, and smart to go with it. In short, she was the perfect woman for Alexander to have a kid with—and what a kid it would be!—and maybe, just maybe, settle down with. God knew that, with a woman like that, he certainly didn’t need Thomas.

Schuyler—no, Eliza, because Angelica was Schuyler, and apparently also Eliza’s adopted sister, because the gods clearly hated Thomas—had gone to university with Alexander, though she majored in human sciences, with a minor in psychology. She was also apparently yet another of Alexander’s old flames, though she hailed from the Before John Laurens era. She and Alexander had been dating for a few months back in university, before Laurens had come along. She was as if made for Alexander, and Thomas’ heart couldn’t help but clench painfully at the thought.

Besides, Thomas added despondently, Eliza could give Alexander what Thomas couldn’t. He didn’t think that he’d be able to do it, to force himself into it, even had he been healthy. He—He just couldn’t do it. He had been brought up thinking it an act that ought not be contemplated in polite society, and the Jeffersons were nothing if not polite. Decades of conditioning didn’t disappear overnight, maybe not ever—not even for love, no matter how much Thomas might wish them to. He just wanted to be normal, but while he did admit that he certainly wanted Alexander, he couldn’t imagine himself with him, doing… those things.
Sweet Jesus, he couldn’t even think about it. How was he supposed to go through with it, if he couldn’t even think about it?

Thomas took a deep breath. It wouldn’t do thinking about this.


“Yes, ma’am.” He shook her hand, his other tightening on his cane.

When he looked back up, Eliza had fixed Thomas with a thoughtful look. Alexander caught it, and his eyebrows furrowed. He gestured for Eliza to give them a little space, and she acquiesced with a slight nod, though not before throwing Thomas a bewildered look.

Alexander stepped up to Thomas as he met Thomas’ eyes, his own eyes searching for something within Thomas’.

“Thomas, are you regretting this?” Alexander whispered quietly enough that only Thomas could hear.

Eliza threw them another bemused look, but neither man feels inclined to include her in the conversation.

Thomas didn’t answer, as he tried to gather his thoughts into some sort of order.

Alexander frowned at the lack of a reply. He reached out for that of Thomas’ hands that wasn’t curled around his cane, and grasped it tightly. “Thomas, I need you to be completely honest with me.” His words were insistent. “Are you okay with”—Alexander gestured around them—”this? Because we don’t need to do it if you’re not comfortable with it.”

Thomas shook his head. “No,” he managed, trying to sound as confident as he could. “I’m fine.”

Alexander peered at him carefully. “Are you sure? Because you don’t—”

“Trust me, won’t you?” Thomas snapped at Alexander, hoping that it would serve as a distraction. If he sounded sufficiently annoyed at the fact that Alexander was mother-henning him, Alexander wouldn’t suspect him of actually feeling what he had been suggesting.

Alexander scoffed. “I’m just trying to make sure that you’re alright with this whole idea,” he muttered. “No need to get so defensive.”

“Really, I don’t mind.” Thomas repeated for what felt like the twentieth time. He hoped that if he said it enough, it would eventually become the truth.

“Really?” For the first time during that conversation, Alexander smiled. It wasn’t a beaming smile by any means, but this, right here, reminded him of just why he was agreeing to this whole thing. It made Alexander so happy, and Alexander, of all people, deserved to be happy.

Thomas couldn’t afford not to be okay with something that made Alexander happy.

“Really,” Thomas assured him.

Alexander, smile still dancing on his lips, leaned forward and kissed Thomas, who subconsciously melted into the kiss. He grabbed the front of Alexander’s shirt and dragged him yet closer to him until there was nary an inch between then. Alexander let a pleased sound from the back of his throat,
and Thomas replied in kind.

No, he may not be ready for kids yet, Thomas thought to himself, but maybe he could learn to be.

A light cough interrupted them, and Thomas fought the urge to glare at Eliza as Alexander broke the kiss, though his lips hovered over Thomas' for another moment. His eyes seemed apologetic, and that, more than anything, served to irritate Thomas. Alexander was his. Not Eliza's. Not John's. Thomas'.

Thomas knew that he was being irrational, but really, he rather had a right to be. Eliza was going to sleep with his husband; he had a right be jealous.

Alexander’s eyes trailed after Thomas’ line of sight, and he didn't bother stifling a snicker. "Relax, Thomas," he told Thomas teasingly, watching as Thomas’ shoulders tensed up. "It's not like I'm going to sleep with Eliza or anything."

Thomas blinked. "You're not?" he echoed, hating how uncertain he sounded.

Alexander shook his head, a slight smile on his lips. "No, you dummy. There's this thing called in vitro, you know." He bobbed Thomas on the nose, then furrowed his brows as realization lit up his eyes. His amused expression fell, replaced by pure, undiluted concern. "Is that what's been bothering you?" he asked in concern.

Thomas thought about denying that something had been bothering him. No, Alexander was too perceptive, and too assured of his observations and deductions, to fall for that.

Instead, he nodded silently.

Alexander's expression fell. "Oh, my love," he whispered softly, his other hand sneaking its way around Thomas’ neck to massage the back of his head. "I'd never do that to you."

Correction: he knew exactly how he felt about that, but he couldn't voice his thoughts. For one, it was already too late for Eliza to get an abortion, and for another, he wouldn't do it to Alexander—not to his Alexander, who had given up so much for him already. It was time for Thomas to be the one to sacrifice something.

And so he swallowed the protests that had been on the tip of his tongue. He was doing this for Alexander. Alexander wanted a kid, so Alexander would have a kid.

Thomas and Alexander had a long conversation about baby names—and by 'conversation', Thomas meant that he suggested names and Alexander discarded every last one of them.

"Victor?"

"No."

"Frederick?"

"No."
“Erik?”

Alexander paused, and glanced up at Thomas. “No! That’s a terrible name! Next thing, you’re going to suggest ‘Raoul’.”


Alexander sniffed. “If you don’t want to help, be that way.”

Thomas huffed as he pointedly turned away. “Fine. If you do not need my help, you can surely find a suitable name on your own.” He slowly made his way to one of the vacant armchairs, Newton following behind him.

Throughout it all, Eliza sat in silence, engrossed in a well-taken-care-of copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Now, however, she looked up. “What about Philip?” she suggested.

Alexander tilted his head in consideration. “Philip?” He tried the name.

Eliza shrugged. “After my father.”

“Philip.” Alexander hummed. “Why not? Philip it is.”

As much as Thomas tried not to feel jealous over Eliza’s relationship with Alexander, but it was damn hard not to be when Alexander, Thomas’ own husband, disregarded his opinions so blatantly in favour of the perfect Eliza. Alexander was many things, but considerate was not one of them.

“That’s just the first name,” Eliza gently reminded Alexander. “If he’s going to be the future king of England, he’s going to need more than that.”

Thomas groaned silently as Alexander turned to him expectantly.

Here they went again.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Baby Philip makes an appearance, Thomas does not deal well with infants, Rowling regrets every choice that led up to this, and there is a middle-age crisis. In other words, business as usual at Buckingham.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After months of preparation—and, in Thomas’ case, stressing himself out over what was to come—Philip’s birth was rather anticlimactic, to say the least.

At least that was how it had felt like to Thomas; he doubted that Alexander would agree, what with how much he had begun stressing and fidgeting the moment he found out that Eliza has gone into labour. It had taken all of Thomas’ not-inconsiderable expertise to calm Alexander down to a degree where he could be taken to the hospital without hyperventilating.

Eliza, by contrast, was almost calm. She gave Alexander a reassuring smile that did little to allay his fears, then exchanged a put-upon look with Thomas when Alexander turned away to snap of an avalanche of questions at the doctors. Eliza’s eyes seemed to be saying ‘Take care of him’, and Thomas bristled. He hardly needed to be reminded to take care of his husband, least of all by the intruder in their lives.

He acknowledged her with a sharp nod, and Eliza looked faintly surprised at first, though the look quickly turns into twinkling amusement that left Thomas feeling like he had missed the punchline of one of Lafayette’s jokes.

Thomas and Alexander were summarily herded out of the busy room by a cross nurse whose mouth had thinned enough to give even Minerva McGonagall a run for her money.

Alexander swirled on his heels once the door closed behind them. “How dare they!” he seethed. “To throw me”—Thomas coughed pointedly—”to throw us out of that room! What were they thinking?!”

“Probably that they wanted some peace during an already stressful situation,” Thomas muttered under his breath.

Alexander whirled around and pinned Thomas with what he probably thought was an intimidating glare, but the effect was ruined by the somewhat crazed look on his face. “And what do you mean by that?” he demanded.

Thomas fought the urge to roll his eyes. He stepped closer to Alexander—the thud-thud of his cane striking the cold stone floor echoing around the room as he crossed the short distance to stand before his husband. “I mean that your presence is hardly liable to assuage the tension in that room. You have a propensity for getting an entire room into uproar simply by walking into it, non?”

Alexander’s eyes softened somewhat at Thomas’ words, though the sharp look didn’t leave his eyes. He placed a hand on Thomas’ shoulders, then sighed. “You’re right, of course.”
Thomas scoffed. *Of course.* As if Alexander made it a *habit* of confessing his wrongdoings; granted, he had gotten better, but he was by no means *good.*

Alexander let his hand fall back to his side, then glanced at the chairs in the waiting room. He made as if to sit down in one, before standing up abruptly. He began pacing across the room in silence.

Thomas heaved a sigh as he gingerly settled in for the wait. It was going to be a long morning.

Thomas would have liked to say that he fell in love with Philip the moment he laid his eyes on him, but that would have been lying. No, he was apprehensive even as he gazed at his son and shit Philip was his son wasn't he? Thomas was in part responsible for this small, precious life.

One look at Alexander's face—Alexander's face, ecstatic as he looked at Philip with nothing short of adoration in his eyes—was, however, enough to convince Thomas that, despite his apprehensions, he had done the right thing.

Still, he could not help the fear from before. It curled up in his stomach, not quite choking him but not letting him breathe easily either. Here was a human being for whom he would be responsible for the next eighteen years, if not longer. Thomas would need to make sure that it would not only remain alive and well *physically,* but also *mentally*; more than alive and well, actually.

For a moment, Thomas couldn’t breathe.

That was a huge responsibility. Shit. What if he couldn’t do it? What had he thrown himself into? He was hardly going to be a good father; he didn’t even know if he *wanted* to be a father.

Then the moment passed, and it was as though nothing had happened.

When Thomas looked up again, Alexander was looking at him expectantly. He held out the bundle towards Thomas. Thomas stared at it in silence. Alexander sighed, the picture of exasperation. “Hold your son.”

Thomas tensed up. “Are you sure?”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Yes, I’m *sure.* He’s your son, you know.” He spoke slowly, as though to an infant. “You should hold him.”

“But I am still unsta—That is, my hands are still sha—”

“Just hold him.”

Slowly, ever so slowly, Thomas took the bundle from Alexander and held it as far away from himself as he could. He gathered the courage to glance down, and met a pair of brown eyes. Brown like his.

Brown like Eliza’s.

Suddenly, the baby in his arms—*Philip,* Thomas reminded himself—let out a loud wail. Thomas nearly dropped him.

"Why does he always cry when I hold him?!” His hands were shaking, badly, as badly as they had the days after he had woken up.

Alexander sighed. “Because you're treating him like he's a tiger about to pounce upon you.”
voice had softened from its earlier irritation. "Babies cry; it's fine. You don't need to hold him like he's about to break in your arms."

Thomas stifled a retort of “But he’s so fragile!” and glanced down at the baby again. He hoped that the fear he felt wasn’t evident in his eyes.

Apparently, it had been too much to hope for.

“Look, just—” Alexander made an aborted motion. “Just let me show you.” He gently repositioned Thomas’ arms. “Like this,” he continued when he was satisfied.

Thomas chanced a glance down at the bundle in his arms. He swallowed.

It was okay. He could do this.

To: Queen Fluffhead

Thomas

Why is Philip shouting ‘no taxation without representation’

From: Queen Fluffhead

Is he?

He is certainly quick on the uptake.

To: Queen Fluffhead

Thomas

What did you do

From: Queen Fluffhead

I taught him some necessary phrases in life.

To: Queen Fluffhead

Really

Is ‘no taxation w/o representation’ really necessary

I will not have a son who spouts conservative bullshit
From: Queen Fluffhead

It is not “conservative bullshit”.
It is the truth.

To: Queen Fluffhead

Thomas.

From: Queen Fluffhead

Alexander.

To: Queen Fluffhead

You are infuriating
You’re lucky that I love you
Also I have a recording of you singing lullabies #adorable

From: Queen Fluffhead

Are you spying on me?

To: Queen Fluffhead

It's called surveillance cameras, mon petit chou

From: Queen Fluffhead

So you ARE spying on me.

To: Queen Fluffhead

By that definition, I'm spying on everyone

From: Queen Fluffhead

This is what people's hard-earned tax money goes?
To: Queen Fluffhead

Thomas

Love

You don’t even pay taxes in England
You literally have no room to talk

From: Queen Fluffhead

No taxation without representation.

To: Queen Fluffhead

... ...

Alexander Hamilton @AdotHam
Pip on his first horse! #couldntbeprouder https://i47.tinypic.com/2z9bcj0.jpg

BBC Breakfast @BBCBreakfast
Prince Philip has reportedly begun his riding lessons. https://t.co/YNqSuaBrmt

Thomas Jefferson @Montiviolin
@BBCBreakfast It must be a slow news day indeed.

Thomas Jefferson @Montiviolin
@AdotHam Also, it’s a pony.

“Thomas, I’ve been thinking,” James told Thomas during Thomas’ first visit back to the United States since the mess with Jackson.

“Always a dangerous enterprise,” Thomas quipped with a grin. When James didn’t laugh, his smile faded, replaced with a serious frown. “Yes?”

“Clinton’s going to be running for re-election,” James began formally, “and while I appreciate the fact that she’s the president and not Pumpkin Spice,”—Thomas choked—“I don’t agree with any her policies.”

“So?” Thomas asked, even though he had an inkling as to where this was going. But—If James was implying what Thomas thought he was implying, then he needed verbal affirmation from James.

“I want to run for president.” James’ next words confirmed Thomas’ suspicions. “I can help improve our country, because although America’s not the garbage can that Trump described, there’s room for massive improvements, and Clinton hasn’t done that. All she’s done is just…” James threw up his
arms. “She had the chance, and she blew it. I want to—no, I need to—help.”

Thomas bit his lower lip. “You do realize that the chances of reelection have been marginally higher these past few elections than they have been in the past? By that logic, there’s a higher chance that you will win in another four years than now, and it is not—” He paused, searching his mind for something. “As though!” he finally exclaimed. “There it is. Yes, as though you will be past your prime.”

“I can play the long game,” James said slowly, “but is there a point to do it? Clinton doesn’t exactly have the highest approval ratings, and we need a competent Republican candidate to act as counterpoint to her. The people have learned from the last election—they will not vote for some fear-mongering billionaire with daddy issues.” Thomas snorted. “They need someone in whom they can lay their trust.”

“And that someone is you?”

James tilted his head, a slight smile making its way onto his lips. “It could be,” he offered cryptically.

Thomas took a deep breath, before leaning forward. His cane clinked against the floor. “Well, then,” he replied. “What are we waiting for?”

James is considering running for president,” Thomas told Alexander the following week.

It was late in the evening, and Thomas had commandeered the bathroom in an attempt to make sense of his hair before he went to sleep. So far, it was an exercise in futility.

Alexander let out a noncommittal hum from where he lay on their bed, eyes glued to a tablet—probably containing some report or other.

Thomas rolled his eyes as he turned to glance at his husband. “Alexander, did you hear what I said?”

“Yeah; James has big dreams,” Alexander said dismissively, still focused on the text before him.

Thomas wasn’t mollified, but he didn’t have the energy to fight that particular battle right now. He turned back to the mirror and studied his own reflection critically. He narrowed his eyes when he saw a little bit of dandruff in his hair. He reached into his hair, grabbed it, and yanked.

And yelped as he abruptly discovered that the something he had thought was dandruff was actually his hair.

His greying hair.

Shit.

He was getting old.

Thomas chanced a glance at Alexander to see whether he had reacted to Thomas’ shout, but other than a cursory look his way, Alexander didn’t look away from the report.

Thomas took a few steady breaths.

Okay. So. He was fine. It was just a bit of grey hair.

Grey hair.
Yeah.

Not a problem.

This was just his body casually aging. With Alexander.

This was his life now. He was growing to grow old with Alexander. This was really happening.

Shit.

“Thomas?” Alexander called out. “Are you okay? You’ve been quiet for some time.”

“I am fine,” Thomas croaked.

He discovered with no small amount of surprise that his words rang true.

Beyond the initial surprise, he was fine with this.

Fine with the way his life turned out.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me what you thought of this ;)

We're getting close to the end of this fic. Only one or two chapters left :(
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

A shift of power occurs.

Or, Thomas deals with being the husband to the king of England. Holy shit, how did this happen?

Chapter Notes

This is most likely the next-to-last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Son," George began carefully one afternoon. He and Alexander were sharing a quiet moment in the king's atelier. "What would you say if I told you that I wanted to retire?"

"You can't retire!" Alexander protested immediately. "You still have so much potential! You can help this country!"

"So can you," George replied calmly, "and I believe that it's about time the younger generation had a shot at ruling." His eyes were twinkling as he spoke.

"But"—Alexander floundered for a moment—"I'm going to have more than enough 'shots at ruling' later!" he objected.

"After I'm dead, you mean?" George said in amusement.

Alexander's face flushed. "I didn't—that's not what I—I wasn't—Don't put words in my mouth," he finally snapped.

George sighed, and it was as though he was aging before Alexander's eyes. Suddenly, his father seemed decades older. "Look, son," George began again, and despite himself, Alexander listened, "I want to have a little time for myself—time I can spend cherishing my family, worrying about nothing but Martha's most recent painting or my hyacinths.

"Being a king is fulfilling, yes, but it's also a burden unlike any other. I want to be able to live without that on my shoulders for a little while. I want to see Philip grow up. I don't want to miss every important moment of my grandson's life the way I did with yours because I was too busy making sure that the country didn't run itself ashore—pun very much intended."

Alexander's shoulders slumped. "But sir," he began, then trailed off. For the first time in a long time, Alexander Hamilton was at a loss for words.

George got up from his chair, wincing as his back cracked loudly. He embraced Alexander in an awkward hug. "It's going to be okay," he murmured. "You are going to have me to ask questions. I didn't have my father to help me through it; I'm hoping that, by doing this, you are going to find it
easier to adjust to your new position.”

Alexander’s body shook. “Dad,” he whispered.

George ran a hand through Alexander’s hair. “You are going to be an amazing king,” he told his son. “Certainly better than I have been.”

“I could never surpass you,” Alexander protested.

“You will,” George promised. He paused, and took a step back from their hug, though he still had a grip on Alexander’s arms. He studied Alexander for a moment, before smiling. “Thomas is lucky to have you.”

“I’m lucky to have him,” Alexander told his father.

George’s smile widened. “I am glad that it all worked out. I admit that, when I first heard about him, I was skeptical, and even more so when he came chasing you halfway across the world, but he has proven himself.”

“That’s good,” Alexander said with relief, before teasing, “I’d hate to have to mediate between the two of you until the end of time.”

George rolled his eyes at that. “Son,” he deadpanned, “you never were good at it anyway.”

It was shortly after he left his father’s atelier that Alexander had a vivid flashback.

“Oh, so now you’re on-board with the whole sharing thing, are you? A little too late for that.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“If you can’t figure it out, you secretive asshole, then you’re even more stupid than I’d given you credit for.”

Alexander stopped, then swirled on his heels and changed directions, heading now for the library where he could bet just about his entire fortune Thomas was reading some obscure encyclopedia or other. Or maybe The Necronomicon; Alexander had seen him eyeing it, and Thomas had never been known for his self-control when it came to reading material.

Sure enough, Thomas was in the library, a copy of Quidditch Through The Ages in hand.

“Thomas, we need to talk,” Alexander declared bluntly, not bothering with small talk.

Thomas, bless his heart, reached for his bookmark and marked the page, before putting down the book. He glanced at Alexander expectantly.

Alexander took a deep breath. Should he give Thomas some heads up? Prepare him somehow? But how?

Fuck it.

“George is planning to abdicate,” Alexander began without further ado, “and I’m going to be expected to take the throne.” Thomas was silent, so Alexander ploughed on. “I know that we’ve talked about it, but I need to know: are you okay with that?”
Thomas froze when Alexander began to speak. He slowly processed the words, but it was as though the information simply wasn't sticking.

George was going to abdicate. That in itself was unbelievable—kings did not do things like that—but what stumped Thomas was the fact that Alexander was going to take George's place. Logically, he had been aware of the fact that Alexander was next in line for the throne, but it had never seemed quite relevant, never quite real.

Except now. And, it seemed, for the rest of Thomas’ life.

He was on the verge of snapping that this wasn't some bloody therapy session, but reigned himself in at the last second. He let out a deep breath, forcing himself to take a step back and look at the situation objectively.

Alexander and he had actually been making progress: addressing the issues they each had with the other, telling the other what they loved and hard about each other. He couldn't destroy that with a few cutting words. He had enough self-awareness to know that he was simply lashing out against the unknown, the fear in his stomach making him irrational.

Thomas felt the words he had been about to throw into Alexander’s face sour in his mouth, and swallowed. “There’s not much I can do in that matter.” His voice was tainted with bitterness. "I know that you are going to want to take over for George and ascend to the throne.”

Alexander grimaced. “Yes, it’s always been something of a dream of mine,” he admitted, "but I wanted to talk to you first about it, because you’re my husband and I love you more than life itself.” The last part had been rushed through in one breath.

"I do not exactly have a choice, do I?"

Alexander frowned. “You always have a choice,” he pointed out. “And that is not an answer.”

Thomas inhaled sharply. “I will be okay with it,” he said eventually.

Alexander crossed his arms. “I’m sorry if I sound pushy, but that sounds like classical evasion tactic to me,” he protested.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “If I told you no, you would be miserable for the rest of your life,” he stated plainly, and watched as Alexander winced but did not deny the veracity in Thomas’ words. “I do not—don’t—want that.”

“And I don’t want to make you do something against your will,” Alexander objected.

Thomas groaned. “I am not your prisoner, Hamilton,” he snapped. “I am perfectly capable of saying ‘no’ if I need to.”

“Yes, but do you realize that you need it?” Alexander parried.

Thomas shook his head. “I am not having this discussion with you,” he told Alexander.

“We need to talk about this,” Alexander replied stubbornly.

“No, we do not. I am fine with you being king, end of story.”

Alexander crossed his arms. “But are you fine with being the king’s husband?” he retorted.
“Yes!” Thomas insisted. He ran his fingers through his curls. “My God, why are you so stubborn about this? I told you that I am okay with you”—he waved a hand vaguely—“being all kingly.”

Alexander’s eyes narrowed. “Excuse me if I’m not exactly convinced by your enthusiasm. Only last month, you had a panic attack about this. A panic attack, Thomas.”

“Yes, well.” Thomas’ eyes were shifty. “It has gotten better. I have gotten better.”

“Now once more with more enthusiasm,” Alexander drawled sarcastically.

“Why are you arguing with me about this?!” Thomas snapped. “You want to be king?! I am fine with you being king—I’m fine with being married to the king—so why are you trying to find reasons to—to make this an issue?!”

Thomas stopped for a moment to take a breath, glancing over at his husband. Alexander looked poised to open his mouth, to say something that was no doubt snarky and condescending, whether he realised it or not, and Thomas swore under his breath before pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Whatever you are about to say, don’t,” he continued. “Don’t. If what you want—what you really, truly want—is for me to regain my independence, then respect my independent decision to say that I am completely fine with you becoming king.”

Finally—finally—Alexander seemed to deflate, no doubt swallowing back whatever witty retort was waiting behind his teeth. “If you’re—”

“If you are going to ask me whether I’m sure, I will not be responsible for my actions,” Thomas threatened.

Alexander scoffed. “I just want to make sure.”

“Well”—Thomas’ nose wrinkled in distaste—”consider your job done.”

Alexander stared at him for another moment, and it was almost as if the last vestiges of the energy he had been holding onto escaped him at last. “You, Thomas Jefferson, are bloody impossible,” he finally declared.

“Life would be dreadfully boring otherwise,” Thomas quipped.

Alexander flopped down onto the couch beside Thomas. “That it would,” he agreed, before peering at the cover of the book that lay on the table next to the two. “Read to me,” he demanded, and, for the moment, the subject was dropped.

“Scotland was the birthplace of what is probably the most dangerous of all broom games—Creaothceann. The game features in a tragic Gaelic poem of the eleventh century…”

Compared to Philip’s birth, Clara’s was almost smooth in comparison. While Alexander still did stress over Eliza and the birth and the child and oh my God Thomas what if something happens, there was nine of the chaotic energy that surrounded the situation the first time around.

Thomas felt something akin to an inner calm as he watched Alexander drum his fingers against the table in the waiting room. He absentmindedly listened to Philip, bless his three-year-old heart, prattle on about a flower he had found in the garden earlier that day. His son’s newfound fascination with botany was endearing.
Philip suddenly stopped, prompting Thomas to glance down at him quizzically. “What is wrong?” he asked Philip quietly in French.

Philip hesitated. “What is Pa doing?”

Thomas grimaced. How did one go about explaining to a child, even one admittedly as mature as Philip, that its father was trying not to have a mental breakdown while its sibling was being born? Thomas had no desire to have The Talk with his son, especially not when his son was three years old.

“Pa…” Thomas sighed. “Pa is a little worried.”

Philip tugged on his little curls, which shouldn’t be as adorable as it was. “What over?”

“Over what,” Thomas corrected, before continuing. “You know how we talked about you getting a sibling?”

Philip brightened. “I want sister!”

“A sister.” Thomas hesitantly reached into Philip’s hair and ruffled it. “And yes, you will have a sister, petit.”

Philip’s lips pursed. “But why is Pa worried?” he asked, innocent as could be.

Thomas sighed. He moved his other hand, rubbing the bridge of his nose to stave off an oncoming headache. He absentmindedly noted that his hands were trembling again. “He likes to worry,” he replied evasively.

Fortunately, the three-year-old seemed satisfied with the answer. He smiled sweetly at Thomas, before going back to looking around the waiting room.

Not for the first time, Thomas cursed whomever it was that had the brilliant idea to let a three-year-old come along to the hospital. Whose idea had that been again? Ah, yes, Alexander’s. Because his husband was renowned for making good, calculated, and well-thought-through decisions. For a man who was soon going to be the head of state of an empire that spanned sixteen countries, Alexander was remarkably rash.

With a sigh, Thomas went back to watching his husband.

It had been Thomas who had picked the name this time. Objectively, it was a good name, traditional enough to appease the swells but different enough to make it clear that the British royal family was finally moving into the 21st century, and it certainly didn’t hurt that some of Thomas’ favourite heroines growing up shared parts of the name with his daughter.

Besides, Thomas thought, if he had left the naming process to Alexander, their daughter would have been saddled with a ghastly name like Lilianne Estelle, or, God forbid, Henrietta. The mere thought sent a shudder down Thomas’ spine.

No, it was better for everyone involved if Alexander ‘Naming Affinity: Harry Potter’ Hamilton just stayed away from the process altogether.
Even knowing just how much work that went into preparing a royal festivity, it still shocked Thomas to see just how many preparations there had to be done for George’s abdication and Alexander’s subsequent coronation.

As in the case of the wedding, Lafayette had been called in to direct the preparations. The Frenchman did so with a staggering amount of enthusiasm.

This was where the similarities between the wedding and the coronation ended.

In a move that, in hindsight, shouldn’t have surprised Thomas as much as it did, Lafayette then drafted Thomas into helping. The last time, Lafayette explained cheerfully, he had been far too inexperienced in these matters, not to mention one of the main people involved in the event itself; this time, it was about George and Alexander.

“Besides,” Lafayette continued blithely, switching from English to French, “it’s quite an honour to help plan a coronation, wouldn’t you say?” He beamed at Thomas.

That was the thing about Lafayette. He was a master of charades. It was remarkable, really, how good Lafayette was at giving off the appearance of obliviousness, when Thomas knew first-hand just how astute the man actually was. Beneath a thick veneer of obtuse optimism were layers upon layers of cunning, planning, and calculation.

Which were, currently, being utilized to pick out the perfect pasta.

“And let’s make sure that no one dies this time, yes?” Lafayette added pointedly. “Food tasters are a go, and I will veto anyone’s protests.”

Thomas’ grip on his cane tightened. Yes, that would be a good idea.

Lafayette pursed his lips, apparently having moved past the topic of food for the time being. “What colour scheme are we thinking?” he changed the subject as smoothly as was the sound of the word ‘smoothly’ when said out loud.

Thomas blinked. “What do you mean?” Wasn’t white the traditional colour of these events?

Lafayette told him as much, but, as he elaborated, “purple is also closely associated with royalty, and the Washington coat of arms are a pair of golden lions in dark-blue crowns holding the shield symbolizing the various parts of the United Kingdom.” He paused for a breath. When he spoke again, it was in English. “Which leaves us with a choice: white, purple, gold and blue, or a mix of any of the above?”

Thomas considered the question. “I would say gold and blue,” he finally answered, “if only because Alexander looks good in blue.”

Lafayette smirked. “I thought you might say that,” he replied smugly, before he was all businesslike once again. “Now, as for the ornaments…” he began briskly.

Thomas groaned. Newton looked like he very much wanted to do the same.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me what you thought!
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

A coronation, an abdication, and more Philip Hamilton. Also, guns.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I don’t think if I can do this,” Thomas confessed to his husband the next day.

Alexander was at his side in an instant. “What do you mean?” There was genuine concern in his voice. Thomas didn’t know whether it made it better or not.

“I mean—” Thomas stopped. Swallowed. Opened his mouth again. “What will this mean for me? For Philip? For Lucy?”

Alexander sighed. He put a tentative hand on Thomas’ shoulder. “I can’t tell for certain,” he confessed. “I’m not omniscient; I can’t control all variables. But while I can’t make any promises I won’t be able to keep, I can tell you that I’ll always be there for you.” He paused. “That said, this is something I have to do.”

And there it was again—the drive in Alexander’s eyes, as much a permanent feature of his as the mussed-up ponytail or the dark circles under his eyes that never seemed to abate.

“Besides,” Alexander added, and there was something about his stance that Thomas couldn’t identify, “James will probably win the upcoming election.”

“He will?” Thomas couldn’t mask the surprise from his voice.

He hadn’t followed the American news lately, and since nothing major had come up in his Twitter feed, he had assumed that everything was as hopelessly stagnant as always. He hadn’t spoken with James since the man had announced that he was running for president; for all that he and James had ostensibly resolved their issues, Thomas didn’t feel comfortable calling his friend at every moment. Besides, Thomas reasoned, James probably had a lot of things on his plate; Thomas didn’t need to complicate matters by adding to his troubles.

A light cough pulled Thomas from his thoughts. When he looked up and met his husband’s eyes, he saw that Alexander was giving him a knowing look. Thomas refrained from returning it with a glare.

“Yeah, he will,” Alexander told Thomas, and the sheer amount of kindness very nearly killed him. “He’s charismatic, he’s competent, and he’s talented, as much as it pains me to admit it. He can strike enough of a balance to get the more moderate Democrats to support him.”

Thomas rose an eyebrow, despite himself. “That’s high praise indeed, coming from you.”

Alexander beamed at Thomas. “Now, wouldn’t it be nice if the meeting between the American president-elect and the British king was relaxed rather than tense?” He swiftly returned to the topic. “Trust me, Thomas, everything is going to work out.”
As he said that, he moved his hand so that it rested on the back of Thomas’ neck. Thomas felt himself relaxing involuntarily as Alexander’s skilled hands worked their miracles. Thomas could feel Alexander’s warm breath tingling his neck.

“There,” Alexander whispered gently into Thomas’ ear, causing Thomas to shiver. “See? Things will turn out alright.”

And, oddly enough, Thomas trusted Alexander.

Alexander was secretive about his coronation speech; though for good reason, Thomas still couldn’t resist being curious about it. How many times in someone’s life did one get to listen to a coronation speech, let alone read one before it is spoken to the public?

Suffice to say that Thomas positively inched to have a look at it.

Alexander, being Alexander, refused to show it to anyone.

That was, until he suddenly shoved the whole thing in Thomas’ face.

“Here,” he declared with all the pomp he could muster. “Read it.”

Thomas blinked, nonplussed. “What is that?” he asked, even as he had his suspicions.

Alexander’s eye roll was dramatic, even for him. “The coronation speech,” he elaborated impatiently. “Now read it,” he went on expectantly, admitting, “You’re the first person to read it.” Honesty was shining through his eyes, and it was all Thomas could do to keep himself from kissing Alexander senseless.

He had to crack a smile at how typically Alexander was being.

Alexander laid a hand atop Thomas’. “I’ll give you a little space, shall I?” he offered unexpectedly. “Just to let you get a good feel of this speech,” he hurried to add, before making himself scarce.

Thomas stared after Alexander’s retreating figure. Well. That was unexpected.

With a put-upon sigh that was more for show than anything else, Thomas settled in to read.

The ceremony was magnificent. More surprisingly and to the point, it went off without a hitch, no one coming to any harm. It was an incredibly low standard to set for a successful function, but there Thomas was. The last public event had gone so horribly badly that this was a blazing victory by comparison.

With all the pomp and fanfare that the proceedings demanded, George held a speech about the inevitable progression of time, and time on Earth and using it correctly, mixing in something about utilitarianism elephant, before handing over the crown to his son, who swore to “cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all his judgements, to the utmost of his power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel, and to maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England”. This was followed by more monologues about the rights of man and his responsibilities, both to himself and to others.
God, Thomas was so grateful that he wasn’t the one being crowned. These proceedings were boring enough to watch—he couldn’t bear to imagine how much worse it must be to be a part of them.

Afterward, both Alexander and George were accosted by journalists, but while the questions asked of the former were of the administrative kind—which Alexander, mind, was all too happy to answer—the questions asked of the latter were… Well…

“What do you plan on doing, Your Majesty?” a noisy reporter asked curiously.

“I plan on watching my grandchildren grow up,” George replied honestly, “and I’m sure that my wife will be grateful to have time to tend to her garden. And if I happen to write a book or two?” He shrugged almost imperceptibly, and a secretive smile crept up onto his lips. “Well. What will happen, will happen.”

By his right side stood his grandson, a tiny crown in his curls, holding some flower or other while his face was scrunched up in rapt contemplation—though at the thought of what, Thomas couldn’t ascertain.

The two of them made for a rather sweet sight.

Judging by the flashes of cameras, the journalists shared Thomas’ opinion.

A ROYAL AFFAIR

King abdicates, controversial prince ascends to throne

The day is finally here.

After over a year of preparations, King George VII has abdicated, leaving the throne to his son and heir, Alexander Hamilton.

King George VII, age 67, has long expressed a wish to step down and hand over the reigns to his son, and that is precisely what has happened. As of 13:21 GMT, Alexander Hamilton’s formal title is King Alexander II of the United Kingdom, and head of state of sixteen countries (for the full list, see page 6).

The 29-year-old former crown prince has been embroiled in many a scandal, the foremost of which in 2016, when rumours had surfaced that the then prince had been involved in a secret homosexual relationship with fellow Oxford Law graduate and longtime friend John Laurens.

Since then, however, the young monarch has found true love in America—which, in itself, turned out to be another scandal of almost equal magnitude. King Alexander II’s husband is the American architect Thomas Jefferson, who was later hospitalized due to an attempt on both men’s lives several months later at their wedding. This reporter is happy to note that Mr Jefferson’s health is much improved, as evidenced by the fact that he attended the function in person, none worse for the wear apart from cane in his hand and except a German shepherd service dog at his side.

The first five persons in the order of succession are now as follows: Crown Prince Philip Charles Henry (6), Princess Clara Lucille Elizabeth (3), Prince Augustine Washington (86), Prince Mildred Washington (38), Baroness Janet Cunningham of Bloomfield (60).
MADISON WINS

Unexpected victory for Republican candidate

In an unexpected twist that shook the nation, the American conservative party managed to recover from the various scandals involving allegations of sexual harassment that have been haunting the party for the past months. One of the reasons for this is clearly the young and charismatic face of the movement: James Madison. Mr Madison, having previously served two terms as Virginia’s junior senator, has stepped down from his seat in early February in order to devote himself to his bid for the presidency.

As senator, he has advocated the termination of TARP, as well as a decrease in taxes for small businesses, and opposed the expansion/increase of government regulations. Mr Madison has, amidst the scandals plaguing his party, emerged into the post #MeToo world unscathed.

Last night, Mr Madison’s sacrifices have finally paid off, and in a way that nary a person could have predicted. At 11:17 pm EST, James Madison beat the Democratic presidential candidate and incumbent president, Hillary Clinton, and became the 46th President-Elect of the United States of America.

“This party sucks,” Alexander whispered into Thomas’ ear.

Thomas fought the urge to roll his eyes. “Behave,” he hissed back.

Really, why had Alexander chosen today of all days to get in touch with his inner brat? It was usually Alexander who was chastising Thomas for insulting every diplomat in sight, telling him to at least not be so overt about it. To have it the other way around was jarring, to say the least.

Alexander stuck out his tongue, and yep, there was that camera flash. Thomas had no doubt that, come tomorrow, photos of King Alexander behaving like a toddler on crack would grace the national headlines. Thank sweet baby Jesus that Thomas wasn’t responsible for Alexander’s continued good reputation.

“Enjoying yourselves?” asked a familiar quiet voice from behind Thomas.

Thomas smiled as he turned around. “Mr President,” he acknowledged.

James Madison inclined his head. “Your Highness.” His voice was ostensibly devoid of any inflection, but his eyes were twinkling with merriment.

“A pleasure,” he replied glibly. “Thank you very much for your gracious invitation.” The words were coming easier now, Thomas had found, especially when the language called for was of the more formal sort.

At that, Alexander made an exaggerated gesture that was probably supposed to be a bow but ended up looking as though he was flailing to keep his balance. James managed to keep his face, and
instead offered a hand to the king, who took it with as much dignity as could have been spared.

“As for your question, yes, we quite are;” Thomas went on before Alexander could say anything else.

“How is Phil?” James asked.

Alexander made a face. “Ew. Don’t call him that.”

James glanced quizzically at Thomas’ husband, then at Thomas himself. “Why?” There was genuine curiosity in his voice.

“So it’s a gross name, is why,” Alexander retorted, though his eyes were still gleaming madly.

Internally, Thomas frowned. What was up with his husband? Was he high or something? Something was off—say what one wanted about Alexander, but he was truly dedicated to his subjects, and always went above and beyond what duty demanded of him. He simply did not pull stunts like getting high right before the most important formal function of the year. It was wildly out of character for him.

Thomas’ eyes widened in realization. Yes, it was odd, wasn’t it? Almost… unguarded.

Thomas grabbed Alexander’s arm in a loose grip. Had he wanted to, Alexander could easily have slipped out of it, but he didn’t. Thomas tugged him a little ways away from James before he spoke.

“Have you taken your medicines?” he demanded quietly.

Alexander gave Thomas a wide grin. “I mean, yeah.” He paused, and seemed to ponder the question. “Sometime,” he added.

Thomas felt his stomach twist unpleasantly as a horrid suspicion crept into his mind. “Recently?” he pressed.

Alexander tilted his head, pausing for another moment, which was an answer in itself. “Define ‘recently’,” he finally ventured.

“Today.”

Alexander’s grin widened. “Then nope,” he chirped.

Thomas bit back a quiet groan. “Do you have it with you?” he demanded, which Alexander only dignified with a headshake.

Thomas closed his eyes briefly. When he opened them again, he turned to face James, who was watching the scene with curiosity and not a little concern. “Thomas?” There was an unspoken question in his voice.

Thomas’ lips twisted into a grimace. “I’m afraid that something has come up, Mr President. My husband and I need to leave,” he said, and if he was a little curt… Well, who could blame him?

James, bless his soul, merely nodded in acknowledgement, although his eyes promised Thomas that the topic wasn’t closed by any means.
“What do you think you’re doing?” Thomas demanded once they were safely in the privacy of their car. There was little heat in his voice. Alexander almost wished that there had been.

Alexander leaned back in his seat, avoiding the eyes that were fixed on him. He started at the sound of a throat being cleared, and abruptly realized that he had spaced out. “I don’t know,” he admitted.

Thomas’ eyes didn’t waver from his husband’s still form. “You don’t know,” he echoed in disbelief.

Alexander grimaced. “It won’t happen again,” he promised.

Thomas’ lips pursed into a thin line. “I certainly hope not,” he replied acerbically, before the sharpness made way for softness. “You remember the advice you gave me about asking for help? It’s perfectly fine if you need it yourself.” Thomas fought a wince. He hated how much he sounded like a self-help pamphlet. Still, this needed to be said.

Still, Alexander didn’t react.

Thomas sighed. “You are not invincible,” he reminded his husband. “There’s no shame in admitting that you need medicines.”

At that, Alexander fixed Thomas with a glare so abrupt that Thomas almost flinched. “I can’t afford to have any public weaknesses!” he burst out, before taking a forcible breath to calm himself, and adding, “Not ones like that.” Not ones that can be exploited went unsaid.

Thomas’ grip tightened on his cane. “And what am I—fish dinner?” He waited for a laugh that never came. Thomas’ frown deepened. “I’m not the public; I’m your husband. If you can’t afford to be vulnerable around me, when can you?” he challenged.

Alexander dropped his gaze, offering no defence, or, indeed, reply.

Thomas pressed on. “You can’t go through life alone. Admitting that you need help is not only acceptable, it’s actually preferable—and starting by facing the fact that you need to take your medicines in order to function at peak efficiency seems as good a place to start as any.”

For a long moment, Alexander didn’t move, processing Thomas’ words. Then, unexpectedly, his lips were split into a wistful smile. “When did you get so wise?”

Thomas allowed himself a slight grin. “Well, hanging around Martha tends to have that effect. Must be contagious or something,” he cracked jokingly.

“Well, I don’t feel very wise, and I’ve been around Martha for a lot longer than you,” Alexander retorted.

“You’re probably immune.”

“To wisdom?”

“It has been known to happen, you know,” Thomas replied defensively.

Alexander rolled his eyes at Thomas’ antics. “You dork,” he said affectionately.

“But I’m your dork,” Thomas sniped.

Alexander stared at Thomas with thinly-veiled adoration. “That you are,” he said at last. “That you are.”
“What's for dinner?”

“Pebbles.”

A pause. “You think you're being funny, dad, but you're really not.”

Another pause.

“It's funnier in French.”

“We need to talk about Philip about guns,” Alexander declared one day.

Thomas looked up at his husband. “Already?” He sounded skeptical. “I thought that we would wait for him to mature before having this conversation with him.”

Alexander gaped. “Thomas, he’s already seven!” He threw up his hands into the air. “That’s plenty mature!”

Thomas tilted his head in consideration. “Well, he’s already more mature than you, at any rate,” he teased.

Alexander smacked him over the head with the report he had been proofreading. “You're an ass,” he told Thomas. “Why did I marry you again?”

“Because of my scintillating wit,” Thomas retorted without a moment's pause. He clamped down on the stray thought that told him that yes, Alexander did marry him for his intelligence, and now, Thomas didn't even have that. It wasn't like that —he wasn't going to think like that.

Not anymore.

Alexander rolled his eyes. “In your dreams,” he replied, but there was little heat to his words.

“Anyway, I'm going to discuss it with Philip. The sooner, the better,” Alexander told Thomas firmly. “Would you like to be there?”

For a moment, Thomas didn't reply. Then, “Yes.”

Alexander nodded again, and that was the end of it.

Two days later, Philip was approached by his fathers. His pop had a serious expression on his face as he said, “We need to talk.”

Thomas’ eyes were gleaming with barely-contained anger as he addressed his husband. “Maybe I want you to talk to me, Alexander!” Thomas threw up his hands in the air. “Maybe I want you to look me in the eye and ask me about my day. Maybe I want you to help Pip with his homework or go on a walk with us or something!”

Thomas was in Alexander’s office, and the man in question was hunched over his desk, typing away at his laptop.
“Alex? Are you listening to a *word* I’m saying?”

Alexander just muttered, “Of course, love,” never even looking up from his work.

“You—you— *Fuck you, Hamilton,*” Thomas spat before turning on his heel marching out of the office.

“Can’t right now, love, I’m busy.”

“Dad?” Philip asked as Thomas stalked down the hall. “You alright?”

“Ask your father,” Thomas snapped. Philip backtracked and spun to face Thomas.

“I thought that’s what I was doing,” he countered with a smirk.

“Don’t get smart with me, young man,” Thomas said.

“Sheesh, okay. Do you know where Pops is?”

“Where is he always?” Thomas shot back dryly.

Philip’s hopeful look diminished. “Oh.”

“Yes,” Thomas all but snarled. “So I wouldn’t bother trying to *talk* to him. We’ll see him at dinner, possibly.”

“But—”

“There’s no use, Pip. You know how he is,” Thomas sighed.

Philip stared at his father for a long moment. “Do you ever regret it?” he asked quietly, looking over Thomas with a shrewdness that made it **perfectly clear** that he was Alexander’s son.

“Regret what, Pip?” Thomas asked, already sensing where this conversation was going.

“Marrying Pops,” Philip replied, his voice even softer than it had been before, and for a moment Thomas was caught between seeing a young, childish thirteen year old and someone far older.

“Never,” he said quickly, not giving the answer a second’s delay.

“You two fight. A lot,” Philip said, grinding his toe into the carpet even as he looked Thomas straight in the eye. “And you don’t particularly like the monarchy, and you’ve always said that your mum doesn’t like that you’re with another guy, and—”

“Philip, listen to me,” Thomas said, taking a step forward and cupping his son’s face in his hands. “I love your pops more than… anything. Yes, he’s a stubborn, ostentatious *prick,* but we love each other. You think I would deal with all of this nonsense if I didn’t love him?”

“No…” Philip said, gnawing on his lip—yet another trait he’d picked up from Alexander, and one that Thomas had vowed to break him out of.

“Exactly,” Thomas said as he pulled the boy into a hug. “Don’t worry about us, Pip. Yes, we argue, but that’s only because we love each other.”
“No, that’s because Pops thinks all your political opinions are horrendous and you could both argue with an empty room,” Philip teased.

Thomas rolled his eyes and ruffled the boy’s hair. “That too,” he conceded. “Now, weren’t you on your way to something?”

Philip grinned. “I’m going to give Lu fencing lessons. She asked me last week,” he said.

“Go on. Go easy on her, kiddo. She’s only ten.”

“I was ten when I started lessons!” Philip protested.

“Yes, and I remember many a time when you ran into my office crying about how hurt you were,” Thomas reminded him. “Go. Shoo. Be nice.”

Philip Hamilton @Pippinitty
@JamesMadison is honestly the coolest uncle in the history of cool uncles

Philip Hamilton @Pippinitty
Literally the ‘oh I'm in charge of a different country you wanna come over and visit when your parents get Too Much?’ kind, and it’s Super Lit

Philip Hamilton @Pippinitty
(Which is p much All The Time)

Rachel Burden @rachelburden
I! Just! #unclepotus #kingpops

Ben Tamurge @BennyTheSpy
@rachelburden I KNOW

Philip Hamilton @Pippinitty
Oh and dad he's an architect it's pretty cool I guess

Thomas Jefferson @Montiviolin
@Pippinitty YOU *GUESS*?! P H I L I P

Chapter End Notes

So. Uh. *This* is the next-to-last chapter. Sorry for the confusion ;)}
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Time flies by when you're happy.

Or,

Thomas realizes that he's old.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Thomas was about fifty-five when he realized it. It was not the best of circumstances to have a crisis—your mother's funeral isn't the best circumstance for anything—but the universe seemed to have an ironic sense of humour.

He was in Virginia for the first time in years. Granted, he had come back to the States since he officially moved into the palace, but it's mostly been to New York, for work. It was weird to think about. He hadn't been home in years. Actually, Virginia didn't even really count as home anymore, not really.

Which was the root of the whole issue.

"James, my accent is gone!" Thomas' voice bordered on panicked.

"I know, Thomas," James said with a sigh. "It's been gone since you got out of the hospital."

"Wha—what? But we—you and I, and Jane and Mary—!" Thomas practically shrieked. He spared a thought to how outraged the Lady Fallowfield (God bless her soul)—who had been his drill sergeant (no, Alexander, not a teacher, a bloody drill sergeant)—would have been, had she borne witness to his decidedly unseemly outburst.

"You call cookies 'biscuits' for God's sake!" James replied, throwing up his hands in exasperation. "Your son is the heir to the British throne. Your husband is the king. What were you expecting?"

"I—I—Hush!" Thomas yelled when he saw James open his mouth. "Just bloody help me."

"It's like I don't even know you anymore," James teased.

"I know, Jemmy!" Thomas exclaimed. "Help me! I—I need some sort of Southern purification ritual—sweet tea, magnolia flowers, tacky curtains, loud and inefficient pickup trucks, anything!"

"You're ridiculous."

"What do I do, James?" Thomas asked, seeming genuinely distressed.

James sighed. "I don't know. Go on vacation," he suggested. "Visit Monticello. Have fun." He rubbed his temples. Thomas would feel more pity for him if he wasn't going through a midlife crisis right about now. "Or, here's a novel idea: embrace the fact that you've been Britishized. You
practically ooze Britishness at this point.”

“Thomas, love, I have a kingdom to run,” Alexander told him, not bothering to look up from the document he was annotating. He pushed his glasses further up his nose. “I can't just fuck off to Virginia for a month.”

“Not even for Pip?” Thomas said incredulously.

“What do you mean, ‘not even for Pip’? What does Pip have to do with it?” Alexander asked, finally looking up.

“He's from here too, y’know,” Thomas pointed out.

“The funeral was the first time he'd ever been south of Massachusetts, love,” Alexander reminded him.

“Exactly!” Thomas exclaimed triumphantly. “He has a right to know where he's from, Alex.”

“So what?” Alexander asked. “We just rent a hotel room in Virginia and give a middle finger to our responsibilities?”

Thomas scoffed. “A hotel?” he asked incredulously. “Of course not. We’ll stay at Monticello.”

“That all sounds wonderful, Thomas, really, but it doesn’t change the fact that I am still king. I—”

“George James Alexander Jefferson-Hamilton-Washington, calm the fuck down. You have been going non-stop since I met you; you can take a month and work from somewhere that isn’t your castle,” Thomas snapped.

Philip put this hands on his hips, the picture of defiance. “Dad, what are we doing here?”

Thomas furrowed his brows. “Uh…” He fumbled for a moment. “We’re riding four wheelers. Through a pasture full of cows. In bad jeans and flannel shirts.” Awkwardness was practically oozing out of him.

Philip frowned. “Why?” In that one word, there was the unspoken implication that he could be doing several better things with his time than go along with his dad’s mad plan to ‘reconnect with his roots’.

Thomas was silent for a long moment. When he spoke, it was in a quiet voice that sounded so bloody uncertain that Philip’s heart just about broke.

“I used to do it when I was a kid. It's fun. Just… just go with it.”

Despite himself, Philip found himself acquiescing to his dad's request. When his dad spoke like that—softly, gently, his British accent clearly evident even through his attempts to curb it—it was practically impossible for Philip to refuse his dad anything. It was a trait he had inherited from his pops.

“What is this?!”
“Thomas, you did ask for biscuits.”

“This—this is not biscuits, James, this is scones!”

James sighed. “These are biscuits. American biscuits, but biscuits all the same.”

“But—”

“If you wanted cookies, you should have just said so.”

“But these aren’t biscuits! Biscuits are sweet!”

James pressed his face into his hands. “This defeats the point of this exercise,” he bemoaned. “Here.” He prodded at the offending plate. “Biscuits. Gravy. The star-spangled banner. Iced tea. A Republican bumper sticker. Take them.”

“Dad, I have a question,” Philip said.

“Yes?” Thomas looked up from his phone.

“Doesn’t the GOP stand against you and dad?” Philip was brutally straightforward.

Thomas paused. “Your point?”

Alexander shrugged. “I don’t know why he still votes conservative either,” he admitted.

Philip’s eyes widened and he turned to Thomas. “Please tell me you didn’t vote for Donald Trump.”

“Pip!” Thomas gasped, scandalized. “Please say you have more faith in me than that!”

Alexander snorted. “Thomas Jefferson: secret Bernie supporter because he hates the Republican candidate more.”

Thomas glared at his husband. “Alexander Hamilton: OPEN BERNIE SUPPORTER YES YOU OVER THERE LISTEN I SUPPORT BERNIE SANDERS!”

Alexander winced as he rubbed his ears. “That was uncalled for.”

Philip’s eyes flitted between the two. ”Dad, can you even vote?”

“I’m an American citizen, aren’t I?”

”Aren’t you?”

“Yes! Yes I am!” Thomas threw up his hands. “God, you’re hopeless.”

“Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain,” Alexander corrected automatically.

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Like you have room to talk. You are so much worse.”

“No, I’m not.”

”Alexander. Honey. Hush.”

”I WILL NOT BE SILENCED, THOMAS. I WILL MAKE MY VOICE HEARD.”
"Trust me, you've already succeeded."

“Oh, I don't think—”

"Listen, Alexander, you’re the reason we’re a country in the first place!"

Philip closed his eyes in frustration. ""Dad. Pops. Please not again.”

"NO I'M NOT. YOU WERE THE IDIOTS WHO SOUGHT 'INDEPENDENCE' WHEN YOU WERE DOING JUST FINE UNDER OUR RULE, YOU DICKS."

Philip let his head fall back with a groan.

How was this his life?

Charlie and Oliver exchanged long-suffering looks when they heard a crash from a distant part of the castle.

“Another argument?” Charlie asked rhetorically.

Oliver snorted, not dignifying Charlie’s rhetorical question with a proper response.

Wordlessly, they both set off in the direction of the sound, already prepared to start doing damage control.

Chapter End Notes

… And they lived happily ever after—except not really, because that's not how life works. But that is a story for another time and another teller.

**

And with that, the monster that is the Royal Jamilton Trilogy is complete! A 'verse spanning over a year's work and countless nights spent considering how this should proceed. It wasn't meant to be this long, to be entirely honest—it was meant to end after part one. Then… Well, things happened, and here we are, 140k words later.

I hope that you enjoyed it

End Notes

As always, thank you for reading!

Works inspired by this one

the mess we're in by allonsy  gabriel. Sanna  Black  Slytherin. Hamilton
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!