Heart & Music

by PaperThinRevolutionary (SingFortissimo)

Summary

Ever young and ever enthusiastic, John Laurens is given the opportunity of a lifetime. His demo is picked up and he's offered a recording contract for the biggest studio on the east coast--Studio Forge. With only his guitar and an old suitcase, he makes his way to the hustle and bustle of New York City, and is quickly thrown headfirst into the unknown world that is the music industry.

Notes

hey y'all, this idea has been bouncing around in my brain since i took my first music law class junior year of college. so while i do know what i'm talking about, i assure you that i'm not going to make this accurate to the real world because that could get convoluted and boring af.

so without further ado, thank you all for checking out my new fic and i hope you enjoy Heart & Music <3

-krys

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Another day, another song. Another song, another heartbreak, another paycheck. Of course, the paychecks were always consistent, royalties and all that, but it wasn’t enough to be a fully fledged “day job” just yet, but just one hit. A number one, that’s all he needed, that’s what it would take to skyrocket him to fame.

Well.

Some number one lyrics and a performer to sing them, giving him a loose handhold of fame from behind the scenes. But that wasn’t really too important at the moment. He could find a performer after he wrote the winning lyrics, or one would be thrown at him by the label.

Hopefully.

And what did he care if he was famous from behind the scenes, anyway? Behind the scenes was quieter, less flashy. He didn’t have to dress up, play nice, keep a professional front and a fake smile. He could just be known as “Songwriter: A. Hamilton, Studio Forge”, and frankly he really thought he would prefer it that way.

As his mind continued drifting, his office began to feel cramped, notebooks and loose-leaf paper taking up any room he could have had to breathe. Pens and pencils littered every surface, alongside empty paper coffee cups and dirty mugs. The only clean space was the small spot on his desk, about two feet, where he could just sit down and write.

He was so thankful that every job he held involved writing in some way. Maybe it didn’t always pay the bills on time, and maybe it wasn’t the best gig around for someone with his mind, but he was happy. He loved waking up and throwing words out onto paper, whether it was for a new song or a new article, a new blog post….

When it came to writing, he was non-stop. Non-stop to the point that he nearly missed the knock on his door. He would have, too, were it not for the fact that the offender peeked their head into the room and cleared their throat.

“Alexander?”

He jumped out of his revelry when he heard the voice, silently thankful that it had caught him before his thoughts could begin to spiral or the sudden claustrophobic kick could get any worse. He whipped around to see the figure in the doorway, that of a young honey glow woman, looking professional as always in her light blue sport coat, Mary Janes, and complimentary slacks and button down shirt.

“Alexander?”

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“Yes, Miss Schuyler?” He said quickly, standing from his disaster of a desk to face her properly.

His eyes were wide, but held an exhaustion that the woman couldn’t even imagine. His hair was mussed and falling out of his ponytail, he’d gone a couple of days without shaving, and his glasses were balancing rather precariously on the tip of his nose. Without fail, though, his nervous smile warmed the woman’s heart. Besides, there wasn’t anything new to this level of disheveled.

“Alexander, George told me to bring this down to you. And quit calling me Miss, it’s Eliza. You know that.” The woman—Eliza—chuckled and rolled her eyes, lips curling into an affectionate smile. “It’s a contract for a new artist we’re about to sign. Give this a look before he’s ready to meet up, because I’m sure he’ll want to talk to you about some of it. He’s got the chops, and we think
your words might be just what he needs to make it big.”

Stepping into the doorway of Studio Forge sent John’s heart aflutter. He’d sent in a demo, a cover that he’d recorded quite literally in his closet, in a makeshift sound booth. He’d used a cheap Audio Technica, a second hand pop filter, an old quilt to sound proof everything. LogicX MiDi and a worn out pair of headphones, and John was well on his way to a hopeful relationship with one of the biggest record labels on the east coast.

He’d submitted his demo recording from the relative comfort of his childhood home in Charleston, and after a series of phone calls and interviews, John had found himself taking a flight to Manhattan by himself, with only his guitar and a stuffed suitcase in tow. Some runaround later, he was in a real studio, recording on real equipment with a real band, lending his voice to a fully legal and recognized cover of the song he had submitted for his audition.

Life worked in funny ways, he supposed, and this was the funniest of them all.

The recording took longer than it ever would have in his closet studio, since they had to do what felt like hundreds of takes, since there was a real engineer, with real recording and industry knowledge, using a real recording program and giving him real advice, a real shot at his dream.

It hit him in that moment, this was it.

Before he knew what was happening, the recording wrapped up and he was being swept from room to room in the building, meeting people and signing contracts, shaking hands with people he only ever dreamed of meeting. He was soon face to face with one of the most intimidating men he had ever met, a larger man with a powerful stature. John stood terrified until he saw the not-quite-stranger smile. It was paternal and comforting in a way he didn’t realize until then that he really needed in that moment.

“You must be John, then.” He hummed and smiled, holding his hand out for a shake.

John took it, met with the firmest handshake he had ever experienced in his life. “Yes, sir. That would be me.” He grinned and hummed. “I presume then, you’re Mr. Washington?”

A smile crossed the lips of the elder, who only shook his head. “Yes, but please, call me George. I’d prefer not to have those formalities looming overhead with anyone on the label. That isn’t what this is about here. I know it sounds like a cliche, and I hope you’ll forgive me for it, but this really is a family.”

John watched the man—George, his mind quickly corrected—with wide eyes, almost afraid to speak and wake himself from this dream.

George quickly jumped back in and gave a soft laugh. “Unless you’re more comfortable with the formalities, then who am I to say no? This is about your comfort, especially if we’re your first label.”

In a quick blur of curls which had fallen from his hair tie, John shook himself from his revelry and gave a smile of his own. “No, of course not. I.. This just isn’t what I expected, is all. You know, you hear so much about the industry and everything and it’s just… Scary, you know? So seeing you being so nice? I mean, I’m just over thinking it, I’m sure.” He said gently and gave a nervous smile, brushing a couple of the loose curls out of his face before he just retied all of his hair into a looser ponytail at the base of his neck.

“It’s alright to be nervous. I’ve had my fair share of unusual first meetings a well, and I’m sure this...
would fall into that category for you. So… I would like to know more about you, about the vibe that you want to give off with your music before we get you set up and get your contract all drafted out, if that sounds good? So let’s start out, what would you say your… Hm. How would you describe your style? Musically, I mean. What do you want to accomplish?” George asked, leaning back comfortably in his chair and watching John closely.

It took a moment before John cleared his throat and shrugged. He had spoken about this so many times today, to so many people, but the thought of saying it again to the most important man in the building sent butterflies to his stomach. “I… Guess sort of a singer-songwriter vibe? I’m not big for techno, but elements of it can be fun. I’m pretty good at writing my own music but the lyrics are where I sort of fall. That’s uh… That’s why I sent in that cover, mashup—thing?—when I auditioned.” He admitted, beginning to fidget a bit.

“Well, it got you this far, didn’t it?” George quipped and smiled, leading John to relax just a tad, smiling himself.

“I guess you’re right. So, um. Yeah. Singer-songwriter, indie kind of stuff? I can do heavier, I love classic rock and stuff, but I enjoy sort of the softer stuff. I don’t want to get into metal or anything, you guys wouldn’t be the label for that anyway, and uh… I…” He hesitated another second, hoping this wouldn’t break him somehow. “Don’t really dig modern country.”

George’s brow raised a bit. “So your southern roots don’t follow through to the music, then?” He teased a bit, laughing when John’s cheeks flushed. “It’s perfectly fine, I don’t blame you. Considering where I grew up, one would think me a fan, but it doesn’t really strike me unless it’s something older. Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, that sort.”

“My mom was a fan of Tammy Wynette and Loretta Lynn,” John offered, smiling a little. “I can get into the greats, but not really any of the new stuff, at least not very often or enough to call myself a country artist.”

“Completely fair.” George nodded and smiled. “So, a singer-songwriter, coffee shop vibe, and you said you don’t write?”

“Well. I do it’s just. Not good enough for me to ride off of it in a real album.” He chuckled and shrugged. “I would feel a little more comfortable if I got to work with somebody else with some more experience, if that’s alright. At least for a little while.”

“We do have a few songwriters on staff, if you’d like. I think I know one who might actually work rather well with you, if you’d like to meet him?”

John looked a little shocked at that, nodding quickly. He was honestly terrified that George would drop him with that knowledge, but he supposed not every performer could be expected to write their own lyrics.

_Not everyone can be Freddie Mercury,_ he told himself, then smiled.

“You can talk with him about your inspirations and style, I’m sure he’ll know how to get what you want to produce.” George assured, then leaned over to start typing on his computer. “He’ll be in here in just a moment, until then,” He trailed off, sliding a stack of papers over to John so he could start taking in his contract before negotiating and signing.

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It wasn’t too long between George typing out his message and a knock coming at the door.
John looked around, clearly nervous to meet whoever was waiting to enter, but he relaxed when he saw the glowing smile of a young woman with gorgeous curly brown hair, a soft blonde ringlet mixed into the front. Her eyes were warm and loving as she looked between George and John.

“Alexander is almost done, he’ll be in in just a few moments, George.”

“Thank you, Eliza. John, I’d like you to meet my right hand, Elizabeth Schuyler.”

John stood quickly and offered his hand to her, eager to meet what had to be the friendliest face in the building. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Schuyler. I’m John Laurens.” He said softly, smiling when she took his hand.

“The pleasure’s all mine, please, call me Eliza. We’re excited to have you as a part of our family. When your meeting is up, feel free to get my number from Alexander or George, I’m happy to help out however you need me to, I know you’re new to the area.”

He grinned a bit and nodded his head, squeezing her hand gratefully. “Thank you, Eliza, that means the world to me.” He murmured, eyes glimmering hopefully at the prospect of making a new friend so soon, especially one at work. Hopefully that’s what this would turn into, at least.

“Of course,” She hummed, interrupting his train of thought. She pulled her hand away gently, flipping through some of the papers she had in her hands before setting a few on George’s desk. “When you’re done, really just before you head home, could you sign these and get them back to me?”

George gave a nod and a smile. “Not a problem. I’ll have them on your desk as soon as John gets settled with Alexander.”

She smiled at that and nodded. “Good luck with the meeting, have fun with the legal stuff. I hope to see you around soon, John. By the way, I loved your demo. I’m excited to hear the final mix that Maria has in store.” She cooed sweetly before slipping out of the room again. The door clicked shut behind her softly, and the room was left in a surprisingly comfortable silence.

John smiled to himself as he settled back into his seat and returned to browsing over his new contract until there was another knock at the door.

He turned around just in time to see it creak open again.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

From the time that John stood up to the time that he stepped out of Studio Forge, he wasn’t sure if he had taken a single breath, or given himself a chance to exhale. It seemed to come in one desperate gasp when he could take in the not-quite-fresh air of New York City.

Honestly, until that moment, he barely registered he was in New York at all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The man who walked through the door was far from what John was expecting.

He was just a hair shorter than John, from what the man could tell, thin wire framed glasses teetered towards the edge of his nose and his eyes were lit up with an incomparable fire despite the Prada bags that rested under them. His hair, relatively long, was tied into a messy half-bun-thing at the base of his neck, and he looked disheveled in the most professional way he could.

*What a strange man.*

“Sir, sorry I’m late.” He said with a soft huff as he fell into the seat beside John, plopping a couple of signed papers onto George’s desk. “I filled out that paperwork you asked for this morning, let me know if I missed anything, but I don’t think I did. I went over it five or six times and triple checked, but just to—”

“Alexander, thank you.” George interrupted when it became clear to him that Alexander wasn’t planning to stop on his own any time soon. “I called you in here to meet our new artist. John Laurens, this is Alexander Hamilton. He’s one of our songwriters, and he’s going to be working with you on your first album.”

John’s eyes blew wide at that, the thought just a little too overwhelming for him to fully take that in. “Wait, what? I.. Must have misheard, he’s.. A songwriter? For *my album*?” He repeated, looking to Alexander with a sparkle in his eye.

The shorter man couldn’t seem to help the small quirk that came to his lips. “Yes, he is. Or, that’s the plan, at least. I’ll leave it to the two of you to discuss what you’d like to come of that, but either myself or Eliza will have to make final approvals before you take the demos to Angelica.”

“As usual, sir.” Alexander nodded, clearly used to the world of new procedures that lay before John.

George nodded as well before continuing. “John is the man behind the demo take I sent you earlier this week—you remember I’m sure—so you have a base for his vocal ability and such. He said that he’s comfortable with the composition, but the words fall a bit short, isn’t that right?” George paraphrased, then glanced to John again.
There was a second more of stunned silence before John shook himself back to reality. “Oh. Um. Yeah, yes. Yes, sir. I can compose whatever needs to be composed, I can write and read sheet music as well, so that won’t be a problem. Um, I… Yeah. I just need help getting the words out to go with the compositions?” He finished this by glancing over to Alexander with a nervous smile. “So I guess that’s what you’re here for..?”

Alexander took a moment to take in the other man before responding, making John all the more nervous. There was something piercing in those dark eyes, something that John could feel in his very core. A knowing glint, yes, but John wasn’t entirely sure exactly what it knew.

“Yes. That’s what I’m here for.” Alexander said simply, not quite sure how to read the nerve-wracked southerner quite yet, despite the insistence otherwise John could feel in his stomach. “I need to figure out the kind of style you want to go for before I—”

“Yes, figuring out your direction and vision is very important, so I’d like to propose that the two of you take the afternoon to get to know one another. Alexander, why don’t you take him to that little cafe you like so well?”

“But sir—”

“On the company, of course. These are still work hours, and this is a business meeting, for all intents and purposes. Plus, this is an excuse for me to make sure you eat, Alexander,” George insisted with a firm tone, thick with both concern and accusation. “So, please, John, make sure he eats something when the two of you get there, an actual meal? He can be a pain, don’t let him get away with just ordering a side salad or some other nonsense.”

Still nervous, and now a smidge on edge from the unusual conversational turn, John nodded. “Yes, of course, I… I can do that.” He said softly, glancing between Alexander and George with a concerned look of his own. He was definitely missing something there, but he knew it wasn’t his place to ask any further questions.

He nearly missed the slight look of betrayal Alexander had on his face.

“Good, thank you…” George hummed, seemingly satisfied with that. He leaned back into the comfortable looking office chair, swiveling it back and forth just a tad as he smiled to himself. “I think it will benefit both of you to get to know one another as quickly as you can, since your partnership is going to be vital. Alexander, make sure that you get to know what kind of style John is after, and John, please be honest with him. This is your debut, we want to get as much passion and truth into it as we can, as you’re comfortable with, to get you some unique recognition, okay?” The swiveling came to a stop, and George looked over to the two. “Studio Forge and its musicians like to pride themselves on honesty. We don’t want to create some fake persona for you if that isn’t what you’re after, so… Please, let us all know the truth to your goals.”

John swallowed the lump in his throat, desperate for water or fresh air, really anything to get him out of the claustrophobic feeling the room suddenly had. “Yes, sir.” He said simply with a nod of his head.

George’s glance went to Alexander now, and the younger man nodded as well but remained silent, seemingly still bitter about the lunch thing. The eldest didn’t seem deterred though, just nodded his head and waved his hand slightly.

“The two of you are dismissed then. Alexander, you still have the company card?”

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From the time that John stood up to the time that he stepped out of Studio Forge, he wasn’t sure if he had taken a single breath, or given himself a chance to exhale. It seemed to come in one desperate gasp when he could take in the not-quite-fresh air of New York City.

Honestly, until that moment, he barely registered he was in New York at all.

He had gotten off of the plane at about 8:30 that morning, and it had been go-go-go ever since. He had gotten his cab to the studio and been shuffled from room to room with no time to register anything, really, but now he stood nearly awestruck in the heart of chaos.

All things considered, the studio was in a rather odd location. It was a more southern part of the Financial District, not far off of the Charging Bull. It wasn’t a place that would be expected to house a recording studio, but John definitely wouldn’t complain about how close he was to the water and to some pretty nice parks, easy places to find some peace and quiet if the hustle got to be a little too much.

He had told Alexander that he would wait by the entrance for him, and he would stay true to that promise, but he couldn’t help it when his legs carried him to the corner so he could take in more of the environment around him. There was so much he hadn’t seen, so much that he wanted to see, and so much to go before the city was truly his. Hopefully he’d have time between studio sessions and meetings to get to know what was now his city.

The revelry was broken after a short moment, when Alexander cleared his throat as he came to John’s side.

His new coworker looked him over for a second, nodding slowly to himself as he jotted something down in a notebook before stuffing it into his messenger bag. It quickly got lost in the other notebooks tucked away within, and John would be lying if he didn’t say he was a little surprised.

“Try not to wander off like that. Or look so lost. It shows how green you are, and you don’t want to wander around looking like a tourist down here, you might get sucked into some sort of con. Anyway. Food, what do you like? Or want, or whatever. I’m not too hungry but I can lead you basically anywhere your heart or stomach desires.”

A few awkward beats ticked by before John shrugged. “I.. Don’t really care one way or the other, I mean. Whatever’s cheap and easy?”

“Trust me, you mean cheap, easy, and palatable,” Alexander interjected. “I won’t let you subject yourself to just quick and easy, that risk isn’t worth it and I’m not going to McDonalds or something like that. So cheap, easy, palatable, and local. So. Hm, George called it with that little cafe, then.” He barely even waited for John before he started to walk in the opposite direction with the same determination and gait as a hunting dog honing in on his catch.

As John did his best to catch up, he couldn’t help but let his eyes sweep over the other man, taking in the strangely disheveled beauty that he held. There was an unusual elegance to his entire being that, despite looking like he’d been awake for the past six months, was well on the way to being charming.

Oh, who was John kidding? It was incredibly charming, he just couldn’t find the words to explain why.

In the few seconds that John let his thoughts take him over, he nearly lost track of Alexander in the sea of suits and lunch-hour renegades, causing a small flush of panic to roll through his system. A moment of hesitation ticked by before he cupped his hands around his mouth, giving a swift shout
for Alexander to wait up.

The other man, confused by the faint shout of his name, stopped dead in his tracks. Much to the
chagrin of the remaining foot traffic, naturally, but neither could find it in themselves to care at that
moment.

John sucked in a breath and gave a rather nervous smile before jogging to Alexander’s side. “Hey,
uh. I know you’re doing your best to help me out with not looking new, and I super appreciate it, but
can you like.. Slow down? I don’t know the city like you do, and if I get lost, I’m done for.” He said,
keeping that nervous smile in hopes that Alexander wouldn’t get too incredibly pissed off at him for
the request.

He almost heard the gears ticking before the other knit his brow. “Fuck, I didn’t even think about
that. I… Yeah. I’ll slow down. Uh. We’re almost there anyway, it isn’t too far.” He responded,
looking a bit embarrassed.

Or at least, what John assumed his version of embarrassment would be.

“So, uh,” Alexander knit his brow. “You’ve really never been here before, then.” There was a
strange tinge in his voice, something that teetered on the edge of, but refused to touch sympathy;
something that spoke of understanding.

John shook his head, both trying to rid himself of the curiosity and in a slight response. “No, I.. No.
Just lots of pictures. And a couple of hours on GoogleMaps clicking around and ‘running’ the streets.
It always felt like some kind of fever dream. What about you?”

Alexander seemed to hesitate a little, but his shoulders lifted, slumped. A very subtle shrug. “I’m not
from around here either. But it’s home now.”

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from around here either. But it’s home now.”

“Where are you from?” John couldn’t help but ask.

“Unimportant.” The other shot back almost immediately, rounding a corner. There wasn’t any
aggression in his tone, but it was clear that he didn’t want to talk about it anymore. “We’re here.
Where do you want to sit?”

The quick dismissal had been unexpected, but John couldn’t say he was really surprised. He didn’t
know the first thing about Alexander, other than his own inferences and the few things he’d read on
the Forge website.

As they walked into the restaurant, John resigned himself to what he was sure would be an awkward
lunch, if the walk there was anything to go on. As he thought more about the interaction, the quick
dismissal the other shot his way, he couldn’t resist letting out a small sigh. If the man wanted to
remain a cloud of mystery, far be it from John to try and fan away the fog.

Chapter End Notes

heyo! here i am, back at it again

i got a couple of chapters written at the airport on thursday so with any luck i can get
this updated regularly for a little while. here's hoping.

i'm happy with where it's going, and i hope y'all are too.
thanks for reading <3

-krys
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

For the first time since John had arrived that morning, everything was slowing down, and everything truly felt like it was going to be perfect.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the two finally settled into the corner booth in the little cafe, Alexander appeared to be calming down a little. Despite the lunch rush, the cafe stayed relatively calm. Only a few suited Wall Streeters held down other booths, but they seemed to speak anything but business. Instead, hushed laughs about family affairs, games, travel plans, and various other topics filled the space.

Alexander handed a menu over to John, forgoing one for himself and instead pulling out that same notebook as before and scribbling something down. He was only on the second page of it, but he was already intently filing away something brand new on the crisp pages.

John knew it must have been about him.

The moments ticked by a little awkwardly as John looked over the menu, but as soon as the waiter—a chipper younger man named Ben—had taken their orders, Alexander immediately got to work.

“All right, so. John Laurens. You’re sticking with your name or are you going to try and find an artist name?”

“No, I like mine.”

“Okay, what’s your style? Like, what genres, moods, anything like that?”

“Style would be… Coffee house? You know, the mellow stuff, anything like… Indie, singer-songwriter, lighter pop or soft rock I guess? I can do the heavier rock, but I’d rather not scream. Or perform anything country.”

“Thank god, because I hate writing country and screamo.” Alexander actually smiled ever so faintly at that, but immediately got back into it. “Inspirations?”

“Modern, or?”

“Whatever you want to start with.”

“Okay. Um. Robert Plant for sure. I dig George Michael, and Paul Simon. Hall and Oates like, once a week if I’m in the right mood. Matt Nathanson is great. Train can be fun, same for Gavin DeGraw. As far as similar inspirations go, at least. I like more than just them, obviously, but they’re more in line with what I’m feeling for my stuff.”

“Song style?”

“References?”
“Yeah, please.”

“‘50 Ways to Leave Your Lover’ and ‘You Can Call Me Al’ are great. And ‘Fool in the Rain’. Anything really on Nathanson’s new album. Just chill, fun stuff, you know?”

Alexander scribbled down everything John said at the speed of light, pausing once he was caught up. “So…” A beat of hesitation before a smile. “High key mellow pop.” He stated, eliciting a laugh from John.

“High key mellow pop sounds ideal as a basis, and whatever that turns into.” John nodded. The simple expression on Alexander’s face was enough to fill his chest with an unexpected warmth. He was pretty sure that this was the first genuine smile that he saw the other man give.

The simple expression gave John a moment he didn’t expect to have any time soon—a full chance to take in the other before him. Alexander had set his pen down, replacing it immediately with a steaming mug of black coffee. He sighed lightly before taking a slow sip, eyes falling shut as he did. That may have been the first time that he had slowed down since first walking into Washington’s office.

John wouldn’t say he was surprised by the dark circles under the man’s eyes, but if he saw them on anybody else he might be more concerned. In the minuscule time they had known one another, though, it just made sense.

He found himself taking in every detail of Alexander, between his looks and his actions. The way he held the mug of coffee with both hands to sap as much of the warmth as he could, the way he held it just under his nose and still pressed to his lips after he took a drink. The way his index fingers tapped against the ceramic as he thought, matching the rhythm of whatever raced through his mind. The way he seemed to tune out entirely until the heat off the coffee entirely fogged his glasses and he had to snap back to wipe them clean.

When his hands weren’t busy with his pen and paper or the warmth of his drink, he would almost nervously comb his hair back, even when he didn’t need to. While his left hand rocketed over the paper, writing at a rapid speed that John had never seen before, his right seemed to tap out the cadence of the words had they been spoken instead. When he got caught in the trance of his own words he would gnaw almost absently on his bottom lip, leaving it flushed and bruising when he caught himself.

Then, John took in his details. Dark eyes, accented by those dark circles but holding knowledge and experience that John couldn’t even begin to understand. A strange combination of a groomed patch of facial hair and the beginning scruff of neglect surrounding it. A strong nose with a birthmark that, had he not known better, John would have mistaken for a healed-over nose ring.

After another moment or so of some quite-obvious gawking (thank god Alexander was oblivious), John was snapped out of his revelry by the waiter bringing back their meals and refilling Alexander’s coffee. Alexander seemed to be brought back to reality as well, and he thanked their waiter softly before putting his notebook aside to eat.

A beat of hesitation passed before John smiled. “So I’m not gonna have to force you to eat, then? Washington’s worry was for nothing?” He quipped gently, tentatively.

Alexander rolled his eyes and shrugged. “He’s got this weird paternal instinct, I don’t get it.” He huffed. There was something in his eyes, though, that let John know just how appreciated it truly was. After another sip of his drink, he continued; “It’s just how he is sometimes, I guess. But it still weirds me out that he calls me son.”
As quickly as Alexander admitted that, though, he was rushing into something entirely different. Small talk was never his forte, but…

“So what made you decide to send in your demo? Did you ever like… Audition for anything else?”

John blinked a couple of times before he chuckled and shook his head. “Nah, I never really felt right trying to get on some reality tv singing competition or anything like that. Actually, I didn’t even send in my demo,” He admitted with a shy laugh.

“You didn’t?” Alexander raised his brow.

“My sister stole my laptop and hit send before I could psych myself out of it for the millionth time. So it’s really her doing, not mine.”

“No shit? And for the ‘millionth time’? How many times did you nearly send us your demo? How long could I have been working with you?” Alexander almost sounded offended that he had waited at all, which John supposed was a good sign.

“I can’t even tell you how many times I chickened out, Alexander. It has to at least be in the hundreds. I was terrified of rejection, I guess? And to be honest, I was just as scared of success. Not to like… Dump my soul out on your plate. I’m sure that Southern hesitation doesn’t taste too good with a Cuban.” John said, nervously fidgeting with his cutlery and looking away from the other man before taking a bite of his own meal. It was more of a precaution to make himself shut up than anything, especially with his new fear that his joke didn’t quite land.

Alexander laughed, though. It faded into a smile, one that still held silent laughter, and shrug of his shoulders. “They mix just fine, don’t worry. You can tell me whatever, you know. And you can call me Alex. We don’t have to be so formal, John. I’m not your boss, I’m your partner.”

It didn’t strike John until that moment how much he liked that idea, Alexander—Alex—being his partner. He let himself smile, an honest to god grin, and he nodded. “That’s… Yeah. Okay. Alex.”

John definitely liked how that rolled off of his tongue. “Thank you for this, I… I’m really looking forward to working with you, you know.”

“I’m looking forward to it, too. I’ve already got some great ideas for your music, too.”

The rest of the meal went by in a flurry of ideas being tossed back and forth between the two men, rapid words and gestures between bites of a surprisingly home-cooked tasting meal. If this was anything to go on, the pair was definitely on the verge of an amazing partnership.

~

Once they settled their check, Alex began to lead John back to the studio at a much more eased pace, letting John take in his new surroundings at his own leisure. It was definitely shocking to John to think that he could be in such an amazing area, to be somewhere with such hustle and bustle, somewhere that for so long had felt like a complete fever dream.

There was something surreal about being in the Financial District, anyway, especially when he thought that he was here to work at Studio Forge of all places. Still it was a pretty strange place for a recording studio, and he was pretty sure that the suits he saw earlier would be just as confused by the whole thing. Nobody could blame anyone for the confusion though; being surrounded by banks and the hustle and bustle of Wall St. was odd enough on its own, but factoring in performers, writers, studio musicians and an entire stream of artists felt a little out of place.

It was going to be refreshing, though. That much was a guarantee.
Alex would occasionally point things out as they went, some unusual historic landmark or a coffee shop that he would frequent, somewhere that he’d seen something interesting happen, or just something he enjoyed. What John didn’t expect, though, was for their path to veer off just a little, for it to go from the madness of Wall St. to something so much different in such a small distance, less than a city block.

There was an unusual serenity coming off of Alex as he steered them into a small courtyard in front of an old brick building, beautiful and peaceful in the heart of so much chaos. John looked around, nearly awestruck as they wandered into the cemetery surrounding the parish.

“I hope this isn’t too weird, I just, uh… Well, you’re new here. And you’re from somewhere smaller, somewhere… More quiet, I guess? I figured you may like this. It’s where I come to think when the rest of the city just becomes too much. It’s just a little bit of quiet in the middle of something that can be hell on earth. So I thought you might like to know about it. It’s honestly my favorite place around here. Especially right here, for some reason.” He explained lightly, stopping in front of an obeliskoid monument of a headstone, old and weathered.

John didn’t even take the time to read the name before glancing over to Alexander with the same awed expression he gave the courtyard. The shorter man, who he had only seen tired, frazzled, full of pent-up energy, before this moment was…

Well, he was completely relaxed, even his posture had loosened. He glanced over to John, finally, and smiled, sweet and completely genuine.

“I guess something about it just draws me in and reminds me of home.” He said softly, then knit his brow. “Not the, uh. Not necessarily the cemetery but, well.. Hm. Something about it just feels right, it… Draws me in, I guess. It’s just nice.”

“Alex,” John interrupted before the other man could get too ahead of himself. “I appreciate this more than you know. It’s gorgeous. Thank you for sharing it with me.”

There was something in John’s tone that held such pure honesty. The gentleness of the moment felt like Alex had shown him something in the vast city that only he knew about, and John thought that it was possibly the sweetest thing that anyone had ever done for him.

Alex almost seemed shocked by the response John gave, enough so that he paused for just a moment and just watched, as if trying to read some sort of sarcasm in his expression or tone.

There was none.

A smile spread across Alex’s face, too, and he nodded. “Yeah, of course. I… I’m happy to show you anything you wanna see.” He offered quickly, practically lighting up at the show of approval.

John didn’t expect that kind of enthusiasm, but he definitely wouldn’t complain.

They drifted in near silence through the cemetery, broken only when Alex would share some kind of story relating to the location or a headstone he would point out, and soon enough they found themselves sitting together in the back of the parish, taking in the soft glow of the candles lit around it.

For the first time since John had arrived that morning, everything was slowing down, and everything truly felt like it was going to be perfect.
just a quick note, this isn't going to be a reincarnation au, i just wanted to express how much i love trinity church, and that serenity that i feel every time i've been there, or even thinking about it. i might decide later who the headstone belongs to but for now it's just an unknown historical figure bc i felt nostalgic.

anyway, i hope y'all are enjoying so far, the next chapter is gearing up to be a little more on the technical side of production, since i'm getting nostalgic for that, too. i'll try not to be too annoying talking about ProTools in a fic, but really, anyone who knows me irl would say that's very in character for me.

as always, likes and comments are appreciated beyond words, and feel free to reach out to me on tumblr or instagram, @paperthinrevolutionary.

happy pride month, guys!

-krys
Chapter Summary

John wondered if one day he would leave something with the stones, and another fresh face would be awestruck by what they saw.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The afternoon with Alex had been far more fulfilling than John had expected.

The pair made their way back from Trinity Church just after the end of lunch rush, giving them ample room to move about the sidewalk and not have to fight anyone for breathing room. They stopped into a bodega just around the corner from the studio, where Alex popped in to grab a couple of drinks (coffees for himself and George, and a pomegranate aloe drink for Eliza), and a handful of different periodicals. He handed the money over to the cashier, tucking the aloe away in his bag as he instructed John how to make the coffee for George.

“It’s a pretty good piece of trivia, if you ask me. It can brighten his mood up pretty fast if someone brings him coffee on a shitty day, that or a maple bar from this one place nearby, I’ll show you one day. Needless to say, he’s easy to please if you ever need to.” Alex explained, forgoing any cream or sugar from his own drink in favor of just a sleeve for the cup.

“And he really likes the coffee from this place, easily some of the best in FiDi, I think they import some special roast or something, I’m not totally sure, but he likes it. And the price is right, so, you know.”

John just smiled and nodded, perfectly content to listen to Alex babble on and on as he stirred the additions into George’s cup, then capped it tight and put a stopper into it. Honestly, he could have just listened to Alex all day. But he had to shake that thought away as they left the bodega, rounding the corner and slipping back into the ground floor of Forge.

Before John could even breathe, Alex was at it again, babbling a mile a minute; “I’m sure Eliza’s already on it, but you should have a key card by the end of the week, if not by the end of the day. George texted me while we were out letting me know what he had scheduled for the rest of the day, since we kinda figured you’d wanna get right into it. So I’m gonna take you to the studio and into the hands of our engineers, I’m sure they already have some ideas to tighten up what you did. Maria should be back at the end of the week, so you’ll meet her soon, and you already recorded something with Angie earlier, right?”

There was a soft silence for just a moment as John caught up to Alexander’s words, then nodded. “Angelica, yeah. We re-recorded the vox track, she said she had some ideas to add onto it, but I was ushered out before she could tell me anything about them.”

Alex chuckled and nodded. “Sounds about right. Sorry about that. You’ll have time to talk it over with her now, don’t worry. I’m sure the time away has given her even more ideas, and whatever you guys come up with is gonna be amazing.” He grinned, tapping a couple of buttons at the elevator before tugging John in with him. “So I’m gonna take you back to the studio so you don’t get lost,
then I’m gonna head back up to my office, if that sounds good?”

John shrugged a little bit and gave a slight nod. “Yeah, that sounds good.” He said, looking around at the framed album covers lining the walls of the elevators. It was like a monument to everything he wanted to be.

He had noticed in the entryway and down the hallways as well, the line of album covers, gold and platinum records, all framed with photos of the bands, the recording artists and engineers, photos of the recording processes. It wasn’t all pomp and circumstance here, clearly, because as they got past the lobby, none of the photos were professional by any means. They all looked like family photos, snapped in the heat of the moment or during a party, taken when Grammy announcements were made, or when the band or artist had just finished recording their albums.

That’s what it was, really. John smiled to himself as the realization set in, as they stepped off of the elevator and were met with more of those photos. They were family portraits, moments of love and friendship being shared with onlookers. It was exactly what he wanted to be surrounded by.

As if only to interrupt that chain of thought, Alexander started to speak again; “Now, before I forget, I think I should give you my number. Just text me if you need anything whenever, I don’t really have any off hours, I’m usually always up, but yeah. Text or call, or whatever.” He hummed, digging one of his business cards out of his pocket and pressing it into John’s hand.

Before there was time for him to even look at it, Alex was leading him back into the studio he had first entered, finally giving him a chance to take in the majesty of the studio and recording rooms. The first room they entered—with the engineer’s permission—was large and packed to the brim with equipment. The back wall was a rough stone, marred with age and some rather strange memorabilia. John noticed right off the bat a couple of playing cards, gum, and dollar bills stuck between the stones, and hints of signatures just peeking out on the paper paraphernalia.

He wondered if one day he would leave something with the stones, and another fresh face would be awestruck by what they saw.

Opposing the rocky surface was a soundproofed window, leading into a large recording room separated into two different sections—a wide, open space and an isolated vocal booth. The lights were dimmed for the time being, but John was sure he would be back in there soon. He smiled with the thought.

His eyes were quickly drawn to the series of consoles lining the desks along the window, varying sizes and channel capacity. The cables, which could have easily become an intolerable mess, were almost obsessively organized, labeled, and tied together leading to their various I/O’s.

Subconsciously, John’s fingers flexed.

Oh, he wanted to play with those consoles so badly.

With any luck, the engineer would trust him enough to give it a shot.

Speaking of, John finally took the time to actually observe the lead engineer. She was a shorter woman, shorter than John at least, but she easily took command of the room. Even Alex held visible reverence. Her hair drew John’s attention quickly, shaved to the skin on the sides and back with a beautiful puff of curls remaining, cascading in a gradient from its natural black to delicately bleached blonde at the tips.

Everything about her radiated strength and commanded respect, but even so, she gave an inviting
smile to John, offered her hand for the second time that day.

“Laurens, it’s good to see you again. We didn’t get a proper introduction last time, with the rush and everything. I’m Angelica Schuyler, the recording engineer.” She stated, giving a firm handshake once John accepted it.

“Schuyler, you said? How are you related to Eliza?” He asked and smiled a bit, glad to have remembered enough from the chaos to make the connection.

Angelica smiled warmly and hummed. “Oh, she’s my sister. One of them. You’ll meet the youngest here in a bit, as well.”

Alex chuckled and nudged John just slightly. “Forge is a family business, if you couldn’t tell.”

“Our father helped George found it all those years back. He’s retired since, left his spot to Eliza once she worked her way up to.” Angelica explained, then hummed a bit. “It started out pretty small, almost just a gig between friends until dad signed someone and they actually released it into the world. The rest is history, I guess.” There was a glow of pride in her eyes and her smile never faded, even when the door swung open again and a rather excited and exuberant younger woman pranced into the room.

Angelica and Alex both lit up with bright smiles, Alex pulling the young woman into a hug before she could get too much further into the room.

She let out a squeal of a laugh and pressed into the hug, snuggling right into Alex and grinning. “What are you doing out of your cave, you gremlin?” She teased, earning her a laugh and a swat on the shoulder.

“I’m showing the fresh blood around the studio, be nice.” Alex grinned and gestured to John, who just looked on in a bit of a fearful confusion.

Angie, not wanting to make John wait any longer, tugged the younger away from Alex. “John, this is Peggy, my baby sister. She does additional vocals for the studio. Maria and I had some ideas that we wanted to run by you for your demo but…” She trailed off a little, then glanced over to Peggy before returning her strong gaze to John. “Rather than do that right now, I was thinking… We’ve had an arrangement floating around for some time and I really want to give it a shot with the two of you, see how it works out.”

John blinked a few times as that thought cleared in his head. “You, I… Yeah, okay. What do you have in mind?”

“Ooh, is it that arrangement you showed me a few weeks ago?” Peggy asked eagerly, bouncing on the balls of her feet and smiling wide.

Angelica returned the smile and nodded. “You know it. Are you still interested?”

“Oh, hell yeah I’m still interested!”

Alexander chuckled and looked between the three of them, shooting a wink to the incredibly confused southerner. “I’ll leave you guys to it. I’ll be in my office if you need me for any reason, okay? Have fun, and don’t forget, text me if you need anything.”

With that, he was gone, and John was left in a flurry of confusion between the excitable Schuyler sisters.
After a quick run through of the setup, Angelica was passing sheet music to Peggy and John both. She pulled up an older protools session, filled to the brim with bounced out MiDi files and orchestrated into a beautiful rainbow of sound waves.

“Okay, Laurens, this might be a bit outside of what you’re thinking, but your voice is exactly what I pictured for this piece, if you’re willing to take a leap of faith.” Angelica explained with a smile, then flexed her fingers before she started fully preparing the session. “Pegs, can you go into the booth for mic check?”

John tuned out as they rolled through that, flipping through the pages of music and humming out the melody to himself.

He was already familiar with the songs in the arrangement, but the arrangement itself really sent him for a loop in the best way possible.

He was a little nervous, though, as he grabbed a pencil from the cup by the monitor, quickly jotting something down before he sucked in a breath. “Miss Schuyler?” He said lightly, biting his lip.

As mic check was over, there was no hesitation for her to turn to him. “Just Angie is fine, you know. What’s up?”

“Oh, uh. Angie, then. Um. What about this?” He offered up the sheet music and a nervous smile as the woman looked over the penciled in notes and changes he left.

She knit her brow together, going through them and humming to herself the changes that John made, then smiled brightly. “That’s actually great. We should run it by Pegs and see what she has to say but I’m all here to try it out with the track.”

John looked, frankly, shocked to receive the praise and approval, but he quickly nodded and got to his feet to go explain the plan to the youngest Schuyler.

Next thing he knew, they were recording.

He’d never had so much fun behind a mic before.

Chapter End Notes

well hello sorry for another late post but chaboi had to cry about the tony awards. goddamn they were good this year, love me some hadestown and beetlejuice

ANYWAY, some housekeeping!

Angelica is based on the lovely and amazing angel that is Emmy Raver-Lampman (one of the sweetest women i’ve ever had the joy of meeting) and Peggy is still the lovely Jasmine Cephas Jones (Ramos?)

Studio Forge's main recording space is based on Fantasy Studios in Berkeley, CA, which i was devastated to find out closed. it was the first major recording studio i ever had the pleasure of going in, and they really did have a wall with gum, cards, and cash stuck in it. one of the playing cards was signed by Steve Perry and i nearly cried.
Fantasy was an amazing place and I’m heartbroken that it's no more.

also it should 100000% go without saying that the song is Jas and Ant’s cover of Higher Love (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTem90Basfk) because im still Obsessed

aaanyway, here's the new chapter! hopefully you enjoy it, happy pride month! due to fathers day and the local pride fest next week, i may be a little late again, but we'll see!

until next time and with much love,
-krys
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

John barely made it through the first page of results before his head started to spin and he was being hit with the harsh reality of how overwhelming this could all be. He didn’t know the first thing about living in New York, the different neighborhoods or the commutes… Shit, any of it. He had no idea.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John wasn’t sure if he had ever slept so well in his life.

George had helped him maneuver the subways to his airbnb after the office closed, and he sunk into the mattress and slept for what could have been weeks. He woke up feeling refreshed at around 10:30 to a text from George, telling him to take the next few days to himself to find a stable place to live.

He was beyond grateful for that opportunity, but admittedly didn’t even know the first place to start with that.

After enjoying the warmth and comfort of the bed for a while longer, he stretched out to grab his backpack, then tug out his laptop to begin the search.

He barely made it through the first page of results before his head started to spin and he was being hit with the harsh reality of how overwhelming this could all be. He didn’t know the first thing about living in New York, the different neighborhoods or the commutes… Shit, any of it. He had no idea.

Before he could let himself get too deep, he shut his laptop and knit his brow, glancing over to his phone and sighing softly. Maybe he should call someone for help?

But who could he call? He didn’t have any family around here, or any old acquaintances who ended up out this way either. He didn’t know the first place to go, other than his new coworkers. Did he really want to do that, though?

On one hand, he knew that the Schuyler family had been there forever, and George was definitely confident in the area. Alexander, too, but he was confident with everything, it seemed. But would any of them be confident in helping him? And on that matter, would any of them actually want to help?

It took a few more moments of mental runaround before he heard Alex in the back of his mind again; “Have fun, and don’t forget, text me if you need anything.”

Did this count? Was this under the “anything” umbrella that Alex had implied?

God, he hoped so.

~

Alexander had just settled into his desk, eager to get back into what he was working on after he was
ushered away from it the night prior. He’d already drafted a handful of ideas for John, and was beginning to work on about eight more when he got a stream of unusual texts from an unknown number.

11:36AM
from: UNKNOWN
he says this isn’t weird but i don’t really live here yet? like i just have an airbnb for the week?

i don’t really know where to start looking?

and you told me to text you if i needed anything?

i hope this falls under the “anything” category

Alex stared at his phone and knit his brow, taking a few seconds before he chuckled a little bit, shaking his head.

11:39AM
to: UNKNOWN
Let me guess, John?

I’d be happy to help out, my lunch break starts in 10 and I’m sure George is going to make me take it. Where are you staying? I can make my way over there if you don’t want to head back to the studio. I know George gave you the day off.

Alex couldn’t help smiling at his phone, honestly enjoying the thought of spending his lunch break with John, even though he wished he could stay behind and work on those new songs. At the very least, he supposed that he could take his notebooks along as usual and work on them while John surely bantered back and forth with himself over the different apartments that he wanted to check out.

And hell, maybe he could be of help in choosing them, too.

Who knew?

11:42AM
from: UNKNOWN
shit yeah this is john, sry. i thought i gave you my number, it’s been a blur since i got off that plane. i’m close to the studio if you want me to head that way.

Well, that was certainly enthusiastic, Alex thought, and he hummed a little to himself. May as well partake.

He shoved a couple of his notebooks and his laptop back into his messenger bag, electing to go to George instead of sending him an IM though the company email. He strode confidently down the hallway, filled with an unexpected cockiness just from the attention that John was giving him.

Of course, he knew better than to read into it as such, after all, he was basically just a glorified tour guide for the duration of his break, giving a virtual walkabout of Manhattan to help him find a place to crash.
But, the other side of his mind interjected, *what if it's more?*

Well, what harm could hoping do?

On his way into George’s office, he tapped out a response;

11:45AM  
to: Laurens

*That sounds fine by me. I’ve already got a couple of songs ready that I want you to look over. Send over your address and I’ll head that way as soon as George gives the okay.*

*I’ll bring my laptop so we can be more efficient, too.*

*But I’d say we should meet up somewhere for lunch, I know a great little cafe.*

*And the owner usually gives me free coffee.*

*Might be able to snag you one, too.*

By the time that was sent, he was standing at the door of George’s office, just about ready to step in when Eliza rounded the corner. She smiled to him and cocked her head a bit. “George already left for lunch, he’s meeting up with Martha.” She explained, gesturing for him to instead follow to her office. “What did you need?”

Alex hummed a little bit and shrugged. “I just wanted to let him know I was going to be out of the office for lunch.” He explained, settling into his usual seat across from Eliza’s plush office chair.

“Oh? Just need to get out, or?”

“Oh.” He chuckled, but his smile soon fell to something a little more nervous. It was nearly invisible, but easy for Eliza to spot his worry.

“What’s on your agenda, then? And on your mind, you seem broody. More so than usual.” Eliza teased, her own lips quirking up into an inviting smile.

Alex hesitated a bit, settling further into the sea blue upholstery of the seat, picking at a newly found loose thread on his sleeve. “It’s… Well. Laurens asked me to help him apartment hunt.” He began tentatively, knitting his brow. “Like I was even good at that for myself, you know, but I really want to help him out with it?”

“I think it would be a great bonding experience for the two of you, and it would definitely help establish a trust between you. Besides, maybe you’ll get some helpful insight as to the songs that you should be writing for him.” Eliza countered, watching as Alex processed the thought.

“Well, we got quite a bit of that fleshed out at lunch yesterday, when George sent us out.”

“You can’t know too much about someone you’re writing for, Alexander. You of all people know that. Go help him out and get to know him more. And don’t think you can hide that look in your eyes from me.” She nearly giggled, eyebrow quirking when Alex puffed up, now flustered.

“What look!” Alex snipped, more embarrassed than annoyed.
Eliza just leaned back in her chair, grabbing a mug on her desk and taking a sip from it. “We dated for almost a year, Alexander. I think I know your faces by now. Just go spend the day with him, help him out.”

Alex nodded, but frowned again. “The day?”

“Yes,” She nodded as well, smiling. “The day. The rest of it. Take it off and help John find an apartment.”

Alex huffed, puffing his shoulders a little as he dove into the argument. “But what about George?”

“He told me to make sure you took the rest of the day off,” She explained, turning the computer monitor on her desk towards him after pulling up an email. Surely enough, there sat a request from George to make sure Alex left early. “We know you got kicked out by security, and we all know that you didn’t rest at home afterwards, so this is an order from your commanders, Alexander. Take a break. Go help John, enjoy your lunch, enjoy your dinner, and goddamnit, enjoy a good night’s rest tonight, okay?”

Her argument was bulletproof, frankly, and she did have quite a bit of authority to him, so all he could do was shrink down and nod his head. “Yeah, alright, fine. But I’m staying late tomorrow.”

“Not if I tell security to throw you out again. Go rest, Alexander, and tell John hi for me.”

Chapter End Notes

hey guys! sorry for missing last week, but with the stress of everything on top of it being pride and fathers day last weekend, I couldn't have produced anything even halfway decent.

so here we are, back again! it's a bit shorter but i like where it left off, and it leads well into the next chapter.

hope you enjoy! come yell at me on tumblr or instagram @paperthinrevolutionary or discord at static_disaster#2569

until next time, much love to you all!

End Notes

just for reference, not all the characters are based on their OBC! i'll mention it as they arise but for for now, eliza is based on solea pfeiffer (my personal fav eliza!)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!