Whitehall University

by boleynqueens

Summary

a modern college au of the tudors.
most of the same characters, but most of them reside at 'whitehall university' (rather than whitehall palace).
henry tudor is the son of one of the richest men in the world, henry tudor the 1st. anne boleyn is the daughter of a french ambassador.
'she is a book he wants to keep reading and he is utterly, hopelessly lost in her.'

Notes

inspired by an amazing aesthetic post on tumblr about a high school au of the tudors:
i loved it, reblogged it on my tumblr (boleynqueens) a while ago with the tag "i want a college au and if i can't get one i'm going to write one".

and, surprising myself, I actually did!

a fair amount of it is going to be told via texts, emails, facebook posts/messages, etc.

my first work posted to archiveofourown.
From: 323-431-231

To: Katherine Aragon
Sent August 20th, 2016, Saturday, 4:00 AM

Henry Tudor has tagged you in a relationship status

“Henry Tudor is in an Open Relationship with Katherine Aragon”

Press “1” to like

From: Katherine Aragon

To: Henry Tudor
Sent August 20th, 2016, Saturday, 4:02 AM

What the fuck is this?

From: Henry

Morning, love.

From: Katherine

Henry, WTF?!

Henry:

Don’t know what you’re referring to.

Katherine:

Your “relationship” status?

Henry:

You posted engagement photos. I told you not to.

Katherine:

This is so embarrassing!

Henry:

I could’ve put “single”.

Katherine:
You wouldn’t dare.

**Henry:**

I still want to marry you. But it’s years down the line. And since we’re at different schools and countries in the meantime…we agreed to be open. You agreed. Remember?

**Katherine:**

Yes, but not where people can see! It’s humilitating.

**Henry:**

Well, then, maybe neither of us should have a relationship status. Make it clear it’s no one’s business but ours.

**Katherine:**

Fine.

**Henry:**

Perfect.

**Katherine:**

Asshole.

**Henry:**

Tsk, tsk. What an unchristian thing to say!

**Katherine:**

Fucker.

**Henry:**

Gotta unpack. Bye!

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**August 25th, 2016, Thursday, 7:30 am**

Whitehall University is considered by most magazine and newspaper ranking lists to be the most prestigious, wealthiest, exclusive higher education institutes in the world.

Henry Tudor, whose father has contributed immeasurably to the university's wealth, is Whitehall’s wealthiest student, a fair feat.

He is not only rich, but also handsome, a younger man that radiates a sort of unavoidable, golden charisma. Those close to him feel his warmth, those far away yearn for it. He’s regarded as a demigod on campus, with all the reverence that comes with his station in life.

Katherine, whose parents are impossibly rich, even more so than Henry's, is his fiancée. She was accepted into Whitehall, but didn't want to go to school in the states. She's been there a few times and finds its people ignorant and the poverty appalling; a private health care system and educational
system that bankrupts so many citizens is an immoral country; in her opinion, and she will only go there when she must.

She goes to Oxford.

She is pretty, diminutive, rigidly religious, and only a few years Henry's senior. He's known her for most of his life, dated her for three years. He loves her; he truly does.

But that doesn't stop him from sleeping with other girls-- not by a long shot.

One of them is in his bed right now--Betty? Lizzy? One of those. She's gorgeous, blonde, and rolls the best joints. He's slept with her before. He should know her name by now, but it's not like he's going to give himself a hard time about it.

His best friend, Brandon, is his dorm mate. He has the best one on campus-- he didn't have to have a roommate but Brandon's on scholarship and he didn't want him to be stuck with some loser like last year.

Henry "won it" (read: bought it) in the lottery for the room that all students can apply for.

It's spacious, and they have giant rods with curtains for occasions when they have overnight guests.

It has its own private bathroom and shower.

He washes his face there now with a bar of Irish Spring, patting his face dry with a towel. Next he brushes his teeth, scraping the fuzzy, remaining feel of beer from his tongue. Spits, rinses with mouthwash. Looks at himself in the mirror, satisfied.

Today's going to be a good day.

Henry knows this with the confidence of someone who's had a life of mainly good days.

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August 25th, 2016, Thursday, 2:00 PM

Mary Boleyn is begging her sister to join her at her sorority party.

Begging to the point of annoyance.

Anne, her younger sister, swats her away, intent on her History notes.

"You don’t need to study all the way to Friday night– college is supposed to be about being well-rounded, not a square. And we’ve barely started classes."

Anne ticks off on her fingers: “1.) This square needs to maintain a 3.8 GPA to keep her scholarship. 2.) we’ve been in classes for 2 weeks–where have you been? And 3.) I don’t like sorority girls.”

“You like me!”

“Debatable.”

Mary joins her at the cafe’s table, closing her open textbook.

“Hey!”

“You loooove me. C’mon.”
“No, thank you,” she insists, prissy as hell, Mary thinks.

“There’s gonna be cute guys there.”

“Oh my God!” Anne gasps, clutching her chest, putting on a high, affected voice, “like, why didn’t you say so?!”

“Anne,” she says, with sudden solemnity, changing tacks “if you’re not there, I’ll be so bored. Who will I talk shit in French with? No one!”

“Your French is not that great.”

“Rude!”

“But true.”

“Lizzy Blunt—”

“Blunt? That cannot be her name—”

“Blount, whatever, believe me, she has earned that nickname—but anyway, she’s going to be there, and she’s going to poach all the hot guys from me and I need someone to have my back! I need a wing woman.”

“What about your other sisters? You know, the ones you live with?”

“Ugh, no. They’re self serving hos that only look out for themselves.”

“Then why do you live there?” Anne asks, laughing.

“It’s the best way to keep my dance scholarship. They have files of all the old lecture notes and finals.”

“What?”

“Oh. ” Mary says with faux, wide eyed innocence, “have I not mentioned that?”

“Mary…”

“I mean, we’re not really supposed to share them with anyone. It’s supposed to be a privilege, a perk you earn with all the dues you have to pay with being a Beta Thau sister…”

“Ok, wait—”

“But, I don’t know. You’re so smart,” she says, getting up from the table with a shrug, ”it’s not like that would interest you…”

“Mary!”

“I think I’m gonna go get a latte. Do you want any—”

“When’s the party?”

“Tomorrow at midnight, come over at 10!” she chirps, blowing her sister a kiss.

August 25th, 2016, Thursday, 6:30 PM
Anne is walking across campus, on her way from the library, when her phone buzzes in her pocket:

**From: Mary Boleyn**
come over at 7. password is jimmy choos.

**From: Anne Boleyn**
don’t know what you’ve been smoking, but it’s not Friday.

**From: Mary Boleyn**
rude! i know. come over tODAY at 7 :p

*Why?*

She’s just about to press send when she runs smack into someone and drops all her books and her phone.

“No, no, no…” Anne groans, fearing the worst (she can't afford a new cell phone, like...at all).

She searches frantically for her cell. It’s not anywhere on the pavement.

“Thank God!”

It’s just on the grass, so the screen isn’t cracked. She wipes the screen on her sweater.

“Anne?”

The voice is familiar. She looks up.

“Tom? Oh my God!”

She hugs her old friend, laughing with surprise.

“Hey,” he says easily, hands in pockets. “Sorry for running–"

“No, I’m sorry, I wasn’t looking–”

“Except, happy to run into you.”

She blushes, suddenly shy and looking at her feet.

“Um–"

“Here, where are my manners,” he says, picking up her books from the ground and handing them to her.

“Thank you.”

“Been a while,” she says, organizing the books in her arms by title, “I, I had no idea you went here.”

“Well, we haven’t talked in a while.”

“Right. Are you...still doing music?”

“Well, that is my major, so I would say so.”

“Oh, great. I’m glad.”
“Yeah. My dad says this is a great place for it— that at least the homeless are warm in Los Angeles.”

“I see he’s much the same.”

“He is, but he’s not paying for it, so it doesn’t matter what he thinks.”

There’s an edge to his voice, a sort of forced optimism that makes Anne wince.

“So you have a scholarship, too?”

“Yes. Well, partial. The rest I make up with work-study.”

“That’s awesome. You’re so talented, I’m not that surprised.”

“Thank you. Can I,” he leans down to pick up her paper cup, “buy you another coffee to replace the one I knocked over?”

“Oh that’s sweet, but I’m actually supposed to meet someone right now—”

“Oh.”

“Mary! I’m on my way to meet Mary.”

Why is she saying that? She doesn’t care if he thinks she’s meeting a guy, let him think that. She doesn’t need to spare his feelings. It’s not like he ever did that for her, back when they went to the same high school.

She hates that seeing him is affecting her like this. It’s been two years since Thomas Wyatt has occupied her thoughts and it took her a while to cultivate that.

“Tell her I say hi,” Tom says, tilting his head to the side.

“I will. She didn’t tell me you went here, too.”

“Maybe she wanted it to be a surprise.”

“Maybe.”

“Don’t you…?”

“Right! Don’t want to be late, you know Mary… see you around.”

“Nice to see you!” he calls out, waving, but she’s already walking towards the girls’ dorms, and she can’t see him.

She’s not even an ex girlfriend, really. But she’s an ex maybe, an ex…something. Enough of a something that he feels a tightness in his chest as she walks away, enough of a something that he was excited to see her, enough of a something that he felt his hands shake and had to hide them in his pockets.

Enough of something that he shouldn’t be feeling, considering he has a girlfriend.

August 25th, 2016, Thursday, 6:59 PM

This house is too pink, Anne thinks with a grimace. Pink like pastels, pink like Pepto Bismol...
Having to look at it is making her eyes hurt.

The knocker on the front of the door is in the shape of a heart.

She uses it, then waits in the bright August heat on the front porch for someone to answer.

A blonde girl swings the door open, blinking at her owlishly.

“Ji–”

“Come in!” The girl says, sweeping her arm in a gesture of welcome.

So much for the password.

“Thank you,” she says, stepping inside, “do you know where–”

“You’re so pretty.”

“Oh, well. Thanks.”

The interior, Anne notes, is much less nauseating than the exterior. There’s a cluster of black and white love seats, and a framed print of Van Gogh’s Starry Night. Vintage 1920s style tables surround the couches, along with pretty damask red and taupe lamps covered in beads and glitter.

“Lizzy!”

Another blonde comes down the stairs, her hair tied in a bun. She’s not as pretty as the first, with sort of a thin face, but in a pleasant way. She kind of reminds Anne of Sarah Jessica Parker.

“Did you ask for the password?”

“Oh,” Lizzy exclaims, covering her mouth with her hand, “sorry, Jen, I forgot.”

Lizzy turns to Anne, looking as if she’s on the verge of laughter, and asks in a stern, booming voice, “Password?”

“Jimmy Choos,” Anne says, amused by the whole exchange.

“I don’t know if that’s right–is that right, Jen?”

“You should know!”

Lizzy shrugs blissfully, giving a wide smile.

“Sorry.”

Ah, Anne realizes. This must be Lizzy “Blunt”.

“Do you know where I can find Mary?”

“Upstairs, the room that has a framed picture of the Eiffel Tower on the door,” Jen says, glaring at Lizzy.

“Thanks.”

“Byyyyee, Pretty Girl!!” Lizzy calls.
Anne shakes her head, walks upstairs, and knocks on Mary’s door.

“Enter!”

Anne comes in to find her older sister sitting on a shag carpet, painting her toenails red.

“Sit!”

Anne opts to sit on the bed.

“I think I just met Lizzy Blunt.”

“Body like a Victoria’s Secret Angel, voice like Janis Joplin?”

“That’s the one. She seemed…nice. Not exactly like a…what did you call her? ’Self serving ho’?”

“Don’t be fooled.”

“She told me I was pretty,” Anne says. That alone made her more likely to defend her.

“Ugh, it’s all just an act. She’ll kiss any girl if there’s a guy she likes within a five mile radius.”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t be so sensitive! You know you’re pretty, anyway.”

Anne shrugs. She doesn’t, really. Mary has always been the Pretty One, Anne has always been the Smart One. She wonders if brothers are so evenly split up into one or the other during their lives.

“Anyway, I was thinking of our deal, and I think we definitely need to renegotiate the terms.”

“Oh?”

“Because it’s not fair! I give you top secret papers to help you with school and all you have to do in return is go to one measly party with me? I mean, I could get into a lot of trouble with the House!”

“Okay…”

“Because I’m going to give you all this stuff for the entire year, I only think it’s fair…if you go to parties with me the entire year.”

“What? No, I can’t, I have to study!”

“We don’t have parties all the time. And besides, I always get one guest.”

“What if you want to bring a cute guy instead?”

Mary ponders that for a moment.

“Well, then I’d tell you ahead of time–unless you really wanted to come.”

“Need I remind you that you can’t be going to parties all the time either? You have a scholarship to maintain, too.”

“Only a 2.5,” she scoffs, “I’m not that dumb”

“You’re not dumb,” Anne says softly.
Mary waves her hand like it doesn’t bother her either way.

“I managed to do it last year! I didn’t flunk out, remember?”

“I do remember. I remember you calling me sobbing, saying you were close to doing so.”

“You can check my homework,” she says sweetly, “just like high school.”

“I don’t know—”

“You remember high school? We had so much fun. You were the perfect wing woman. I was able to scoop up any guy I wanted because you were always able to get his friend away! With your…mystery,” she giggles on the last word, wagging her eyebrows.

“We were a good team,” Anne admits.

And they did have a lot of fun, as Anne remembered—dressed to the nines and managing to sneak into bars, dancing till the sunset at some rooftop party or another…their father, an ambassador, was overseas most of the time, and their mother had passed when they were younger. Their older brother George, had already graduated high school and was on a gap year (which turned into a few) in Europe. All these factors withstanding, the Boleyn girls hardly knew what a curfew was.

“C’mon,” Mary says, finishing her pinky toe, “I know you want those tests…we have them from every course! All of last year’s! I checked them all.”

“Okay, fine! But no trying to hook me up with anyone!” Anne insists, extending her pinky finger, “honestly, I don’t have time for it. And you remember how that worked out last time...I was reminded of it today. By a certain someone.”

Mary links her pinky to her little sister’s, cheeks coloring, “Oh…you saw him, then?”

“Yeah. Thanks for the heads up.”

“I didn’t know how to tell you. I was hoping you wouldn’t run into him, honestly– it is a pretty big campus.”

“Not that big, apparently.”

“That’s what she–”

“Don’t!” Anne says, holding up a hand and laughing despite herself.

“You were thinking it anyway.”

August 26, 2016, Friday, 11:01 PM

Henry is scanning the room when he catches Lizzy’s eye. She waves at him and beams.

He gives her a half wave back.

“Ah,” Brandon says, “I remember her from this morning.”

“Mnhmm. Twice in a row might be enough, though.”

“Really? I’m pretty sure she’s the hottest girl here.”
Henry shrugs, as if he has model-hot girls in his bed all the time. To be fair, Brandon knows that he does, in fact, but if he didn’t know him he might think him overconfident.

“No,” Henry says suddenly, nodding towards a girl sitting on the couch on the other side of the room, “that’s the hottest girl at this party.”

“Nice,” Brandon agrees.

The girl in question is tall, with soft, delicate features and a pretty smile. Her dark blonde curls cascade around her shoulders. Her cheeks are flushed and she’s wearing brown lace-up boots that show off her long legs.

Brandon doesn’t think she’s prettier than Lizzy aesthetically speaking. Lizzy has a bigger chest and this one a slimmer waist. This one has a ski slope nose while Lizzy has a button one. They’re both the same height, both blue-eyed blondes…personally Brandon thinks it has more to do with the fact that she’s new, but he’s not about to criticize his friend.

She looks impatient, like she’s waiting for someone, tapping her foot against the coffee table.

A dark haired girl makes her way over to her. Brandon can only see the back of her head, so he’s not going to swipe in yet.

The brunette passes the blonde a drink– Brandon reads her lips– “thank you.”

“Aren’t you going to say hi?”

Henry looks at him and scoffs.

“No.”

He drains the rest of his cup, then winks at the girl in question

“Watch and learn,” Henry says, patting his friend on the back and making a quick exit.

August 26, 11:01 PM

“Oh my God, that’s Henry Tudor.”

“Who?” Anne asks.

“I can’t with you. He’s only–don’t look!” she cries out when she sees Anne start to turn her head, “oh my God, don’t look, be cool–”

“Chill.”

“Oh my God. Oh my God,” Mary says as she collapses against the pillows, “swear to God, he just winked at me. He is so hot. He’s– he’s leaving! Okay, now you can look.”

Anne does.

“See the guy with the buzz cut next to the painting….wearing the white jersey? The hot one?”

“Yes,” Anne says. She doesn’t go for men that are too good looking. They tend to be full of themselves. This guy looks nervous though, suddenly alone, worrying his bottom lip with his teeth.
“That’s his friend, Brandon, he follows him everywhere and he’s going to follow him if you don’t distract him right now.”

“I—what am I supposed to say?” Anne says, feeling panicky at the prospect. This is a lot less notice than Mary typically gave her at high school parties.

Mary scans the room and waves someone over— who, Anne can’t tell.

“Oh, he’s looking all over the place like a lost puppy— you know what you need to do. Time is of the essence.”

“What?!”

“I do not,” Mary says emphatically, leaving her cup on the coffee table, “want to be interrupted.”

“What?” Anne whisper-shouts, panicked, gesturing. Mary walks backwards and makes a kissy face, then, as if communicating to a child, uses her hands to make kissing hand puppets, then throws her sister two thumbs up before scampering off.

“What’s up?” Lizzy asks, taking Mary's previous seat on the couch.

“Ah, ah” Anne stammers, trying to keep an eye on Brandon while also trying to focus on the task at hand. His attention seemed to have drifted.

She’s never done anything like this before and, since she’s running out of time, she figures bluntness is the best and only course of action.

“Wanna make out?” she blurts.

“Sure!” Lizzy says brightly, taking a seat next to her.

Since Anne asked she figured she’d have to initiate, but Lizzy is all too eager. She takes Anne’s face in her hands, smiling, and presses her mouth against hers, softly.

They start off slow. Anne’s never kissed a girl before. It’s nice, she thinks. Less pressure. And Lizzy tastes like blueberry lip balm and only slightly of beer—not a bad combination, weirdly enough.

Lizzy starts to run her hand through Anne’s long hair. Anne nips Lizzy’s bottom lip, ever so gently and the other girl giggles.

She starts to get lost in the kissing, until she hears the male cheers.

Right. This isn’t for fun. She’s on a sisterly mission.

She opens her eyes to check to see where Brandon is. He hasn’t moved an inch, and he’s staring at them, mouth agape.

Mary was right. Boys are so easy.

Mission accomplished.

Eventually Lizzy breaks the kiss— Anne sits back and watches as the other girl turns around, presumably because the guy behind her, now crooking his finger, just tapped her on the shoulder.

Lizzy giggles, then looks back at Anne with a wide-eyed, ingenue expression, biting her lip, asks, “you don’t mind, do you?”
Anne shakes her head, smiling. Lizzy takes her admirer’s hand and he helps her get up from the couch.

The guy nods to Anne and says, “she can come too.”

“No thanks, I’m good,” Anne says, deciding this is her cue to go.

It seems that the end of a female-only kiss has made the male voyeur group disperse, Anne notes wryly, tossing her red cup on her way to the kitchen.

The room is empty. There’s an ashtray on the island full of cigarettes and a few half empty glasses, deserted.

Anne’s grateful to be alone. She goes over to the sink to wash her hands. She washes slowly, humming the ‘Happy Birthday’ song to herself, an old habit ingrained by her mother. She’s trying to use the moment to steady herself, hoping that this isn’t what Mary’s expecting from every party, because it’s taken a lot out of her.

Anne can captivate a crowd, or a man, easily enough, sometimes without even really consciously trying. It’s subtle, like a light switching, where suddenly everyone notices her.

But she always feels strange after, like maybe she shouldn’t like the attention. Maybe she wants something more real than glitter on the surface that draws notice. Maybe she wants someone to see her.

“What was that for me?”

Anne turns around to the husky voice behind her to find Brandon, apparently notorious friend of (apparently notable, according to Mary) Henry Tudor.

“Excuse me?”

“You were looking at me,” he shrugs, smirking, “that’s all.”

She was looking at him. Can’t defend herself from that. Can’t betray her sister’s confidence for telling him the real reason why.

What the hell, she thinks, drinking in the muscles straining against his capped white sleeves, a jawline that could cut steel, and blue eyes that could only be described as “piercing”– Mary’s right, he is hot, so she might as well go along with it.

“I noticed you,” she says, with a shrug, like admitting this is no big deal.

“I noticed you noticing me,” he counters, sitting his bottle of beer on the granite counter, the clink of the glass working as a natural punctuation to his statement.

“Cute,” she says.

“So are you.”

He saunters over to her and gently takes the handtowel she’s been holding in her hands, all this time, without ever noticing, and sets it on the granite countertop.

Rid of the barrier, he starts rolling his thumb over her delicate knuckles, her hand small and pale in his.
“Do you usually kiss girls at parties?”

“No,” she says, not too shy to break his gaze, he notices, as most girls would be at such a bold inquiry, “do you?”

“Mmhmm,” he says, pulling her into an embrace and doing just that.

*He’s not a bad kisser,* she thinks. There’s a swooping feeling in her stomach but it’s more about the fact that she’s kissing someone than anything like butterflies. She got the same feeling when kissing Lizzy earlier.

Kissing two people in one night–definitely a change of pace for her, considering that before today she’d kissed two people within two years.

Brandon lifts her, with amazing ease (she’s slender, but she’s not nonexistent) onto the edge of the kitchen sink. He maneuvers his way in between her legs. She’s wearing perhaps the most conservative outfit at this party: a green turtleneck and a long black skirt that reaches her ankles, which he’s promptly hiked up to her waist.

“What,” she asks slowly as he nuzzles behind her ear, “are you doing?”

“What,” he says, matching her even, exaggerated tone as he starts to unbuckle his belt, “does it look like I’m doing?”

Anne lets out a huff of indignation, pulls her skirt back down, and jumps off the counter.

“No, you’re not. Well,” she adds, eyeing the bulge in his jeans, “maybe you are, but I’m not.”

“What’s the matter? You want to go back to my place instead? Sorry if I offended you–I just figured you were wild, what with that display earlier. We can have some privacy if you want. I don’t even mind.”


“What? Why?” He asks, fumbling with his belt loops.

“Do you even know my name?”

“I–I–do you even know mine?” he asks.

“Brandon.”

“Oh. well, that’s only my last name,” he says, crossing his arms, “so…”

“So…more than you know of me.”

Anne, deciding she’s done for the night, opens the fridge– she knows Mary keeps bottles of water in here.

“Whatever. Forget you,” he scoffs, then, under his breath, “fucking tease.”

“What was that?” she demands, blocking the doorway.

“I called you,” he says, levelly, “a tease. A girl that tries to attract attention to herself, pretends she likes that attention, and then rejects it.”
“I–”

“You could have just told me to fuck off when I came in here. Instead you wanted to play games, but didn’t want to follow through.”

“I never–”

“It’s not like you’re even that hot,” he says nastily, “I was the one doing you a favor.”

Brandon puts his hands up in a mocking don’t-shoot gesture, and shoves past her, back out into the living room.
don't follow girls

Chapter Summary

“I don’t follow girls. I don’t approach girls. If I can help it, I don’t even talk to girls. They follow me, they approach me, they talk to me, first. Those are the rules I go by.”

August 26, 2016, Friday, 11:32 PM

Reeling from the encounter, tears pricking at her eyes, and most definitely wanting to avoid the crowd, Anne tries to find the nearest exit. There’s a door on the side of the kitchen, so she goes for that, relieved to see it leads to an porch outside.

She sits against the railing, pulling her knees up to her chest. She tries to take deep breaths but chokes on them, so she just gives in and let’s herself cry instead.

The sound of footsteps approach, so Anne puts her head on her knees.

“Are you okay?”

Great, another guy, she thinks, why are there so many of them at this school?

“Perfect,” she says, “thanks.”

“Why are you crying?”

She looks up at him. He’s tall, with longish brown hair that curls around his ears, kind brown eyes almost hidden by his bangs. He’s wearing a leather jacket that matches his eyes almost exactly, though he probably doesn’t know that. Guys never notice things like that.

“I’m not,” she insists, sniffling.

He sits down next to her and passes her a tissue.

“For your non-tears,” he explains.

“Thanks.”

“Mind if I join you?”

She shrugs, looking down at her lap.

“You kind of just did.”

“I just– it’s just some guy,” she says, finally answering his question, “it’s stupid, I only just met him tonight.”

“What did he do?”

“Nothing too bad just…reacted poorly when I told him I wouldn’t hook up with him tonight.”
“What made him think that you would?”

“We kissed.”

“That’s a bit of a leap on his part.”

“That’s what I thought. But apparently not.”

“What did he do?”

She really, really doesn’t want to talk, or think about it, anymore.

“Doesn’t matter.”

“That bad, huh?”

“It’s– I’m fine.”

“I’ll kill him for you.”

“Oh my God! No, not that bad,” she laughs.

“I don’t mind. I hate it when guys make girls cry.”

“Your kill count must be pretty high, then,” she quips.

“I’m Henry, by the way.”

“You’re–you’re the guy that hooked up with my sister? Already? That was fast–”

“What? No. Who’s–”

“All I know is that it was with someone named Henry. I didn’t really get a good look at him? So I assumed…”

“No, ah– if I had to hazard a guess the guy on campus who’s hooked up with most– ah, other people’s sisters– is Henry Tudor.”

“Oh yeah, that’s who she said he was.”

“I’m Henry Percy. My friends call me Harry, though…if that makes it easier for you to distinguish between me and the guy that probably hooked up with your sister, given his rep.”

“He’s well known then? Mary– my sister– was gravely offended when I didn’t know who he was.”

“He’s well known as the campus lothario,” he confirms, “also as the son of Henry Tudor the 1st.”

“Who’s that?”

“Founder and CEO of Red Dragon? Only the largest smartphone conglomerate in the world?”

Anne shakes her head.

“I’m sure you have one of their– here,” he says, pointing to the phone in the see-through wallet next to her, “yeah, see? I can even tell from the logo on the back, that’s a Red Dragon phone. Tudor conceptualized that, he revolutionized– sorry,” he says sheepishly, noting her glazed expression, “business major.”
“It’s alright. Oh,” she exclaims, snapping her fingers, “are you…in Boheme’s Macroeconomics?”

“Yeah, are you?”

She nods.

“I must not have noticed you. Seems impossible, though.”

Anne smiles.

“Well, I sit in the back,” she says coyly.

“How did you get the class, if you don’t mind me asking? I’m a junior and I had to be waitlisted.”

"I could be a junior," Anne insists.

"Are you?"

“No. I took the prreq’s in high school– we had a program called Running Start, where you could take community college classes for credit. And I wrote an essay explaining why I wanted to take the class and I sent it to Boheme when I was applying for enrollment.”

“I see. And what name would that be under?”

“Pardon?” she asks, brow furrowed.

“I introduced myself. You still haven’t,” he teases.

“Oh, sorry. Anne Boleyn.”

The shake hands. He holds hers…longer than strictly necessary for a handshake; she’s pretty sure of that.

“I better get going,” she says, the first to withdraw her hand.

“Me too– promised my friends I’d meet them here.”

“I’ll see you Tuesday,” she says, getting up from the porch.

He gets up too, reeling a bit, legs pricking with pins and needles, “You– you will?”

“Yes. In Macro,” she clarifies, bemused.

“Oh. Right.”

“Thank you for making sure I was okay. Most people would’ve just walked past.”

“Any time.”

August 27, 2016, Saturday, 9:03 AM

“Hey,” Henry asks, tying his shoes, legs hanging off the side of his bed, “you have any luck last night?”

“Was starting to look that way,” Brandon says, flicking through Instagram on his phone, “but didn’t
"pan out."

"Her choice or yours?"

"Hers," he says shortly, "but it’s fine. Shouldn’t have settled that early in the night, she wasn’t that great looking."

"You were a gentleman about it, I hope?"

"I didn’t rape her, if that’s what you’re asking," he scoffs.

Henry stops his movements and glares at his friend, his face a quiet storm brewing.

"Did you fulfill the bare minimum requirements of human decency? No, that’s not what I’m asking," he snaps, "nor is it being a gentleman to do so."

"What’s your--"

"I mean: did you accept rejection graciously? Tell her no worries, you’d see her around...that sort of thing?"

"Ah…no, not quite."

"What did you say?" Henry asks, rubbing his temples like he can’t believe he’s having this conversation.

"May have called her a tease," he admits sheepishly.

"Brandon!" he exclaims, taking his friend by the shoulders, "that is unacceptable. I’m not going to let my reputation be ruined by my friend being an asshole."

Henry pats Brandon on the shoulder, a fatherly gesture. He takes a seat on his bed and lights a cigarette (strictly prohibited in dorms, of course, but he started in boarding school and he’s not about to stop now).

"Tell me what happened."

"She was—staring at me, watching me while kissing another girl—"

"Really? Who?" he asks, grinning, more intrigued than before.

"Lizzy Blount."

"Huh," he says, eyes gleaming with possibilities, "uh, and?"

"They stopped, she left. I followed her—"

"First mistake."

"What?"

"I don’t follow girls. I don’t approach girls. If I can help it, I don’t even talk to girls. They follow me, they approach me, they talk to me, first. Those are the rules I go by. It’s much easier that way, and it makes rejection less likely."

"How do you get them to follow you?"
Henry smirks and points to his face.

“But besides that– I wink and leave.”

“You…?”

“Make eye contact. Wink. And then. Leave,” he snaps his fingers, “works like a charm.”

“And you do this anywhere?”

“Anywhere. Classes, parties, Starbucks, bars. It’s what I did last night.”

A knock sounds on the door.

“Come in,” Henry calls, putting his cigarette out on an ash tray.

Brandon recognizes her from last night. When her back is to them, he mouths, "That’s what you did last night."

Henry shushes him silently, though his playful expression conveys he’s not truly offended.

“I got us coffee,” the girl says, freezing in her steps when she sees Brandon.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know…you were here, or I would’ve gotten you one. I only had five bucks on me anyway, but…”

“Thanks, babe,” Henry says, taking a paper cup from her and giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“Here,” he says, pulling a twenty dollar bill from his pocket and handing it to her.

“Oh, no, really, it’s fine—”

“I insist,” he says with a smile.

She takes it.

“Thanks. I have to get going—”

“No, come here,” Henry pulls her down for a kiss.

Brandon, feeling awkward being in the same room as them, walks over to their open window. Looking down at the courtyard, he sees his failed conquest, laughing and walking with another girl– Anna? He thinks he’s seen her before in Chem class.

She seems fine to him. She can’t have been that bothered by what he said, maybe Henry made too big a deal about it.

Maybe he can apologize and still have a chance with her–

A guy with long hair waves and the two girls stop to talk to him. Anna makes herself scarce.

He may recognize the guy– Tom, yeah, he remembers him as the lead singer of a band that played covers at a lot of campus parties last year.

They talk for a beat, then continue down the path together.

So much for that.
“I really have to go,” she says, giggling, “but I’ll see you later?’”

“Of course. Bye, Mary.”

“Nice to meet you,” she calls out to Brandon, though neither of them introduced themselves.

“Sure, same to you.”

“Nicely done,” he says as soon as she leaves, “sure you’re not giving her the wrong idea, though?”

“What do you mean?’”

“Letting her stay over, ‘babe’, ‘of course’, kissing…”

“I kiss,” he says, affronted, taking a sip of his coffee.

“Only when you’re about to fuck,” he says bluntly, “otherwise that’s girlfriend stuff. Or so you’ve said.”

“Nah, she’s cool. She said she’s not looking for anything serious, and y’know, I actually believe her?” he says, as if he’s even surprised at himself.

“A lot of girls lie about that, but I don’t think she is.”

“Still…best to be careful, no?”

“True. Let’s get ready, shall we? Lacrosse is in…” he checks his watch, “shit, fifteen minutes.”

From: 323-651-81
To: Anne Boleyn
Sent: August 27th, 2016, Saturday, 11:00 AM

Tom Wyatt wants to be friends on Facebook. You have 1 mutual friend in common. Reply “1” to confirm or go to link

From: 323-651-80
To: Thomas Wyatt

Anne Boleyn has accepted your friend request. Reply to send her a message or visit her timeline at link

From: Mary Boleyn
To: Anne Boleyn
Sent: August 27, 2016, Saturday, 1:01 PM

so…you 2 are…friends?

From: Anne Boleyn
Stop stalking my Facebook and go study.

From: Mary Boleyn

Harsh much? I had a great night btw, thanks for asking

From: Anne Boleyn

You’re welcome! For distracting his friend, who’s a DICK, btw.

From: Mary Boleyn

Oh no, I’m sorry! I owe you one for sure. Hope he wasn’t 2 bad…he was nice to me when we met this morning! A little standoffish, maybe. R u ok?

From: Anne Boleyn

I’m fine. Actually, I kind of…met someone last night?

From: Mary Boleyn

OMG, who??!

From: Anne Boleyn

Henry Percy

From: Mary Boleyn

Just looked him up on Fbook! Soo cute!
OMG wait– did we both hook up with Henry’s last night? That would be wild!

From: Anne Boleyn

I KNOW. No…you know I don’t hook up.

From: Mary Boleyn

Had to ask!

From: Anne Boleyn

Anyway…what are you up to today?

From: Mary Boleyn

Had to go finish making copies of Bio textbook from library…they are so strict here. It’s due not only by date but time or there’s a late fee, and it was due at 10 AM! So stupid.

And now I actually AM going to study, missy.

From: Anne Boleyn

Same, I have a presentation due Monday. Wanna come over and we can study together?
From: Mary Boleyn

Yes! And we can talk more about last night.

From: Anne Boleyn

See you soon!
Chapter Summary

"don't fuck with the boleyn girls, i guess."

From: Anne Boleyn
To: Anna Seville
Sent August 29, 2016, Monday, 3:00 PM
Can I friend request him yet? It’s been 2 days!

From: Anna
No! Be cool.

From: Anne
Ugggh! Fine.

From: Anna
You’ll see him tomorrow. Just get there early so there’s an open seat next to you.

From: Anne
You’re a genius!

From: Anna
I know.

From: 323-421-342
To: Anne Boleyn
Sent September 2, 2016, Friday, 11:00 AM
Henry Percy wants to be friends on Facebook. You have 1 friend in common.
Reply “1” to confirm.

From: Anna Seville
To: Anne Boleyn
Sent September 3, 2016, Saturday, 1:06 PM
That song was totally about you.

From: Anne

What?

From: Anna

Tom’s? At the party last night? “Hair like night/eyes like oceans?”

From: Anne

My eyes are brown.

From: Anna

He was talking about depth, not color.

From: Anne

Mmm. And he told you this?

From: Anna

No, but it was OBVIOUS.

From: Anne

You flatter me.

From: Anna

He was staring at you!

From: Anne

He has a gf.

From: Anna

Who’s not here…why not ask if they're open? It's not implausible.

From: Anne

Anna!

From: Anna

What? He’s hot.

Anne:

I can’t. There’s just– too much history there.

From: 602-291-3498
To: Mary Boleyn

Sent September 9, 2016, Friday, 9:30 PM

You looked cute in your uniform.

From: Mary

Who’s this?

From: 602-291-3498

Guess~

From: Mary

…Henry?

From: 602-291-3498

Mnhmm.

“Siri, save 602-291-3498 in contacts as Henry Tudor.”

From: Mary

I had dance team rehearsal yesterday…but I didn’t see you?

From: Henry

No. My friend Will is sports photographer for school newspaper. Showed me his photos, yours as “the hottest girl he’d ever seen”

From: Mary

Aw!

From: Henry

And I got to say, “I know her”.

From: Mary

How did you get my number?

Henry:

Facebook.

Mary:

Creep!

Henry:
You love it ;)

Mary:

Psssh…

Henry:

Free tonight?

Mary:

No…sorority duties. :( 

Henry:

Bummer. Later?

Mary:

Sure!

From: Francis Valois

To: Mary Boleyn

Sent September 17, 2016, Saturday, 10:20 PM

Are you dating Henry Tudor?

From: Mary

Hello to you, too

From: Francis

Don’t be cute.

From: Mary

Don’t be rude!

From: Francis

Just answer the question.

From: Mary

Why do you care?

From: Francis

Not into sharing.

From: Mary
I’m not a fucking dessert!

**From:** Francis

You’re dating him.

**Mary:**

I’m not. We’ve hooked up a few times, is all.

**Francis:**

Wow.

**Mary:**

Never said we were exclusive…and you’ve fucked three girls on the dance team this month alone! So don’t even.

**Francis:**

I’d be nicer to me if I were you.

**Mary:**

What is that supposed to mean???

**Read:** 11:01 PM

**From:** Mary

**To:** Francis

**Sent September 17, 2016, Saturday, 11:59 PM**

Francis???

**From:** Mary

**Sent September 18, 2016, Sunday, 12:30 AM**

Fine. We are NEVER hooking up again.

**From:** Mary

**Sent 1:00 AM**

You’re a dick.

---

**From:** Mary Boleyn

**To:** Anne Boleyn

**Sent September 18, 2016, Sunday, 3:00 AM**

I am so done with men.
From: Anne Boleyn  
Sent 3:02 AM  

What happened?

From: Mary  

Francis happened.

From: Anne  

I told you…Anna said her friend dated him last year and that he was super jealous and possessive.

From: Mary  

Weren’t even dating tho…

From: Anne  

What was wrong with Henry?

Mary:  


Anne:  

Really?

From: Mary Boleyn  

Sent 3:15 AM  

Yes!

From: Mary Boleyn  

Sent 3:17 AM  

No…

Anne:  

What then?

Mary:  

Honestly…he always wanted to go down on me.

Anne:  

????

Mary:
Whatever! I’m not super into that.

Anne:

??!!

Mary:

I prefer giving over receiving.

Anne:

????!!!!

Mary:

Shut up!!

Anne:

????????!!!

Mary:

ANYway….I was running out of excuses to put him off. 
First time we hooked up I lied and said I was on my period. 
Second time said I had just gotten a wax and it was too sensitive down there. 
Third time said I had a stomachache and wasn’t in the mood, he was actually rlly sweet, said I could just come over to watch a movie and we didn’t have to do anything, so did that.

Anne:

Wow.

Mary:

So then I just stopped texting him and he stopped texting me.

Anne:

Is it awkward? Do you have any classes together?

Mary:

Just French I. 
It’s not too weird, we still say hi and stuff. He grabbed a soda for me in the caf the other day, we wave at each other at the gym…

Anne:

V mature of you two.

Mary:
Right? V different for me.

Anne:

Francis was…immature, I’m guessing?

Mary:

Very.
Fuck him.

Anne:

Or…don’t.

Mary:

ha, ha, ha.

Anne:

I'm hilarious-- you don't have to tell me.

From: 326-651-78

To: Anne Boleyn
Sent September 19, 2016, Monday, 8:30 AM

Henry Percy has written on your timeline

“Happy birthday, cutie”
Reply with your comment or “like”

From: Anna Seville

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent September 24th, 2016, Saturday, 6:00 PM

Where r u?

From: Anne Boleyn

In the library, why? What’s up?

From: Anna

There are some rumors going around about Mary.

From: Anne

What rumors?

From: Anna
People are saying that she’s a prostitute? To pay for college?

**From: Anne**

What the hell???

**From: Anna**

They’re calling her “Beta Whore”. Francis is probably behind it.

**From: Anne**

Are you sure?

**From: Anna**

All signs point to it. This guy was saying he “had it on good authority” that one of his frat brothers paid her because she’d “do stuff nice girls wouldn’t”. He’s in the same frat as Francis. Last year he started a rumor that my friend had an STD after she broke up with him.

**From: Anne**

Thank you for telling me.

---

**September 24, 2016, Saturday, 6:15 PM**

“Siri, call Katherine Aragon.”

“Okay, well, don’t tell me to call you if you’re just going to let it go to voicemail–”

“Excuse me! *Excuse* me!”

“NO RUNNING!”

“What the…okay, this girl just shot out of the library like a bat out of hell…that was weird… anyway…I have a test Monday so I have to–”

“Young man, there’s no phone calls allowed in the library, I’m–”

“Do you know who I am?”

“Excuse–”

“My father practically built this library. Watch your tone.”

“*Sir*–”

“*Gottagoloveyoubye!*”

---

**From: Charles Brandon**

**To: Henry Tudor**

**September 24, Saturday, 6:32 PM**
Dude, where are you?

From: Henry

Library. French is kicking my ass. What’s up?

From: Brandon

You know Francis Valois?

From: Henry

Hate that asshole. Why?

From: Brandon

I just saw this girl run up to him at the Victor Hugo fountain and I shit you not, she just starts screaming at him! She said he was “lucky Mary even gave you the time of day”, called him some choice words….

From: Henry

Mary…Boleyn?

From: Brandon

Yeah, probably. Don't know any other Mary's.

From: Henry

That’s why she stopped texting me…

From: Brandon

Guess so. Anyway, she just starts whaling on him!

From: Henry

That’s hilarious.

From: Brandon

Then Tom Wyatt and Henry Percy are there, trying to get her to calm down, trying to hold her back but she’s not having it. She's all “LET ME GO” and she pushes Valois, who’s like twice her size, into the fountain!

From: Henry

Sounds amazing. Wish I had been there.

From: Brandon

Yeah. Don’t fuck with the Boleyn girls, I guess.

From: Henry
Girls?

From: Brandon

Oh yeah that’s the other thing…the girl that pushed him is the one that was a bitch to me at that Beta Thau party.

From: Henry

You’ll have to be more specific.

From: Brandon

Dick. The one that was kissing Lizzy Blount?

From: Henry

Oh, yeah?

From: Brandon

Yeah, turns out she’s Mary’s sister. The other Boleyn girl.
"you had a girl in your bed and you roped your schmuck of a friend into doing the errand for you."

From: Anne Boleyn
To: Henry Percy
Sent October 3, 2016, Monday, 6:19 PM
Are you going to the Virtue Masquerade?

From: Henry Percy
To: Anne Boleyn
Nah, seems like a bit of work. And I like to pick my own costume.

From: Anne Boleyn
Oh.

From: Henry Percy
Are you?

From: Anne Boleyn
I promised Mary I’d go…and I already auditioned for a principal role in the pageant.

From: Henry Percy
Sorry, wish I’d known. I already agreed to a friend’s party.

—

From: Mary Boleyn
To: Anne Boleyn
Sent October 4, 2016, Tuesday, 7:01 PM
Jen just told me you’re playing Perseverance! Yay!

From: Anne
Ok.

From: Mary
What’s wrong?
October 5 2016, Wednesday 5:00 PM

“This envelope was outside our door,” Brandon calls out, throwing his bag on the floor and throwing the letter at Henry.


“Interesting.”

“A paper letter? How 90s,” Henry says, ripping the envelope and lifting out the parchment inside.

“You are cordially invited to the Virtues’ Masquerade, a night of revels, magic, and dancing…blah blah….attendance is not taken lightly. All attendees will need to send their measurements to email address blah blah blah…be available for costume and mask fittings and if selected, will need to take mandatory ballroom dancing lessons to learn the introductory routine…”

“Christ!” Brandon says, tugging his shoes off as he sits on the floor, “I’m not doing that shit.”

“It’s on Halloween,” he says, “there’s a number to RSVP to…’PS: the ratio of genders has already been decided for this event, 10:1 girls to boys.”

“Sounds like a lot of work,” Brandon gripes.

“Brandon, were you even listening? 10 to 1! Girls to guys!”

“I don’t know…”

“That’s a golden ratio, my friend. It’s worth it,” Henry declares, typing the phone number on the invitation in on his phone, “I’m going, even if you’re not.”

“Well if you’re going, I’m going.”

“Course you are.”

—

From: Henry Tudor
To: Charles Brandon
Sent October 10, 2016, Monday, 2:30 PM

Hey, can you do me a favor?

From: Brandon

Probably, what is it?
From: Henry

Pick my little sister up from the airport tomorrow morning? Have a makeup exam. You can use the promo credit for Uber, I’ll send it to you.

From: Brandon

You trust me with your sister?

From: Henry

Yes. Why shouldn’t I?

From: Brandon

You know me…;-)

From: Henry

Gross. She’s my sister. She’s 17.

From: Brandon

Ok, my bad.

From: Henry

Do I need to get someone else to do it?

From: Brandon

No, it was just a joke.

From: Henry

Don’t joke about my sister.

From: Brandon

Ok, sorry.

—

From: Margaret Tudor
To: Henry Tudor
Sent October 11, 2016, Tuesday, 7:00 AM

you couldn’t come yourself? rlly?

From: Henry Tudor
To: Margaret Tudor
Sent 9:12 AM
I told you, I had a makeup exam.

From: Margaret

before 9 am? please. you had a girl in your bed and you roped your schmuck of a friend into doing the errand for you.

From: Henry

No, actually, haven’t had one in a month. Don’t be cross.

From: Margaret

that’ll make katherine happy…

From: Henry

How is the hotel?

From: Margaret

fine. your friend is boring :p

From: Henry

I enrolled you in a masquerade for Halloween. Your 1st dance lesson is tomorrow.

From: Margaret

dance lessons? i’m a debutante. i’ve been in ballet since the cradle. don’t need dance lessons.

From: Henry

Don’t be a brat. It’s a specific routine. You need to send measurements for the costume, too.

From: Margaret

i don’t want to go to a fucking masque.

From: Henry

Too bad. Dad had to shell out a lot of money to get you a role in the pageant.

From: Margaret

you are the literal worst.

From: Henry

Yell at dad, not me. Said you needed ‘structure’. Doesn’t want you ‘gallivanting around Los Angeles’.
From: Margaret

he just wants you to watch me.

From: Henry

That too.
You think I want to have to watch my little sister on Halloween?

From: Margaret

so don’t.

From: Henry

It’s cute that you think I have a choice in the matter.

From: Margaret

you got in trouble at boarding school all the time…no one was sent to watch you.

From: Henry

It’s different for girls.

From: Margaret

that’s bullshit.

From: Henry

I never did a naked dare at school, tho. Don’t know what you were thinking.

From: Margaret

whatever.
is dad’s card charged to the room?

From: Henry

Assume so. Why?

From: Margaret

getting everything from room service.

—

From: Katherine Aragon
To: Henry Tudor
October 15, 2016, Saturday, 11:45 AM

Is it true you haven’t slept with anyone in a month?

From: Henry
Always a pleasure.

From: Katherine

Is it true?

From: Henry

Margaret?

From: Katherine

Yes.

From: Henry

Yes, it’s true.

From: Katherine

Oh, Henry!

From: Henry

It doesn’t mean anything. I’ve been busy, that’s all.

From: Katherine

I know you are capable of being faithful to me.

From: Henry

This doesn’t change anything. I’ve always told you we would be monogamous once we’re married.

From: Katherine

Yes, I know.

From: Henry

I love you.

From: Katherine

I love you, too. I miss you.

From: Henry

Miss you, too.

—

From: Jennifer Parker
To: Anne Boleyn
Are you really 34-24-34?

From: Anne Boleyn

Yes, why?

From: Jennifer Parker

I hate you.

From: Anne Boleyn

…thanks?

From: Margaret Tudor
To: Henry Tudor Sr.
Sent October 20, 2016, Thursday, 9:23 PM

I want to go shopping.

From: Henry Sr.

After the stunt you pulled? Absolutely not.

From: Margaret

I would rather walk around naked than wear last season’s clothes.

From: Henry Sr.

No. Credit cards.

From: Margaret

Naked it is, then. Don’t think I’m bluffing–being naked outside is the reason I got expelled, remember?

To: Margarettudor@gmail.com
From: PayPal
Sent October 20, 2016, Thursday, 9:53 PM

Ms. Tudor,

A $10,000 deposit has posted to your account. Please allow 3-5 business days to process any transfers.

Thank you for choosing PayPal!
From: Anne Boleyn
To: Mary Boleyn
Sent October 25, 2016, Tuesday, 1:04 PM

…why did I just see Lizzy run by with a condom wrapper in her hair?

From: Mary Boleyn

Oh. That.

From: Anne Boleyn

?????

From: Mary

Guys have started throwing them at her.

From: Anne

That’s disgusting. Why?

From: Mary

She made the mistake of sleeping over at Alpha Delta…the frat house where they throw stuff at girls going down the stairs from the bedrooms? They yell ‘go to church’ at them and post videos of it online. It’s called the “walk of shame series”.

From: Anne

WTF!!!

From: Mary

Yeah, it’s fucked up.

From: Anne

Rampant misogyny.
And bullying— they put this garbage online?

From: Mary

Yeah.

From: Anne

Then they’re stupid to boot— they’ve basically posted evidence against themselves for anyone to find.

From: Mary

She’s just gained a reputation for sleeping around in general, I think that’s part of it too.

From: Anne
So??

From: Mary

I’m not defending it!

From: Anne

I don’t see anyone throwing condoms at Charles Brandon. Or Henry Tudor. Or Tom! He has his fair share of groupies.

From: Mary

You’re not wrong…

From: Anne

Damn right I’m not wrong.

—

From: anonymous
To: admin@whitehalluniversity.edu
Subject: URGENT– bullying and hazing videos
Sent October 26, 2015, Tuesday, 11:28 PM

Thought you may want to know what your “prestigious” fraternity has been up to.

link

—

October 26, 2016, Wednesday, 11:56 AM

“Attention, please. Francis Valois, Peter Hastings, Richard Buckingham, and Brett Williamson– your presence is required in the dean’s office. ASAP.”

—

From: Mary Boleyn
To: Anne Boleyn
Sent October 26, 2016, Wednesday, 11:59 AM

Just heard the intercom announcement– was that you?

From: Anne Boleyn
To: Mary Boleyn

O:-)

From: Mary

You're a badass-- you know that, right?

From: Anne
:)
October 31, 2016, Monday, Halloween, 10:33 PM

Anne doesn’t really care about her starring role. Henry’s not even here to see how lovely she looks, she thinks bitterly as she looks at her reflection in the floor length mirror, since he RSVPed to some other party.

She spent three hours in the hair and makeup chair, so it’s only right that she looks amazing– her long, black locks pinned magnificently at the nape of her neck, a lace crown pinned to the top of her head. Her cheeks are iridescent with shimmer, her cheekbones, highlighted by a professional “contour specializing makeup artist”, are absolutely striking.

They even put the shimmer on her collar bones, making them stand out even more than usual on her small frame. The makeup artist had asked, quite politely, if it would be alright if she added some shimmer to her cleavage as well– insisting she could put it on herself if it made her uncomfortable, and Anne had agreed to be shimmered. So that was also enhanced.

The white and gold mask they tied around her head make her dark eyes look mysterious.

She could be unrecognizable, she muses to herself, getting closer to the mirror to check her lip gloss. If someone didn’t know her very well, they wouldn’t know her at all in this gown, this mask.

As she smooths her hands over the cinched waist, turning side by side in the mirror to make sure the ribbons running up and down her hips are still tied, that the gauzy straps are still firmly on her shoulders, she thinks that she could be anybody tonight. Absolutely anybody at all.

It’s a comforting thought.
The ballroom is pitch black, save for the projector on stage; a backdrop that imitates falling snow.

Jen Parker, by her own persistence or some act of God (Anne assumes), somehow managed to convince the Intercontinental York Hotel to look the other way on the fire code, as the stage and the edges of the ballroom are decorated with real lit candles on pedestals.

A voice booms over the speakers:

“Ladies and Gentlemen! The time has come…for the 21st Century Fairy Tale Virtues' Masquerade!”

The crowd cheers.

Anne turns around within the “castle” she and the other principal ladies are inside, peeking through the keyhole shaped window built high on one of the “towers”.

The “castle” was built by professional set designers over the course of October. It’s set on the wall, all the way up to the chandelier hanging from the ceiling. Stairs descend down the far left and far right towers.

Jennifer Parker’s father is an Oscar-winning movie director and had the connections to set everything up.

As part of the payment for the masquerade, all players and guests have signed waivers agreeing to be filmed with the understanding that any footage may be used in the movie “21st Century Fairy Tale”.

“This must have cost a fortune,” Anne whispers to Mary, also sitting perched behind the top of one of the towers.

“Shhh! They’re about to start.”

Mary is playing the role of Kindness, Anne is Perseverance. Jennifer Parker in Constance. Margaret Tudor, younger sister of Henry Tudor, is playing Beauty (Jen balked at the idea of a high school girl in a starring role but her father couldn’t refuse the sum Henry Tudor Sr. paid to have her cast). Bounty is played by Lizzy Blount. Mercy and Pity are played by the Beta Tau Twins, Greer and Jessa.

No one knows their identities, not even the eight men cast as virtuous gentlemen. Nor do the virtuous ladies know theirs.

The only person on stage is an ASL translator, the spotlight on her as the speech continues.

“On this Hallow’s Eve, eight Virtuous Ladies have been captured by Evil Spirits!”

“It’s showtime,” Jen whispers, making one final adjustment to her lace crown and smiling.

Jen stands up and the spotlight finds her.

“The ladies– Constance!”

“Beauty!”

The spotlight follows Margaret, standing haughtily, hands on her hips.

“Honor! Kindness! Bounty! Mercy! Pity!”

“And…Perseverance!”
Anne is standing, beaming by the time the spotlight lands on her. Then she worries—perhaps she shouldn’t be smiling, given that she’s been taken prisoner? But no, looking around, she can see that the rest of the ladies are doing the same.

“The Evil Spirits!”

The spotlight falls to the floor, where the “Evil Spirits”—actors and dancers, both men and women, hired by the production company—bare their swords. Their prosthetics are ghastly: stitches running down their faces and necks, eyes made to look like zombies’, fake blood splattered on their clavicles and collarbones and smeared in their hair.

“Only the Virtuous Gentlemen can save them!”

“Well, this isn’t very feminist,” Anne whispers from the corner of her mouth.

“Perseverance!” Jen hisses through a tight smile.

Anne nearly jumps out of her skin—Jen’s far over, on the other side of the castle…she must have sonar bat-hearing.

“Shut up!” Jen whisper-shouts, smiling still.

Mary stifles a giggle. Anne nods remorsefully, embarrassed and slightly frightened by the older girl’s intensity.

Eight men run out from behind the stage bearing shields. They are all don in Shakespearean clothes, black and gold, with gold crowns atop their heads and gold and black masks covering their faces.

The spotlight goes to each as their names are announced:

“Liberty!”

“Attendance!”

“Loyalty!”

“Pleasure!”

That jawline is Brandon, Anne recognizes it immediately. Anne grimaces. If she gets paired with him she’s feigning some illness, she doesn’t care what Jen does to her. Nothing in the world sounds less appealing than having to dance the three minutes and fifty four seconds of the rehearsed song with him.

“Gentleness! Nobleness! Youth! And…Amorous!”

October 31, 2016, Halloween, 11:37 PM

“Each gentleman can save only one lady!”

A woman dressed as a fairy dances out from behind the stage, holding two handfuls of scrolls, which she hands out to the Gentlemen, one by one.

“You have this moment to read the name of your lady, chosen!–by destiny.”

“Again, the ladies are: Constance! Beauty! Honor! Kindness! Bounty! Mercy! Pity! And
Perseverance!

The spotlight lands on “Perseverance”, the name on Henry’s paper. He can’t make out much from this far away, but she seems pretty enough. They’re all dressed in the same white gowns, the same masks and lace crowns.

“On the count of three, the rescue begins!”

“1…2…3!”

Confetti, fake snow and glitter fall from the ceiling, landing on the Gentlemen as they make a mad dash through the fray of Evil Spirits.

Henry runs past them, the fastest, runs up the stairs that loop around the side of the castle, competitive as always. Perseverance runs towards him to the top of the stairs.

“Perseverance!” someone hisses, “you’re supposed to wait for him to rescue you!”

Perseverance laughs, Henry grabs her hand, grinning from ear to ear at his triumph–

And everything is different.

Fractured.

It’s as if she is a star and everything surrounding her has faded to night.

He cannot hear the violins that were playing before, cannot hear the clamor of the Evil Spirits below, he cannot hear a goddamn thing.

He cannot see a goddamn thing.

But her.

_Her._

The glitter, confetti, and “snow” drifts down, soft and slow as actual snow. Each second that passes feels like a minute.

She is a study in dualities: the inky hair and milky skin, her eyes— _God, those eyes!_—sparkling with mischief, lock into his, fiercely, as if she could peer into the depths of his soul with one glance. They are startling against the white mask, dark brown with flecks of gold, highlighted by the gold in the mask as well.

She is a book he wants to keep reading, and he is utterly, hopelessly lost in her.

She seems familiar, yet also seems like a complete stranger. He’s not sure which is true, maybe the truth lies somewhere in between.

She laughs, a wondrous, musical sound, and the music plays again; the people surrounding them move faster than before. Henry snaps back into reality and finds his voice, unearths his charm.

“Perseverance,” he says, kissing her hand, “I have saved you.”

“Amorous,” she answers with a graceful curtsy, scanning the ground below.

“Forgive me, but you haven’t quite saved me yet.”
“Do you trust me?” he asks, exultant.

“I—”

“Do I look strong? To you?”

“I–” she laughs, blushing, taking in his muscular forearms, “yes and–yes!”

Henry scoops her up in his arms, like a husband walking his bride over the threshold, and rushes down the stairs with her, holding his shield out and pushing through the Evil Spirits. She is laughing, almost screaming, her arms wrapped around his neck, her legs thrown over his arms. He can feel her cold nose pressed behind his ear– it’s a sensation he doesn’t mind.

“I’m going to let you down now,” he warns, depositing her onto the dance floor once they’ve run past the Spirits, to the cheers of the crowd.

A fanfare sounds and the loudspeaker announces:

“First pair to the dance floor: Amorous and Perseverance!”

The crowd applauds, their masks and gowns glittering in the distance.

“Lady and Gentleman, take your places!”

Perseverance takes her place on one line, Henry takes his place on the opposite–they had rehearsals in this ballroom, and both have their starting positions memorized.

October 31, 2016, Halloween, 11:48 PM

Violins play to Lorde’s “Royals” as Anne looks across the dance floor at her chosen partner, who is smiling, flushed (and she's almost certain she is, as well), and out of breath from the exertion of carrying her, running with her in his arms, all the while fighting off their play-actor “enemies”.

The “fairy” runs in between them, scattering rose petals as she does so.

“Are you alright?” he shouts over the music, hands clasped behind his back.

“Perfect,” she answers, somewhat breathlessly, “and yourself?”

“Perfect.”

Other couples start to file in. Margaret Tudor stands next to her, shooting some contemptuous side-eye as she does so, then nods to Amorous.

They must know each other, Anne thinks.

She sees that Brandon is Margaret’s partner. Anne steels herself to not even glance at him and looks straight ahead instead.

Every couple has now arrived.

The starting chords of the song she’s been rehearsing to all month begin: the Vitamin String Quartet tribute to Taylor Swift’s “Blank Space”.

There’s a woman onstage with a microphone, so Anne assumes Jen hired a singer, someone to cover
the song as well– which makes sense, given that they learned their dance routine to the lyrics for easier memorization.

Each couple bows and curtsies to each other before beginning.

She steps forward, palm to palm with Amorous, as they turn–

*saw you there and i thought/oh my god, look at that face/you look like my next mistake/love’s a game, wanna play?*

Unfortunately at this measure she has to cross, and spin with Brandon as well.

*new money suit and tie/i can read you like a magazine*

“Boleyn,” he says shortly.

“Brandon,” she says, matching his tone, “I see you finally learned my name.”

*ain’t it funny/rumors fly/and i know you’ve heard about me*

“Well, you’ve made quite a name for yourself.”

*so hey, let’s be friends/dying to see how this one ends*

At this line she has to return to her assigned partner. Anne dances around a standing Amorous in a circle, sweeping the skirt of her gown as she does so.

*grab your passport and take my hand*

At which he grabs her hand and pulls her flush against his chest–

*i can make the bad guys good for a weekend*

–and spins her out onto the floor,

*so it’s gonna be forever*

spins her back in,

*or it’s gonna go down in flames*

spins her out,

*you can tell me when it’s over*

spins her back in,

*if the high was worth the pain*

lifts her in his arms,

*got a long list of ex lovers/they’ll tell you i’m insane*

spins her in his arms as she arches her back…

*cause you know i love the players*
They withdraw, as rehearsed, and each dancer claps on the word “game”:

   and you love the game!

They come together again.

At “‘cause we’re young and we’re reckless”, they more or less repeat the same moves, only in reverse order.

---

**Halloween 2016, midnight**

“They are you?” Henry asks, leading her down the length of the dance floor.

   cherry lips, crystal skies/i could show you incredible things

She dances another circle around him as she answers teasingly, “I’m Perseverance– remember?”

   stolen kisses, pretty lies/you’re the king baby, i’m your queen

“And do you,” he asks, leading her to the left, then the right, “persevere?”

   find out what you want/be that girl for a month

“Always,” she says, curtseying low to the floor.

   wait the worst is yet to come, oh no!

Henry leans down, lifts her chin up gently. Her eyes meet his, matching his steady gaze, a challenge.

He lets go, then takes her hand to pull her up.

   screaming, crying, perfect storms/i can make all the tables turn

He dips her low, pulls her up to him again.

“And are you,” she counters, “amorous?”

   rose garden filled with thorns/keep you second guessing like “oh my god, who is she?!”

At this point he holds her from behind, moving side to side. He keeps her there, a beat too long, to whisper to her, “Always.”

   i get drunk on jealousy/but you’ll come back each time you leave

They have to speed up their movements to catch up in the routine, and he has to pull her close at:

’cause darling i’m a nightmare dressed like a daydream

The chorus repeats at “so it’s gonna be forever”, so they copy the routine from the same lines earlier.

Before the interlude begins, all the ladies return to their line, as do all the gentlemen.

   boys only want love if it’s torture

The ladies run forward, halfway across the floor to their partners.

   don’t say i didn’t/say i didn’t warn ya
Then they kneel and stretch their arms out, palms up, to their partners, in a beseeching gesture.

*boys only want love if it's torture*

They get up, then start to walk towards the gentlemen, snapping their fingers to the beat.

*don’t say i didn't/say i didn’t warn ya!*

On this line they turn around and trust fall into their partners’ arms, only to be carried and spun around again.

*so it’s gonna be forever…*

Now they repeat the chorus dance, all the way up until:

*…and you love the game!*

Everyone claps in unison, then continues—

*but I’ve got a blank space, baby…*

The partners kneel together, holding hands:

*and i’ll write your name.*
awake in someone's dreams

Chapter Summary

Henry’s been like this for days. At night he tosses, turns, and mumbles in his sleep. Last night Brandon threw a shoe at his side of the room and he didn’t even startle. Henry may be the world’s deepest sleeper, but Brandon’s hardly getting any.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

October 31, 2016, Halloween

The music stops and the guests cheer.

Anne is still kneeling, breathless from the intensity and speed of the dance, still holding hands with Amorous.

He’s staring at her as if she is the only thing in the world not spinning. It makes her feel strangely untethered, like maybe she’s not really here at all.

“I’m–”

“Henry!”

She is beaming, radiant, this mystery girl, Perseverance, but for some reason; though she is saying his name, she is no longer looking at him.

“Yes? How did–”

She runs past him, and some man—shorter than himself, he notes bitterly—catches her in his arms, just as Henry did not minutes before.

Of course she has a boyfriend. It would be stupid to assume otherwise; she’s too beautiful to not.

“You came!”

“I wanted to surprise you.”

“You did!”

“You look pretty…you looked amazing out there.”

Henry can’t bear to look anymore, so he searches the crowd for Margaret, attempting to distract himself.

“Brother?”

She finds him first. He smiles at her. She is seventeen and all limbs, and he hasn’t seen her in over a year. It’s like looking in a mirror— the same copper Tudor hair, the same stormy blue-grey eyes.
Perseverance and some other Henry are, unfortunately, still in his view, kissing.

“Margaret,” he says, kissing her on the cheek, “you look lovely.”

“Are you alright?” she asks.

“I’m– I don’t feel well,” he says, closing his eyes and pressing his hand to his forehead, as if he could will the sight away.

“Do you have a headache? I think I have some ibuprofen, I can go back to coat check to–”

“No, no, it’s alright. Think I just need to rest– I’m sorry to leave, but– Brandon will take care of you. Is that alright?”

“That’s fine. Henry–”

“Text me when you’re back at the hotel? Please. So I don’t worry.”

“Ok, I will. Feel better!” she calls out, watching her older brother as he leaves the ballroom– he never leaves the party first, she thinks, but apparently there’s a first time for everything.

Henry finishes changing into his regular clothes in the men’s room and walks out into the hall, ready to call it a night, when he hears:

“Henry!”

He turns to see Lizzy, sitting on the floor in her expensive white gown. She waves at him with her left hand, holding a brownie in the other. There’s chocolate smeared at the corner of her mouth.

“Hey, babe,” he says, making a seat next to her on the floor and giving her a kiss on the cheek.

He takes off his crown and leans over.

“Is that what I think it is?”

“Mnhmm,” she says, sucking the crumbs off her fingers, “but they’re expensive.”

“Fair enough,” he says, finding a $20 in the pocket of his jeans.

She takes it and gives him the rest of the brownie.

“Who were you?” he asks, resting his head against the wall and tucking a loose blonde curl behind her ear.

“Bounty. You?”

“Amorous.”

“Amorous…like *amour*?”

“Yes, like that.”

“Fitting, for you!” she exclaims, guileless as ever.

“I thought so.”
She looks at him, tilting her head sideways.

“Don’t be sad,” she says, patting his knee, “you’re Henry Tudor! Life is good.”

“Of course. Life is–wonderful,” he says, schooling his face in a smile and taking her hand.

“Lizzy, will you—” his voice is shaky, this is least confident Lizzy has ever seen him, and she can’t help but wonder why, “would you come home with me? Spend the night?”

“Of course,” she says, a surety to her nod. And then, because it seems like he could use it, she kisses him.

He breaks it first and rests his head on her shoulder.

“Why are you so nice to me?” he asks.

“Because I like you, silly.”

“Lizzy, I don’t—”

“I don’t want a boyfriend. I’m like you. I get bored easily,” she admits with a shrug, “and it’s ok. It’s ok that sometimes you don’t answer your phone. For a week I couldn’t even find my phone!”

He laughs at this.

“Honestly!”

She laces her fingers with his and they sit together, peacefully, listening to the sound of violins drifting down the hall from the ballroom.

From: lpointe@whitehalluniversity.edu

To: henrytudor@whitehalluniversity.edu

Sent November 1, 2016, Tuesday, 9:12 AM

Mr. Tudor,

You are falling behind in my French course. You currently have a C- in my class.

I’m aware that you’re one of Whitehall’s star athletes. If your grade drops much below its current state, I’m afraid you won’t be able to participate in our athletics department for much longer.

I am recommending you for our peer-tutoring program.

Don’t be confused by my use of the word ‘recommend’– it will be required that you attend to pass my class, at least until you reach a B- or above.

I’ll email you a list of available dates and times for your first tutoring session ASAP.

Please let me know of any schedule conflicts you may have.

~~~
He’s in a forest. Leaves fall down in waves.

She’s there, in the same white dress, a green and gold cape draped over her shoulders, a gold circlet around her head.

“You came,” she says, voice wavering and distant.

“Of course.”

“I’m happy you’re here.”

“I feel like I know you,” he says, cupping her face in his hands, “feel as if I have always known you.”

“In another life?”

“Perhaps.”

She takes off her cloak and sweeps it over the ground, like a blanket. He watches her, mesmerized, as she lies down on her back, gazing up at him, her dark hair splayed around her.

“I’ve been waiting for so long, Henry...ever so long...”

He joins her, arms pinned on either side of her, and showers her with kisses: on her jaw line, her shoulders, her neck, her clavicle, everywhere but her mouth.

“Don’t—don’t torture me!”

“Don’t torture me,” he counters.

He slides a hand up her skirt, slow as honey, tracing her leg in circles, upwards and upwards... finally, he cups the warm center of her. She gasps, a quick intake of breath, eyes beseeching.

“Better, sweetheart?” he asks.

She gives the slightest nod; his other hand is in her mouth, her teeth grazing his fingers.

“I still don’t know your name,” he whispers, urgent, “tell me your name.”

“Henry—”

“No, that’s my name,” he snarls, frustrated, “tell me yours, please—don’t deny me this.”

“Henry, please—”

What’s your name,” he begs of her, tears sliding down his face, falling onto hers, “what’s your name? What’s your name?”

November 7th, 2016, Monday, 10:29 AM
“Brandon.”

“Huh?”

Henry rubs his eyes, his friend a blurry outline standing over him.

“Name’s Brandon,” he says, chuckling, “since you keep asking.”

Henry shoots him a dirty look, snatching a shirt from his nightstand and throwing it over his head.

“Not funny.”

“Oh, Grumpy,” Brandon says, picking up his keys and notebooks from his desk, “see you later.”

“Where are you off to so early?” He asks irritably, already lighting his first cigarette of the day.

“It’s 10:30, Henry.”

“Shit!” he yells, running to the bathroom, “why didn’t you wake me up?”

He slams the door behind him. Brandon hears water running.

“Well, excuse me for not having your schedule memorized!” he shouts, getting annoyed himself now.

Henry’s been like this for days. At night he tosses, turns, and mumbles in his sleep. Last night Brandon threw a shoe at his side of the room and he didn’t even startle. Henry may be the world’s deepest sleeper, but Brandon’s hardly getting any.

A nightmare while asleep, a nightmare while awake: irritable, quick to anger, and chain smoking like his life depends on every drag (when really the opposite is true).

---

**November 8th, 2016, Tuesday, 8:04 AM**

Anne yawns over her cereal. She hasn’t been sleeping well lately. The fluorescent lights of the caf feel like death against her skull, almost as if she’s hungover, with none of the fun from the night before…only the consequences of the morning after.

“Careful,” Mary warns, lifting a spoonful of oatmeal, “don’t fall asleep in your cocoa puffs.”

“I won’t– doesn’t sound too bad, though. I don’t think I slept a wink last night.”

“It’s all the coffee you drink,” Anna says, sipping her tea, “you gotta lay off that stuff.”

“I don’t think so,” Mary says, genuine concern wrinkling her brow as she takes her younger sister’s hand, “Anne always drinks a lot of coffee and she usually sleeps fine.”

“It’s true,” Anne says, stirring her cereal around the bowl, “I started drinking coffee at 12– probably stunted my growth in the process. I’m totally acclimated. A cup of it to me is like what a cup of warm milk is to others.”

“Oh!” Anna snaps her fingers, then leans in, conspiratorially, and whispers, “Japanese legend says that if you can’t sleep at night, it’s because you’re awake in someone’s dreams!”

“Really, Anna,” Anne says, rolling her eyes, “be serious.”
“You never know,” Anna says, not easily put off by her dorm mate’s grumpiness—she knows she’d be nicer to her if she’d slept.

“Must be running through those dreams, then,” she says dryly, giving up and sloshing her cereal into the trash bin and getting up to return her tray, “because I wake up sore all over.”

Anna quirks an eyebrow at Mary.

“You know what that means,” she says.

“No,” Mary asks, “what?”

Anna leans towards her and whispers, “Sex dreams.”

“Oh, Anna. You beautiful, tropical fish.”

“I got that reference! And I’ll take it. Rashida Jones is a babe.”

Chapter End Notes

"oh, anne, you beautiful tropical fish" is a quote from the wonderful tv show "parks and recreation”. no copyright infringement intended.
"She speaks ridiculously fast, he notes. Henry’s honestly surprised he’s able to keep track. Everything about her is distracting: the dark waves of hair spilling around her shoulders, the sweep of her lashes as she writes, her mouth moving, her hand resting on her slender neck, how she smells as she leans close to him, like peaches and jasmine, pointing each thing on her list to him with the end of her pen…"

**November 9, 2016, Wednesday, 11:31 AM**

Henry waits at his assigned table, tapping his pen against the edge of it, impatience personified.

There are groups of two and three clustered around their tables, all quietly working, heads bent over books and papers, flash cards being raised and put back into neat, tidy piles.

_Tutoring_. Never in his life has he been subject to—well, no, actually, his father hired private instructors in almost every subject and sport, for all his children, during the summers in which they were home.

This is different, though. With everyone _seeing_ him. Knowing he’s struggling in some subject or another…it’s embarrassing.

The door swings open. A girl scans the room, lights on him sitting alone. She waves, comes over, and pulls out a chair.

She puts down a folder and a workbook on the desk. The light catches the “B” around the gold chain on her neck.

“You’re here for French I, right?” she asks, taking off her sunglasses and tucking them into a pocket on her blouse.

“Yes, I…”

“I’m Perseverance, remember?…”

…_lifting her from the stairs, running through the fray_…

…_dark brown eyes, alight, stark against the bright white and gold of the mask_…

“It’s—you,” he says, finally (stupidly)

“Yes…” she trails off, brow furrowed.

“It’s you—you’re,” he clears his throat, “you’re—you’re late.”

**November 9, 2016, 11:32 AM**
Anne checks her phone.

“**I’m two** minutes late,” she says tersely.

It took her fifteen minutes and five different kinds of concealers to cover up the dark circles under her eyes, and she still didn’t totally succeed. She must have lost track of time.

“My supervisor told me you were an **hour** late last time,” Anne snaps, “which I wouldn’t have even known, because I left after the first fifteen, but yes, I’m two minutes late. You’ll have to excuse me.”

“Now,” she says, diving right in, “that that’s out of the way, let’s start…you have,” she says, glancing at her notes, “a C- in the class, so you need at least a B, preferably an A, obviously, on your next exam, to lift your grade. You turn in all the homework assignments, do well in oral,” he smirks and she glares, “**presentations**, but are struggling with quizzes and tests…”

“You must think I’m stupid,” he says quietly, looking at this hands.

“No, not– not at all,” she says, not unkindly.

Maybe she’s been too harsh. Lack of sleep has made her edgy. Mary, Anna, and her newer friend, Megan Sheldon, have asked her if she’s on her period at least a dozen times this week, collectively.

“Learning a new language is really hard– especially if you’re learning after the age of five; it’s a brain thing. And it’s not like this is high school French. The other students I tutor say this course is really fast paced, that you’ve gone through a dozen chapters alread–”

“How many do you speak?”

“Besides…English?”

“Sure.”

“Four,” she answers, not wanting to sound boastful.

He grins from ear to ear.

“But it’s– ‘really hard’?” he asks teasingly.

“You look familiar,” she says, the earnestness of his genuine smile sparking some sort of memory, “do we…have any classes together?”

“My name isn’t anywhere in that folder of yours?”

“No. Default confidentiality here.”

“I’m…amorous.”

“And I’m a Virgo. What does–”

“No, I’m–”

He leans in closer to her and asks, in a low, velvety voice: “and do you? Persevere?”

She stills.

“I–I,” she clears her throat, fiddling with her necklace, “without the mask, I didn’t–”
“It’s alright. I didn’t either, at first.”

She’s blushing despite herself, remembering his hands on her waist, the intensity of his “always”, him kissing her hand…

“What’s your name?” he asks.

“I’m Anne. Anne Boleyn, but you don’t have to tell me–”

“Mary’s sister?”

“Yes…you know Mary?”

“I do. Henry Tudor.”

**November 9, 11:35 AM**

This…this is all…a bit much for her sleep-deprived brain, honestly. All the connections, everything she’s heard about him, before meeting him, is about the guy sitting across from her…and so, that means, the guy sitting across from her, that *he’s* the one her thoughts have been straying to this past week, and he’s…kind of her sister’s ex?

How is she supposed to check his conjugations if all she can think about are Mary’s words (*he always wanted to go down on me*), and Lizzy’s (*honestly? he just knows what to do*) and…and…him pulling her flush against him on the dance floor, how it felt to be held by him, his hands warm on hers…

“I hope you’ve heard of me,” he admits, “otherwise that means I’ve made no impression.”

“Yes, of course,” she answers in a clipped tone, “Mary has only ever spoken of you fondly. And honestly.”

Henry’s not stupid; he can hear the implied accusation, read in between Anne’s lines.

“And I her.”

“That’s good to hear. That you had nothing behind…what was being said.”

“Of course not. Did you think–”

“I didn’t know what to think.”

“It was Valois. I would never–”

“I’m glad,” she says, “anyway, water under the–”

“Fountain?” he quips.

“The…?”

Oh. *That.*

“You were there?” Anne asks, feeling a blush rise to her face.
“No, sadly I only heard about it second hand. Sounded incredible, though.”

She shrugs, trying to downplay her blushing with some nonchalance.

“He bruised her reputation, I bruised his tailbone. Way I see it, he’s the one that got off easy.”

“You may be my hero.”

“Well,” she says, “don’t call me your hero till we see your grade up—and we’re running out of time—for the session…do you have any homework that you haven’t handed in yet?”

He nods, and passes the worksheet over to her.

“What do you like?” Anne asks, reading over his work, occasionally making a mark with her pen.

You.

“Like? What do you mean?”

“Do you like movies?”

Is she asking him—no, no she can’t be.

“Of course.”

“There are quite a few French movies on Netflix. The best one on there is ‘Amélie’.”

She passes his worksheet back to him.

“I can assign you all the extra work in the back of your textbook, but I find that lazy. One of the best ways to learn grammar and vocabulary in a new language is by watching a movie in that language.”

“I’ve…never thought of that.”

“Of course. We’re taught to view movies as solely entertainment, not educational. But I recommend ‘Amélie’. Your assignment is to—wait, let me write this down.”

She speaks ridiculously fast, he notes. Henry’s honestly surprised he’s able to keep track. Everything about her is distracting: the dark waves of hair spilling around her shoulders, the sweep of her lashes as she writes, her mouth moving, her hand resting on her slender neck, how she smells as she leans close to him, like peaches and jasmine, pointing each thing on her list to him with the end of her pen…

She looks over the essay he has due, his notes (which she criticizes for their messiness), goes over the chapter his class is currently on, and before he knows it she’s shaking his hand, asks “same time next week, right?” and all he can do is nod, dumbly.

For some reason there’s a four-poster bed in this forest, but that doesn’t matter, that’s not what Henry’s paying attention to, because….

They’re kissing on top of it, she’s wearing a golden dress, he feels as if his world is ending (but only in the best possible way) he rips the bodice of the dress, kissing her from her neck to her navel, throws her skirt up and—
November 10, 2016, Thursday, 8:30 AM

This won’t do Henry thinks, waking up twisted in his sheets, biting down on his fist, this won’t do at all.

November 11, 2016, Friday, 7:35 PM

Anne is sitting cross legged on her bed, reading Fitzgerald’s ‘Beautiful and the Damned’ for her Lit class when she hears a knock on the door.

Puzzled, she marks the book and leaves it on her pillow. Anna must have forgotten her key, she supposes, walking over to open the door.

“Anna, did you get Thin Min-”

Henry Tudor is leaning against her door frame.

“Don’t have Thin Mints, I’m afraid. Sorry.”

“How did you know–”

“Well that’s— a complete invasion of privacy,” she snaps, crossing her arms over her chest, suddenly very aware of the fact that she’s not wearing a bra.

“We know each other,” he shrugs.

“’I see.’

“We know each other…well.”

“I see.”

She’s wearing sweats and a Whitehall University sweatshirt, her hair piled on top of her head. Her face is clean. She looks pale– even her mouth is pale. There are dark circles under her eyes, but somehow her skin is still luminous.

“I’m having trouble focusing,” he admits, sheepishly, scratching the back of his head.

“On?”

Anything but you.

“The movie. I need more— guidance, direction.”

“Do you find it boring? Maybe I can recommend—”

“No, it’s not that. Just having trouble writing notes and all the stuff I’m supposed to; need someone with me to make sure I’m staying on the right track, actually watching the movie and paying attention rather than, like… putting it on but just playing Candy Crush or whatever.”

“That’s a little out of my job description,” she says, “so—”
“Oh, no, no, of course I know that. I’d consider it extra tutoring hours. For extra help.”

“Right. But—”

“How much do you get paid per hour? For peer tutoring?”

“We don’t. We just get college credit.”

“Well, that’s expensive, no? Especially here. Movie’s—what? Two hours? Plus time to take notes?”

“Henry, I don’t—”

“Would that be enough?” he asks, taking two hundred dollar bills out of his wallet, “for your time?”

Jesus!

“Um…”

Her mind is racing with all the things that would take care of, all the things her scholarship doesn’t cover. Laundry detergent, shoes (her boots are worn down to the ground, her converse duct-taped on the soles), coffee, new highlighters, pens, note cards, scarves, hats, gloves…

She could go off-campus. She could go to Starbucks, for God’s sake, and not have to count her change before deciding what to get…she could go to the movies after 5 pm.

He looks at her, expectant.

“Um,” she says, voice slightly strangled, she clears her throat, “yes, that’s fine, just— give me a second?”

“Of course.”

She shuts the door behind her, then leans against it.


She can do this. This is fine.


No. Big. Deal.

7:45 PM, Friday

Cute boys don’t ever appear out of nowhere when you’ve just done your makeup and are wearing your cutest clothes, Anne thinks, oh no.

They’ll always, however, make random surprise appearances when you’re wearing sweats and you’ve just wiped your face clean of makeup and your lips are chapped and you’re not wearing a bra and your hair’s pulled up in a haphazard bun and you haven’t slept in days…

Not that he’s that cute, she thinks, lifting her sweatshirt over her head and sliding a bra in under the sleeves of her shirt. Not that she should be thinking of his attractiveness at all, objectively or not, given that he’s something like her sister’s ex and his best friend’s a dick and she has a very
sweet, very cute boyfriend.

Not that she cares what he thinks about what she looks like one way or another, she thinks, putting her sweatshirt back on and pulling out her chapstick from her kangaroo pocket and smashing it aggressively over her dry mouth.

He’s so handsome he’s almost ugly, actually, she decides. Those bee stung lips are ridiculous. He must go through a tub of lip balm a day. And those cheekbones? Pfft. The angular nature of his face just looks STUPID contrasting with the softness of his mouth. His elfish ears? Stupid. He should grow his stupid copper-blonde peach fuzz out, cover them up.

Like, what is he trying to prove, anyway? Looking like that; looking at her in that way, that terribly intrusive way that makes her feel like she’d being stripped bare…it’s just rude, honestly.

She’s only doing this because he’s paying her for extra tutoring hours and she needs the money.

That’s the only reason.

That’s the only reason there can be.

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**7:47 PM, Friday**

“The wifi connection is kind of crap here,” she says, “really slow, so I’m just going to put my DVD on.”

“That’s fine,” he says, leaning against the door frame still, hands in his pockets.

She waits for her laptop to read the disc, then pauses it as soon as the credits start.

“Can I get you anything?” she asks, walking over to her desk and pouring herself some coffee from her French press, “coffee?”

“Coffee? This late?”

Anne shrugs, opening the door of her mini fridge to grab a half gallon of milk, “I haven’t been sleeping lately, no matter what I do. This at least tricks my body into thinking it doesn’t mind being awake.”

“I’m sorry. We could do this another time, I don’t want to keep you from–”

“No, it’s fine,” she says, waving a hand, “I won’t sleep regardless. Might as well earn some money.”

“How does this work?” he asks, walking over to her desk, pointing to the French press, “I mean, I’ve seen it before, but never seen how it was made.”

“You mean you’ve been served it before,” she says, smirking, pouring milk into her coffee, “sure you don’t want any?”

“Sure, if you have enough.”

Anne grabs another styrofoam cup from the pack and pours it half full.

“You just take this,” she says, grabbing a container of her ground coffee, “and you put some spoonfuls into the bottom of the glass, depending on how strong you want it. Then you fill it to the top with boiling water, let it sit for four minutes, and then plunge it,” she taps on the lid of the press,
“with this thing.”

“'Cafe la llave’,” he reads the label, "is it good?"

“Very. Milk?”

He shakes his head, so she hands him his cup. Then she puts the French press in her fridge, and pulls the desk to her bed so they can see the laptop screen.

She transfers the laptop to the desk and sits on her bed to face it. He joins her.

“It’s Latin American,” she continues, “I try to get it at Food4Less when I can.”

“Food for…less?” he sounds out, as if the words are foreign to him.

“The grocery— oh my God,” Anne puts a hand over her chest and laughs, delighted, “you don’t know what that is, do you?”

“No,” he says, offended, “so? Why’s that funny?”

“I forget,” she continues, almost laughing hysterically now, “I forget that you’re a Tudor…you…you probably get your groceries delivered by chartered plane—”

“No, I don’t! That’s ridicule—”

“—unpacked to your golden fridge by fairies—so of course,” she chokes out, eyes watering, “of course you don’t know what Food4Less is! How could you?”

“You done now?” he asks.

“Yes. I think so.”

“You done, amusing yourself at my expense?”

“Probably.”

“Fairies…” Henry grumbles, opening his notebook, “honestly. Of all things.”

“I’m sorry,” she says, “I haven’t slept in so long I think I’m bordering on hysteria. Shall we watch?”

“Please.”
When Amélie pulls the cord to her mean neighbor's cable during his sports game, Henry throws back his head and laughs. When the goldfish tries to commit suicide he says "what the fuck" and Anne has to pause and tell him to relax and pay attention to the words.

"Je n'aime pas dans les vieux films américains quand les conducteurs ne regardent pas la route."

"What'd she say?"

Anne pauses the movie again, exasperated.

"Henry, the point of this is that you figure it out. I already know."

He sighs.

"OK," Anne says, "I know you know what 'j'aime' means, so tell me what 'je n'aime' -"

"I don't like."

"Right. And then a few of those words are cognates, so that should help you."

"Films….American…conductors?"

"And what's the man in the car doing?"

"Driving. Oh. Okay, so…I don't like it when in films..."

"What kind of films?"

"Oh, right. American films. Why do they put the adjective after the noun?"

"Why do we put the adjective before the noun?"

He glares at her.

"Because that makes sense, Anne."

"Henry--"

"Alright, alright, fine. I don't like it when…wait, there's an adjective before films too, that makes no sense--"
"That part's not super important at this level, but if you know what--"

"Vieux? Old?"

"Yes!"

"So... I don't like it when in old American films... drivers... don't..."

"In English, what is regard another word for?"

"Look."

"Right. So?"

"I don't like it when in old American films... drivers don't look... route? I don't like it when in old American films driver's don't look at the route?"

"You got the gist. It's 'I don't like the way drivers never watch the road in old American movies.'"

"Why watch them, then, if you're just going to complain about Americans? What's her problem?"

"You're offended? Seriously? You're not even American!"

"Yes I am!" he says, affronted.

"Then why do you have an accent?"

"Boarding school in the UK, what else?"

"What else? Yeah, of course, how could I not have known?"

"I don't know."

"Oh my God. Anyway--"

"My mom bought literally every kind of Girl Scout cookie, so I have--"

Anna stops midsentence, stock-still at the doorway with a box in her hands.

Her eyes slide from Anne, to Henry.

"Hi," she says cautiously, "what's up, guys?"

"Studying," Henry answers, innocuous, drinking his coffee, "how are you?"

"Just... y'know... typical Friday night," Anna says, putting the box on her desk and going over to her bed. She sits down, takes her shoes off, and unravels the scarf from her neck.

"Do you want any, Anne," Anna asks, tearing the cardboard top of a box of Thin Mints.

"No," she answers, "I'm good. Would you like some coffee?"

"No," Anna says, putting her noise-canceling headphones on, "I'm good."

"O... kay," Anne says, a little off-put by her friend's behavior.

She continues to help Henry with his notes, adding a note card of the applicable vocabulary to the
He presses play and they start watching again.

Anne feels a buzz from the deep pocket of her sweats and slides her phone out.

   **From: Anna Seville**
   **To: Anne Boleyn**
   **Sent 8:06 PM**
   Why are you watching a movie with Henry Tudor?

Panicked, Anne glances over at Henry, trying to assess whether he's read over her shoulder...his eyes are still on the computer screen.

   **From: Anne Boleyn**
   Anna, he's right here!! What if he had seen??
   And I'm helping him with his French. It's a tutoring thing.

   **From: Anna Seville**
   I know he's right here because I can SEE HIM.
   Really? Huh. I don't think I've seen any of the other students you tutor in YOUR BED. Watching a movie with you. Cozy.

   **From: Anne**
   He's paying me for tutoring extra hours outside of our session. It's not like I'm doing this for fun.

   **From: Anna**
   You're asking for trouble.

"Want to take a break?" Henry asks, nodding to her phone. "You seem busy."

"No," she says, turning her phone on silent, "it's fine."

They're about 20 minutes through the movie. Henry's styrofoam cup is empty, and he starts ripping the top and throwing shreds into the cup.

"**OOOOOH, THIS IS HOW IT STARTS, GOES OFF LIKE A...LAA...**BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN!!"*

Anne glares daggers at her roommate, but Henry mainly looks amused.

"Yeeees?" Anna asks, lifting an ear off her headphones, Chemistry textbook open in her lap, highlighter in hand.

"Nothing. You're just...singing pretty loudly, there. Anna," Anne says, tilting her head, cupping her hand around her mouth and mouthing "WHAT ARE YOU DOING??!!"
"That's just how I study, Anne," Anna explains patiently.

"Is it? Funny how I never noticed."

"You're just playing the movie pretty loud," Anna says, "so...."

"Maybe we can use headphones?" Henry offers, turning to Anne, "d'you have--"

"I have some earbuds but only one of them works. I don't need to hear it, though, I've seen it a few times--"

"Y'know what?" Henry says, closing his workbook, "I have a TV in my dorm, and we have our own modem, so Netflix shouldn't be a problem...and that way we won't bother you."

Anna backpedals, "Oh, no, it's not that big a dea--"

"No, we don't want to disturb your studying...you're premed, right?"

"She is," Anne confirms, swinging her legs over the side of her bed, "sounds good to me, just let me grab my charger..."

"You can--"

"Bye, Anna!" Anne calls.

Henry opens the door for her and waves to her friend, who waves back, unsmiling.

November 11, 2016, Friday, 8:08 PM

"Well, she doesn't like me," Henry says mildly.

"You're not used to that, are you?"

"Used to what?"

"People not liking you."

Henry stops to open the door of the entrance to the girl's dorm for her.

"What do you mean?" he asks, leading her down the pathway.

There's a biting wind that makes the branches of the trees lining the pavement shiver. Anne crosses her arms to protect herself from the cold, but settles on pulling her hood up and tugging the strings tight to shield her face.

"What do you think I mean?" she retorts.

"I don't know," he asks, stopping for a bicyclist that crosses their way and swerving around to face her, "that's why I'm asking."

She stops as well; apparently this is something he needs to settle now.

He has a commanding presence, an energy that radiates confidence. Anne is sure he's used to people being alternately awed and intimidated by him, but she doesn't bend so easily.

A less steady person would feel the intensity of those stormy blues burn right through them, but
Anne burns right back.

"I'm not sure why you're getting offended--"

"I'm not," he insists.

"You seem it. But regardless, I mean what I said. You're used to people liking you. So I don't know why you're trying to make me say I mean something else. Because I won't."

"Not everyone likes me."

"No. But you think they should."

He stares at her. She stares back.

It's cold (Los Angeles does get cold, usually at night, their tourists always walk around wearing t-shirts and shorts with puzzled and offended looks; as if they're looking for a refund), and she would like to ask if they are, eventually, going to walk to his dorm or not, but that would feel like losing.

"Do you?" he asks softly.

"Do I what?"

Henry crosses his arms, finally breaks eye contact and looks to the side instead of at her, as if the library in the distance is suddenly fascinating.

"It's this way," he says abruptly, nodding to the direction of the library and taking off, not looking behind to see if she's following, "you coming?"

She does, matching his pace to walk besides him.

"I guess," he says, "it wouldn't bother me if I understood why. Why she doesn't like me, that is--"

"God, I don't know. Maybe it's girlfriend solidarity; her being rude to you because she thinks you snubbed Mary, though I know that's isn't what happened...maybe she just doesn't. I don't know."

"It's whatever," he says with a shrug, "but for the record, I don't think people should like me."

"If you say so."

"I don't--"

"You expect them to. That's why it bothers you that she doesn't. You're a Tudor," Anne says with a shrug, "so it makes sense."

"Why do you keep saying that like it's a bad thing?"

"It's not. And I'm not. It just is. You're a Tudor and I'm a Boleyn, and our names mean something."

"Means what?"

You sure are stuck on what things mean, she thinks.

"For you or for me?"

"This is it," Henry says, nodding to the 4-story brick building up ahead.
Anne thinks maybe that's it, that he's finally letting this weird interrogation go, but as he opens the door he says "me"; so apparently he's just tenacious as hell.

"You want me to read you a list of things you are?"

"Top floor," he says, heading to the stairs, "and yes."

"You're...charming, bright, athletic, rich... attractive," she admits.

8:10 PM

Henry smirks at this. Damn right.

"And as for being a Tudor...well, I don't want to assume. I didn't grow up in the Tudor household."

"Go ahead."

"You were taught that you were important. That your name was important and that you were too, for carrying it."

They are still in the entrance of the building, the start of the hallway. The walls are covered in bulletin boards.

Henry's at a loss, mainly because she's hit the truth of his childhood and upbringing in so few words.

8:11 PM

Anne sees a muscle in his jaw twitch.

"Am I wrong?" she asks, hugging the notebook to her chest.

Henry walks past the bulletin boards without saying a word.

Anne follows him, all the way up four flights of stairs, in complete silence.

He unlocks the door at the top of it, and leaves it open for her, but doesn't look back, instead sitting on his bed and unlacing his shoes.

She's not wrong, apparently, but she's beginning to wish that she was.

Anne closes the door behind her (just because he's being impolite doesn't mean that she'll forget her manners), in awe at the size of his dorm.

The room is huge--the whole floor. There's two queen beds (unheard of in dorms), one near the door and one next to the window, facing the courtyard, with matching dark blue bedspreads.

Sports equipment is sprawled around the floor, hampers by each side of the couch, both desks and nightstands.

There's another door that she assumes is a bathroom, on the opposite wall facing the beds.

Anne had no idea there were any dorms on campus this big. She wonders if the girls' dorm has an equivalent or if this is the only one.
8:15 PM

Henry switches the TV on, uses his game console to select the Netflix app, and pulls 'Amélie' up.

"Where were we?" he asks.

"I think twenty or so minutes in," Anne answers, standing, waiting for him to sit.

He walks over to a case of water bottles under the window and grabs two, comes over to her and hands her one.

Anne takes it, thanks him, gives a cautious sip.

Henry sits on the couch.

Anne sits next to him, but not too close-- she does have to look at his notes but she doesn't want to get too "cozy", as Anna accused.

"And what does being a Boleyn mean?" he asks.

A Boleyn?

Oh. "[Our names] mean something".

Well, for Anne it meant being known as Mary's Sister. It meant glasses and AP classes and braces, eating lunches in the library, her hair in two plaits.

It meant a lack of confidence that existed until she spent a summer abroad in Paris, traded the glasses for contacts, lost the braces and gained a sense of fashion. She let her hair down from its braids and let the boys that worked at the supermarché and the boulangerie flirt with her, sometimes flirted back. She went to cafes and finally spoke and argued of everything she'd read, and realized she could keep up with adults in debates pretty decently.

Then it meant love notes in her locker and teachers writing her recommendations, debate team and speech awards, joining Mary at parties and bars. Just like that, Mary was Anne's Sister instead of the other way around.

It meant being her father's favorite and all the pressure that came with that title.

Being a Boleyn meant $50 for each A and $100 for each 5 on an AP exam; meant clipping coupons at night, meant aprons and uniforms from each part time job hanging in the laundry room always.

But she's not going to mention any of that; obviously.

"We were taught that we're only as important as we make ourselves," she answers instead, trying to wrap it up neatly.

"So you learned four languages to prove that you are?"

"Something like that," she says tersely, "are we going to watch this or not?"

8:35 PM

"This isn't that fun," he notes, after the 20th time she's paused the movie and asked him if he recognizes the subject pronoun, the grammar, the vocabulary from his recent chapters.
"Well, it's not supposed to be \textit{that} fun. It's supposed to be more fun than just studying, without neglecting studying altogether."

Henry shrugs, and Anne feels herself snap--she has two hundred dollars in her pocket but his attitude's getting on her fucking nerves. It's almost like he doesn't care about improving his grade, but she doesn't know why else he would pay her for her time ("\textit{Always}," he whispers).

"You'll absorb a little bit of it if you just watch it all the way through, but not enough. You have to write down the words you're hearing to make them stick. And you have to pay attention more than you normally would if you were just watching a movie."

"You hungry?" he asks, absently, flipping through his phone, "I'm starving."

"I guess."

"Order a pizza," he says, passing her his phone, "my treat."

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{9:10 PM}
\end{flushright}

"This is bizarre," he says, picking toppings off, "what is this?"

"Banana peppers. I told you you should pick your own," she says.

"I didn't think you would pick such a monstrosity. Like, really. I'm amazed."

"You have no one to blame but yourself."

"I just didn't know it was possible to mess up food this badly--what--what on \textit{earth} are you doing?"

"I'm eating."

"It's not a sandwich," he says, scandalized, watching as she bites into the folded slice.

"It is now."

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{10:03 PM}
\end{flushright}

"By the way, I forgot to tell you--you're a really good dancer."

"Thank you. I took ballet."

"Really?"

"Yes. Recommended by my wrestling coach."

"Well, it worked. You're very graceful. I had to take extra lessons back in October, to learn the routine--dancing was always Mary's thing."

"And you? What was your thing?"

"Reading. And climbing trees."

"At the same time?"

"Sometimes. What was your thing?"
"Pretty girls. And sports."

"At the same time?"

"Hilarious."

From: Henry Percy

To: Anna Seville

Sent November 11, 2016, Friday, 10:33 PM

do you know where Anne is? i've been texting her but no answer...i got her some chamomile tea because i know she's had trouble sleeping.

From: Anna Seville

To: Henry Percy

Sent 10:41 PM

actually she's FINALLY sleeping and i don't want to risk waking her...maybe leave it outside our door? or come by later?

From: Henry Percy

Sent 10:43 PM

oh sure np. glad she's sleeping

From: Anna Seville

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent November 11, 2016, Friday, 10:49 PM

i covered for you. i really hope i didn't need to.

11:11 PM

By the time Amélie has her ear pressed against the door, Nino on the other side, Henry feels something warm and heavy on his shoulder.

Anne is passed out, the top of her head resting against his collarbone, breathing deeply.

He sits with her for a few minutes. He finds he doesn't mind at all, watching a movie with this girl asleep on his shoulder.

When the credits roll, he lifts her legs, carefully, onto his lap and scoops her up.

He sets her down in his bed and tucks her in.
Henry puts his wireless headphones on and starts the movie over, this time with English subtitles instead of French, as she instructed in her notes.

Her guidance has helped him quite a bit, because he now churns out flash cards with relative ease, pausing and pronouncing them himself, (quietly, so as not to wake her) highlighting corresponding words and phrases spoken in the movie, in his textbook.

Henry feels hyper-focused, almost as if he’s taken Adderall--

Well, not really as if he’s taken Adderall. He was on it when he was younger, briefly, when his father had reached the peak of frustration with his younger son’s rambunctiousness. It only exacerbated the situation, had Henry running, crashing through the house with a broomstick, yelling that he was Harry Potter, knocking over his mother’s Ming vases…

That was before they learned his energy could be channeled and managed easily enough through athletics.

By the time midnight rolls around there's a crop circle of note cards and sheets of paper surrounding his feet, while Anne sleeps peacefully in his bed all the while.

Chapter End Notes

the lyrics anna sings are from colbie caillat's 'brighter than the sun'.

the quote at the beginning is, of course, from the movie 'Amelie'

no copyright infringement intended, neither of these quotes belong to me.
"Do I have a reputation for taking advantage of girls? That is gross misrepresentation."

November 12, 2016, Saturday, 12:00 AM (midnight)

"Your building really doesn't have an elevator?"

"Not to my floor, sorry."

"You know I'm wearing heels, yes?"

"You could take them off?"

"These stairs are not clean."

"Sorry, we're almost there."

"You better be worth it, yeah?"

"Trust me," Brandon says, taking the hand of the girl he met an hour ago and kissing it, "I'm worth every step."

Brandon unlocks the door, and it swings open to his best friend, cross-legged on the floor and writing something, mouthing words as the TV screen flickers.

"You're studying? On a Friday night?"

Henry's head snaps up and he makes a 'shh' gesture, pointing to his bed.

Brandon looks over and sees a waterfall of long, black hair on Henry's pillow. Whoever it is (well, some girl, obviously) is sleeping facing the wall.

His date gives Henry a short wave, then turns to Brandon and asks, "You are other bed, ye--"

Henry shushes her, actually out loud this time. She scoffs, and he takes off his headphones, gets up, and opens the door, gesturing for them to come out as well.

"This is joke?" she asks.

"Yes, Henry," Brandon echoes, "you're joking, right?"

Henry puts two fingers up, mouths "two seconds, please". Brandon rolls his eyes and nods to the girl to follow him out. She rolls her eyes, but does so.

Once they're all outside the room, Henry says, "Look, she's sleeping, I really don't want to wake her-"

"This is my room, too!"
Brandon's date has her arms crossed.

"I'm sorry, can you excuse us a moment?" Henry asks.

She rolls her eyes and takes her phone out of her purse, and says, in a bored voice, "I'd hurry if you want me to stay."

They walk down the stairs, close to the dorm still, as she leans on the wall and texts (hopefully not some other male possibility for tonight, Brandon thinks).

"Look--"

"Don't do this to me, man!" Brandon hisses, "did you see her?"

"Yes, very nice, but--"

"She's Brazilian," he whispers, "please. You can't do this to me, not tonight."

"Here take--hey," he calls out, then, under his breath, "what's her name?"

"You think I know? We met at Lilac. I bought her a drink, she grabbed my ass…I didn't ask questions."

Henry sighs, then calls out, "Sweetheart, could you--"

"It's Simone," she says, sulking over.

"Simone," Henry says sweetly, flashing one of his credit cards "tell me, would you rather spend the night in a shared dorm or a Marriot suite?"

"You have wrong idea," she says, bristling and shoving her phone in her purse.

"Pardon?"

"I'm not a hooker," she says indignantly, storming past them down the stairs.

"No, wait--"

"Henry, I will kill--"

"Look," Henry says, following her down, "wait, listen, that's not--my friend is in there, she's sleeping, I'm studying, and I just don't want to be bothered, but as a favor to my best friend, who I believe you were just interested in--"

"He made me walk upstairs!"

"Yes, it's an old building, but hear me out-- no, look I just wanted to give you guys the card as a favor. No funny business. Hell, you can get room service if you want, I don't care, I have a ton of points…"

They've stopped at the second flight of steps. The mention of room service seems to have made her stop.

"What, are you rich?" she asks, raising an eyebrow at Henry, looking his attire (a ratty sweatshirt and
gym shorts) up and down, skeptically.
"Hella," Brandon confirms.
"How will we get there, if I'm to take this card?"
"My dad's Henry Tudor--"
"No shit?"
"No shit. I have a pretty-much eternal Uber code, from their exclusivity contract."
"I don't know if I believe you."
"Look me up," Henry says, crossing his arms, "I'll wait."
She does, and then she lifts her phone up, examining a photo, then squinting and comparing it to the guy before her.
"Well, fuck. It is you."
"Well, fuck, indeed, Simone. Well, fuck, indeed. So--you in now?"
Simone nods, so Henry hands the card to Brandon with a wink.
"Just put in the address of the nearest hotel and the code I gave you earlier should still work," he tells his friend.
"Ok, but, Henry--"
"Have fun, kids!" Henry calls, walking back upstairs.
"You have good friend," Simone says.
"Yeah," he says dryly, "he's a real prince."

November 12, 2016, Saturday, 1:01 AM

As soon as his hand starts to cramp, Henry piles all the note cards together, closes his books and stacks them, and turns off the TV.

He goes to Brandon's bed, pulls the covers up and lies down, whispers "good night".

Anne sighs, face towards him, mouth slightly parted.

Henry watches her sleep for a moment, then closes his eyes and falls into a deep, dreamless sleep.

November 12, 2016, Saturday, 8:21 AM

Henry wakes up feeling absolutely energized. Anne is still asleep.

Wait-- is she still asleep? She's really, really quiet…

He goes over to check her pulse. Definitely still alive. Just breathing deeply.
He grabs his wallet from his nightstand, deciding to get coffee. No reason, really, just that she made them some last night, and it's the polite thing to do…

He decides to jot down a note first:

**Morning, sleeping beauty,**

**You're welcome to use the shower. There's clean towels in the bathroom.**

-H

Just as he's tying his shoes, her phone starts buzzing and, not wanting to wake her, he takes it. He considers swiping "ignore", for a second, but the screen says Anna Seville is calling, and well…he's never claimed to be a good person.

"Yes?" he answers softly, shutting the door behind him gently and walking down the stairs.

"Anne?"

"Nope," he says cheerily, "who's this?"

"What do you mean, 'who's this'? Every fucking phone says who it is before you answer."

"You sound like you could use some coffee. I'm getting some for us, d'you want me to pick one up for you, too?"

"Does she know you're using her phone?"

"Oh, I don't think so, given that she's still asleep…"

"Did you take advantage of my friend?" she demands.

"I'm offended by that accusation."

"With your rep? Really?"

"Do I have a reputation for taking advantage of girls? That is gross misrepresentation."

"No," Anna admits, "just boning them indiscriminately."

"Indiscriminately', wow-- y'know, this is really rude. I have half a mind to hang up--"

"Look, Tudor, I don't know what your game is, but--"

"I don't have a 'game'. Unless by game you mean trying to improve my education and pay for a few extra hours of tutoring--"

"Yeah, I'm sure you value your education so--"

"--and, anyway, it's not my fault your friend's a narcoleptic who can't stay awake during a movie. You are more than welcome to come over, wake her up, and drag her back to your dorm if you think I did anything untoward."

Anna says nothing, but he can practically feel her fuming.

He's in line at the coffee cart now. More than a few people are looking over their shoulders at him.
He smiles at them-- *always nice to have fans.*

"Look, all we did was study. Then she fell asleep, I kept studying, and then I fell asleep. Think what you want."

"I think you're an ass."

"Well, I can't say you're wrong."

"Tudor--"

"Seville. Do you want me to go back and wake her up?"

"No," she admits in a surly tone.

"She hasn't gotten any decent sleep in a while, am I wrong?"

*Sweet, sweet silence.*

"I plan to let her keep sleeping for as long as she needs. Do you have a problem with that?"

"I have a problem with *you.*"

"Well, that goes without saying."

"Just…"

Anna sighs and Henry can hear some terrible, strangled noise from the other end. He laughs.

"Just tell her I called when she wakes up, please? And that Henry texted her?"

"Who?" he asks lazily.

"Henry Percy, her *boyfr*--"

"Two coffees, please!"

"Tudor?"

"Sorry, what was that? I can't hear you?"

"Tell her that--"

"God, *terrible* reception suddenly, talk to you later!"

---

**From: Charles Brandon**

**To: Henry Tudor**

**Sent November 12, 2016, Saturday, 10:41 AM**

So we're supposed to check out by 11 AM but she wants to stay-- what should I do?

**From: Henry Tudor**
You're welcome :-)  

**From: Brandon**

Yeah, yeah, yeah-- seriously, though, what should I do??

**From: Henry**

Call the front desk and tell them you're staying another night.

**From: Charles Brandon**

It's ok to charge that?

**From: Henry**

It's fine. Take your time

---

**November 12, 2016, Saturday, 11:01 AM**

Anne wakes up in blue, flannel sheets—*wait-- these are not*—these are not *her* sheets—

"Morning."

Henry Tudor is sitting at the desk next to her bed (well, not her bed, the bed's she's sleeping in—*whatever*—everything's fuzzy), typing on his laptop, a bowl of cereal sitting to the left of him.

"What time is it?" she asks groggily, lifting the blankets off of her and swinging her legs over the side of the bed.

"It's 11."

"Oh…wow."

Henry closes a window quickly, then opens another one as she gets out of bed.

"What was that?"

"What was what?"

"You just closed out of something when I came over," she says, looking over his shoulder, "like I'm your teacher walking through rows and you were on Tumblr or something."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"What, were you watching porn?"

"Christ, no! Little early for that, even for me. I was on email--"

"Whatever," she says, rubbing sleep out of her eyes, "sorry I crashed, I should get going…"

---

**11:02 AM**

"You don't have to go."
Reflexively, he pushes the note he wrote earlier into the trash bin--*stupid*. "Sleeping beauty"--*stupid idea, Henry.*

"You can take a shower if you want."

"What, do I smell?"

"No…but I'm sure it's better than the communal. Even a bathroom shared by two guys has to be better than one shared by a hundred girls."

"It's hardly a hundred."

"Fine," he says, crossing his arms, "go if you want. But there's an extra toothbrush in the drawer that's unopened that's..." he coughs, clears his throat, takes a sip of water, "y'know, just always been there. And clean towels. And I bought coffee earlier, but it's probably cold now…"

*God, shut up!*

"Alright, I will...thank you."

"Not a problem."

Henry waits till she closes the bathroom door to pull up the closed draft:

From: henrytudor@whitehall.edu

To: HenryTudor@RedDragon.net

Last saved November 12, 2016, Saturday 11:00 AM

Father,

I've been sitting in on some business courses here, scouting for new talent. The brightest and most innovative student, the most well-spoken, in the top 10% of his class, is by far Henry Percy.

I've attached some articles about him and his accomplishments. Serendipitously, his father also owns Northumberland, one of the biggest and more popular chains that sell smart phone accessories (cases, screen protectors, etc.)

Definitely the one I would most recommend for your current intern shortage.

-Henry
nothing else would fit

Chapter Summary

"It's rude to eavesdrop, y'know," she says, underlining a passage, "were you raised in a barn or something?"

"I was raised in a mansion. At least try to come up with better insults."

Chapter Notes

made a playlist for this story, if anyone wants to check it out

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Henry waits. He's in a forest again, pacing. He's been waiting for a while.

He hears hoofbeats, and sees Anne in front of him.

She's wearing a red gown, tight at the waist, hair flowing around her shoulders. She dismounts from her horse and begins to take off her gloves. Her mouth is stained red. She's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen in that moment and he can scarcely wait to have her in his arms.

Henry rushes up to her. She doesn't look at him, turns her face away when he kisses her on the cheek.

"Sweetheart, I have missed you...I have been counting down the hours until--"

"Tell me this," she interrupts, voice scarcely a whisper, "are you ever going to leave her?"

"My own heart. You know I have been fighting that battle for years--"

"I do know, Henry. But when," she asks desperately, "will it be over?"

"Soon, darling, soon," he soothes, taking her hands in his.

"You've said that many times. And I used to think it true. But it hasn't been true yet, Majesty."

"Anne, it's more difficult than--"

"Don't!" she shouts, wrenching her hands from his, "I can't bear to hear any more excuses!"

"Do you still have a ring on your finger or not?" she continues, throwing one glove at him, "is she still Queen or isn't she?"

"Anne, stop this!"
"I plan to," she says, hitting his shoulder with hers as she shoves past him.

She stalks through the forest, crushing branches in her wake.

"Anne, wait--"

"Don't follow me!"

"Anne!"

He chases after her, a red blur, the long train of her gown trailing behind her through the leaves on the ground.

"Do you think you can have us both?" she yells, walking fast, "do you think I will continue to let you insult my honor in this way?"

"Darling, please try to understand--"

"I have been the most understanding woman on God’s green earth, Your Majesty! And the most patient! I have been waiting, and waiting, and waiting for you to find a way! But it seems a way will not be--"

Anne shrieks, a terrible sound.

"Anne?" he calls, running now, "darling, are you hurt?"

He finds her, lying on her side, leg at a funny angle.

"I tripped," she says faintly, "I tripped, trying to run away from you…"

"Sweetheart," he says, rushing to her side, "come, let me help you--"

"No," she says, tears streaming down her face, "do not call me that again."

"Anne?"

"No more 'sweetheart', no more 'darling'. The next time you call me an endearment," she declares, standing up with a grimace, "it had better be 'Queen'."

November 13, 2016, 8:45 AM

Well, that was weird, Henry thinks as he throws the covers off of him.

He rubs his eyes…the dream is falling away from him in pieces, but he remembers bits.

He's left with vague feelings of guilt, probably residual from the dream-- which is ridiculous, given that it's a dream.

He doesn't mind the 'Majesty' part, though.

November 13, 2016, Sunday, 11:24 AM

Around half an hour ago, Henry went into Whitehall Library with the best of intentions. He was going to find a biography on Napoleon for his Global History paper, but somewhere in between
Ancient Civilizations and World War I, he gave up.

It's not due till Tuesday anyway—he's not sure why he went here on a Sunday morning, like some nerd.

So he's been leaning against this shelf, reading some stupid BuzzFeed article on his phone (He reads, okay? His focus might waver if it's longer than 200 words, but whatever) to keep "up to date on the Millennial Market" (Henry Tudor I's words, not his, he would never say something that sounded so stupid) when he hears footsteps.

He looks up from his phone and sees her at a study station, head bent over a textbook, in between a section on jousting/chivalry and the works of Erasmus.

Henry grabs a random book lying face down on the shelf and hides his face behind it.

Percy sneaks up behind her, grabs her shoulders and says 'boo'.

She doesn't startle at all, but she smiles when he kisses her on the cheek.

"I have to go print something," he says, "see you, princess."

"Bye," she giggles.

Ugh.

Henry waits till her boyfriend disappears from sight before he walks over to the table.

"Princess, huh?"

"Eavesdrop much?"

She keeps reading.

"This seat taken?"

"Yes."

"Great."

He pulls out the opposite chair and sits in it.

"It's rude to eavesdrop, y'know," she says, underlining a passage, "were you raised in a barn or something?"

"I was raised in a mansion. At least try to come up with better insults."

"I can't tutor you again today, I have my own studying to--"

"And really, you two were the ones interrupting me. I was here first--"

"You were the first person in this library ever? Wow--"

"--trying to do some research, so actually, if anyone should be offended here, it's me."

"That so?"

"Yes. But I forgive you," he says with a wave of his hand.
"Thrilled. What are you researching, then?"

Henry looks down, and realizes that there's a book in his hand, still. She grabs it and reads the title aloud: "The love poems of Pablo Neruda?"

"Mnhmm."

"You're in a poetry class?"

"Sure."

"What do you mean, 'sure'?"

"Anyway…'princess'?" he asks, wrinkling his nose, "really?"

"What?"

"Like, is that a regular thing? Does he call you that often?"

"Yes. What's wrong with that?"

"Doesn't suit you."

"Excuse me?" she asks, crossing her arms.

"Doesn't," he says with a shrug, "sorry."

"Says who?"

"Says me. I'd never call you that."

"Why would you be calling me anything in the first place?"

He shrugs again, slides the pen that's been tucked behind his ear. Henry bites the end of it—a bad habit that persists ("Oral fixation", his high school counselor had informed him after he was in her office after a fistfight, chewing on a pen as she scolded him. "You're telling me," he had said with a wink. She kicked him out of her office after that.), smiling around it.

"You tell me."

"What, if we…were dating?"

"Mnhmm."

"In what universe," she demands hotly, "would we be dating?"

"Who knows," he says, all-out grinning now, totally blasé to her obvious irritation, "stranger things have happened."

He's planning on leaving her with that food for thought, even starts to zip his jacket up and puts his phone in his pocket, when she says, "Wait."

Well, well, well. How the tables--have tabled.

"I can take a hint," he says, getting up from his chair, "I'll leave you alone--"

"Just…"
She closes her eyes, as if she can't bear to look at him while she asks, "What would you call me, then?"

Henry makes it seem as if this question takes some serious reflection, though he already knows (has known, since he sat down, actually) how he's going to answer.

"Queen," he answers, as if he's just settled on it, "nothing else would fit."

He watches the color rise to her face, satisfied that his answer has had the desired effect.

There's an apple in his book bag, and he chooses this moment to roll it out and take a bite, staring at her as he does so.

"See you Tuesday," he says, walking away.

_Seems the library wasn't a total bust, after all._

---

**November 13, 2016, Sunday, 11:40 AM**

Anne has just been sitting her, fuming (_burning_) for the last few minutes.

She's furious that she played into his game, right into his hands; furious that her curiosity got the better of her and she asked such a _stupid_ question. Furious at the effect it's having on her.

Henry comes back to the table, printed assignment in hand, and asks, "What's wrong? You okay?"

"Nothing, just," she starts to unbutton her sweater, fan herself, "it's warm in here, no?"

"Not really," he says, opening his laptop.

She feels like she's on fire.

"Maybe I just need water or something."

_Or a long, cold shower._

"Be right back," she says, "watch my stuff?"

"Sure."

She walks quickly to the bathroom, rushes like she's racing to some sort of finish line.

She grabs the handle—_unlocked, fantastic_—and goes to the sink.

The water pressure's weak, but it'll have to do. She puts it on the coldest setting possible and splashes her face, to no avail. It's like she's caught a fever from which there is no escape.

Anne looks at herself in the mirror. Her face is flushed still, and feels warm when she touches it.

Anne opens to the door to the restroom, peeks down the hall to see if anyone's in line to use it.

No one.

She slams the door shut, locks it and presses her back against it.
And then, she starts to do something that would be considered very rude to do here by polite society, something that should not be done in public restrooms.

But, whatever. It's private, a single, locked, and it's not as if she's being unhygienic, really, she reasons with herself…all she had to was dip her hand below the waistband on her skirt, the skirt and sweater tied around her waist are a sufficient barrier between her backside and the door, after all…

As soon as she's finished she goes over to the sink, turns the water on (with her elbow, thank you very much) and washes her hands, three times, in scalding hot water with lots of soap.

"Took you a while," Henry says when she returns to her seat, "sure you're alright?"

"Mmhm" she says, clearing her throat, "there was just, ah-- long line to the restroom."

---

From: HenryTudor@redragon.net
To: henrytudor@whitehall.edu
Sent November 13, 2016, Sunday, 2:09 PM

You have the free time to do this work for me?

I can't say I don't appreciate it, but it'd probably be more appropriate for you to focus on your studies. I know your French grade has dipped recently.

As you know, there are no internships available in our local offices at this time.

Is this Percy amenable to working out of state? Or in Northern Cal?

I've done some research and you are correct, he's a very qualified candidate. And I know you don't make recommendations easily.

---

November 13, 2016, Sunday, 4:32 PM

"Percy!"

Henry's in front of the student bulletin board outside, skimming the postings when he hears someone call his name.

He looks over his shoulder and sees Henry Tudor, beaming at him, waving. He gets up from the bench he's sitting on near Victor Hugo fountain, pats Charles Brandon (who's sitting with him, of course) on the back over and strides over to where Percy's standing.

"Glad to run into you," Tudor says.

"Me?" he asks, puzzled.

"Don't see any other Percy's around, do you?"

"You know who I am?"

"Course I do."
Percy's fairly certain Tudor has never talked to him in his life, but his confidence is so great, so overwhelming, that he's suddenly unsure; his charisma so affecting that he can't help but smile at his classmate's attention.

"I've always admired you," he says with a shrug, "come, walk with me."

Tudor throws an arm over his shoulder and leads him down the path, walking towards the direction of the boys' dorms.

Percy's panicked, suddenly-- 'admired him'? Does he have a crush on him or something? That wouldn't really make sense with his reputation as a womanizer, but--

"You're very talented. President of the Entrepreneur Club, President of the Tech Club, award winner..."

"Oh. Well, thanks very much."

"I know a secret--would you like to hear it?"

"Sure."

Tudor lets go of his him, then stops in the path he's taken him on, gestures towards a jacaranda tree, and walks over. Percy follows him.

"You have to promise not tell-- I'm not really supposed to tell you, actually, but if it were me I would want to know…"

"I promise. What is it?"

Tudor steps closer to him, takes a few furtive glances around the campus courtyard before whispering, "Red Dragon--well, my father, specifically--is interested in you."

"For what?"

"Employment."

"What?!"

"Well, just an internship," Tudor shrugs, "I don't know if you'd be interested--"

"Of course I am! God, this…this is amazing! Tudor is my business idol, really, I…"

Red Dragon is notorious for its exclusivity, a low acceptance rate, and the list of highly qualified applicants looking to be hired is miles long. The benefits package is incredible, as are the networking connections to be made. Business Insider called it "the hardest place to get a foot in the door, but a foot in the door there is in for life."

"The thing is," Henry says, "they don't have any local jobs available. Think they're all out of state, or in Northern California, maybe. So I'm not sure…if that'd be alright. How you'd finish up the term, that sort of thing, if you did choose to take it."

"I'd figure something out," Percy says, "for this kind of opportunity, I'd…I can't-- I can't believe this."

"I just want you to be sure," Tudor says, "my father, he doesn't like being rejected. And he has a long memory. So I can dissuade him if you'd--"
"No, no, don't do that. Please. I'll say yes. I'd be crazy not to, with my career goals."

"He'll be glad. And I'll encourage it, since I can see you're so enthusiastic."

"That would--wow. That would be amazing. You'd do that?"

"Of course. Why not?"

Tudor extends his hand. Percy shakes it.

"Expect a call. And good luck."

---

**From: henrytudor@whitehall.edu**

**To: HenryTudor@RedDragon.net**

**Sent November 13, Sunday, 2016, 7:18 PM**

I always have the time to do a favor for you, and you always need younger, tech-fluent talent. Or so you tell me.

And my tutoring is going well, so I don't think French will be as much of a problem anymore. My tutor's excellent.

Percy admires you greatly-- you are his 'business idol'. I believe he would even work for you in Japan, if that was where the position was offered.

---

Chapter End Notes

the 'well, well, well--how the tables...have tabled' thing is from a tumblr text post.
http://tittytron.tumblr.com/post/70731234340
nothing new

Chapter Summary

But this feels different. Like they're both wearing masks and a song is playing just for them. This feels like that night felt. Fragile, electric with potential.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

From: Mary Boleyn

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent November 14, 2016, Monday, 5:01 PM

Hey, just saw your new status…you ok? Wanna talk about it?

From: Anne Boleyn

No. But I will be.

From: Mary

Ok…let me know if there's anything you need.

From: Charles Brandon

To: Henry Tudor

Sent November 14, 2016, Monday, 5:30 PM

Just saw Lizzy and Gil Talboys pretty cozy in the library…you know about that?

From: Henry Tudor

I honestly could not care less. But no, I didn't.

From: Brandon

 Aren't you two still a thing?

From: Henry

Well, actually I do care. Talboys is kind of a tool. Hope she knows she can do better.

From: Brandon

So…you're not hooking up?
From: Henry
No. We're friends.

From: Brandon
…sure.

From: Henry
We are.

From: Brandon
Since when are you friends with a girl?

From: Henry
Since always. Fuck off, man.

From: Brandon
Just trying to keep you on the up-and-up! Sheesh.

From: Henry
Besides, even if I were interested, she told me she likes someone. Like, a lot.

From: Brandon
Really…who?

From: Henry
None of your business.

From: Brandon
You don't know, do you?

From: Henry
…no. But she told me they're a sophomore, and that rules Talboys out. She's probably just being friendly.

From: Brandon
Looked more flirty than friendly.

From: Henry
With Lizzy, they're one and the same.
To: Jennifer Parker  

Sent November 17, 2016, Thursday, 3:04 PM  

Hey, can I ask you a favor?

From: Jennifer Parker  

Sure, what's up?

From: Mary Boleyn  

I know you're a stickler for the rules, but would it be alright if I had two guests instead of one to the next party?

From: Jennifer  

Depends. Why?

From: Mary  

Well, I want my sister there but also my friend needs to get laid.

From: Jennifer  

Oh? Elaborate, please.

From: Mary  

Ok…well, she's basically a goddess among the nerds but they're too shy to ask her out, and she's too proud to ask them. Also she's really tense and I just think she needs it.

From: Jennifer  

I see. Well, there are way too many people going to the Homecoming party tomorrow. But I guess you can bring your friend and Anne to the Saturday one.

From: Mary  

Great, thanks!

Anne used to never see Henry Tudor, and now, suddenly, she's seeing him everywhere.

Sure, she knows technically he was there at that first Beta Thau party back in August, but Mary wouldn't even let her look at him.

Usually she'd at least look up Mary's various flings and boyfriends on Facebook, to make sure they weren't creeps, but she'd been busy. And besides, with what Henry Percy had told her about him, she doubted it'd last long (though with Mary, they never did).

They have no classes together.

The first time she'd really seen him was at the Masquerade. But even that didn't really count-- his face was obscured behind the mask. All she saw was blue-grey eyes. She could see he was at least six feet tall, could see his ridiculous cheekbones…the brightest smile she had ever seen and the
strongest arms that had ever held her…

The first time she *really* saw Henry Tudor, not in costume, was at tutoring.

And then private *Amelie* tutoring.

Then…the…Library Incident.

Then more tutoring.

And now every-goddamn-where.

She'd applied for a job at the student café on the same day as she and Henry Percy had broken things off (she didn't want to wallow, wanted to stay busy so she couldn't get sad, and she could use the extra cash anyway) and been hired on the spot (they were, and are, very under-staffed).

Luckily she knows how to work an espresso machine from the barista job she had in high school. Luckily she knows how to count change quickly from her summer gig as a clerk at an always-busy grocery store.

Unluckily, he somehow manages to always come in when she's working.

And sees her in her *stupid* uniform (baseball cap, polo shirt, a too-short skirt and closed-toe shoes) in their stupid school colors, forest green and crimson, looking like a goddamn Christmas tree. Not that it matters…it's just an embarrassing outfit in general. It doesn't bother her that he sees her specifically, or anything like that.

He comes in with his entourage: Charles Brandon, Will Compton, and Anthony Knivert.

They're usually laughing, boisterous, always hanging on to his every word.

Henry turns heads but seems not to notice that he does.

He's stupidly generous, she thinks. If anyone in head of him in line is ever short, ever fumbling with their change, ever telling the cashier, "forget the scone, actually, sorry," there *he* is, opening his wallet with an easy smile and saying, "I've got it, no worries."

But, Anne supposes, it's easy to be generous when your father's richer than God.

He walks in with Lizzy Blount and buys her blueberry muffins. She pushes him playfully, he ruffles her hair.

He shoves money in the tip jar, even more so when Anne's the only one working.

Anne always feels her breath hitch when he comes in. She spills milk, drops napkins when she's trying to reload the dispenser; sometimes she unties her apron even as she's asking her manager to take her five, just to avoid him.

She sees him at the library, the cafeteria, Hugo fountain, walking out of the Erasmus Rose Garden Maze with lipstick smeared by his mouth, leaving the girls' dorms with bleary eyes.

---

So she shouldn't be too surprised when she walks out to the balcony on the 2nd story of the Beta Thau House during the Homecoming After-Party and he's there, sitting against the railing, smoking a cigarette.
She hates smoke (because she started smoking in Paris and it's hard to stand near it when you've quit). It's a good excuse—reason not to stand next to him, at any rate.

Anne shuts the sliding glass door behind her and stands there instead.

_Because that's normal._

Henry opens his eyes and there's Anne, standing at the door, arms wrapped around herself.

The white sweater she's wearing is about five sizes too big for her. Her skin is rosy, strands of hair framing her face, the rest pulled back.

Opens her mouth as if to say something, then closes it.

"Mamihlapinatapai"-- for some reason that word's coming to his mind right now.

Oh-- he had to write a paper on etymology for his History class this week. On a whim, he had searched "hardest word to translate", and that word had come up. Apparently it meant, "a look shared by two people, each wishing that the other will initiate something which both desire, but which neither one wants to start."

This is a test he doesn't want to fail: who speaks first?

It's not like they weren't just at their table this Tuesday, like she didn't just congratulate him on the 85 on his most recent test and go over every mistake with him…

But this feels different. Like they're both wearing masks and a song is playing just for them. This feels like _that_ night felt. Fragile, electric with potential.

"I don't bite," Henry quips.

"I'm allergic to smoke," she lies.

"I'm done," he says, dropping the cigarette into his half-empty beer bottle.

Anne decides not to get any closer. But she's tired, and more than a little sad, so she sits down and leans against the exterior of the house. This way she's facing him, and can talk to him, without having to feel his warmth.

"Where's your boyfriend?" he asks, looking over her shoulder as if he expects him to pop out at any moment.

"No idea, since he's not my boyfriend anymore."

"Why not?"

"He took a job that's out of state. It doesn't start till next semester, but…I'm not into delaying the inevitable."

"I'm sorry about that."

"Don't be, it's not like it's your fault."
Kind of.

But Henry hadn’t thought about her being hurt, just her being single.

Percy didn’t have to say yes to the Red Dragon offer…is Henry really at fault for a decision made of another individual's free will? Just for offering an option to him? His Ethics professor would say no…probably. Maybe?

"Are you going home for the holidays?"

"Thanksgiving, no," she says, messing with the sleeve of her sweater, "December break, yes."

"Why no Thanksgiving?"

"Washington D.C. is too far for those few days…and my dad doesn't 'believe' in American holidays."

"Doesn't believe?"

"He's American, but he thinks he's French."

"And that's why you speak--"

"Yes. He's the US ambassador to France. He used to only speak French in the house, actually, out of stubbornness. Mary and my brother would just ignore him. My mom would get so annoyed with him for that…but I…I wanted to talk to him. So I asked him to teach me, I took some classes for the times when he couldn't teach me, and….I learned."

"Do you miss it?"

"Speaking French?"

"No," he chuckles, "home. Your family."

"I miss my brother, George. But I don't think he'll be invited home, honestly. I'll probably try to meet up with him beforehand."

"Why do you miss him?"

"Because…he wrote to me. Actual letters, back when we were kids and at different summer camps. And then later, when I was in high school and he lived in Europe."

"Letters? As in, pen to paper, put it in an envelope letters?"

"Yes! I miss them. I'm sad I missed the era where people had to make…a real effort to reach you. To say whatever it was they wanted to say, to share their thoughts. I don't know, I guess I miss the excitement of getting one in the mail, miss tearing the envelope. Getting a new text doesn't match it, somehow."

Henry laughs. It's a great, unapologetic, sound, totally lacking self consciousness.

She likes the way he looks at her, she can admit that to herself. When most people look at her it feels like they're only seeing her. When he looks at her she feels like he's reading her.

"Well, I'll be gone for Thanksgiving," he says.
"To the Tudor mansion?" she teases.

"Not enough space in New York City for a mansion. It'll be the Tudor penthouse."

"Ah."

"There's one here, though."

"Of course there is! Why not go there?"

"We go to whichever office will need my father the most. With Black Friday, he told us that's New York. With Christmas, it'll probably be the same."

"I see."

"You look cold."

"I'm fine."

Henry takes his letterman jacket off and gets up from his seat; walks over to Anne, holding it out as an offer.

"I can't. If I take that you'll be cold too."

"It's worth it. And I have a sweater, I'll be fine," he insists, "take it."

She does, grateful that he ignored her, and slides it on.

"Sit with me," she offers, patting the floor next to her, figuring it's the least she can do.

He shrugs and does so, back against the wall, just like her. He pulls his knees up, then lets one fall, hand clasped around the other.

"Tell me something," she says.

"Like what?"

"Like...I don't know. I just told you all this personal stuff, I don't why I did, but I did, all this personal stuff about my dad and my obsession with letters."

"Obsession?"

"Yes, obsession, and now you know, and I don't know...much about you at all, really. So tell me something. Something that most people don't know."

"Why?"

"So it's even! So I don't feel weird," she says, knocking her knee against his, teasing.

He's silent, distant in his expression, probably in his thoughts as well, she guesses. She can see the stubble on his face, is close enough that she could trace the line of his jaw, the cupids bow of his mouth (not that she would...why would she?), close enough to smell tobacco, smoke, fire and cinnamon.

"Please? For me?"
"For you?" he smirks.

She nods.

He sighs, shakes his head, wearing a chagrined smile.

"Let's see…"

Henry pulls his pack of Marlboro Lights from his sweater sleeve and starts to tap it against his knee.

"Something most people don't know…"

Henry closes his eyes, fiddles with the top of the pack, flicking the lid open. Closed. Open.

"I have a brother. An older brother. Arthur. I haven't," he takes a sharp breath, "I, I haven't…spoken
to him. For quite some time. It's been over four years, I think."

"Henry--"

"Please don't say anything."

His eyes are squeezed shut now, the pack crushed in his hand. Anne doesn't know if she should take
it from him. If he doesn't want her to talk, he may not be alright with being touched.

"He was just gone one day. I asked where he was, of course, and so did my sisters. But my father
just -- didn't explain. He never does, not when it's important, anyway. He'd just say he was gone, that
he wasn't part of the family anymore, that he didn't want to be, that it was his choice. We asked and
asked, but he wouldn’t elaborate. So I guess…they must've had a falling out, yes?"

"I don't know--"  

"Why else? I just have a hard time thinking that he'd leave without saying goodbye. I didn't have a
falling out with him, so I don't know why…and I still don't know why. Why he left."

"What did your mom do?"

"Nothing. She passed when I was twelve."

"I'm so sorry. I know…I know how hard it is to lose a parent."

"Your mom, too?"

"Yes. I was ten. George was thirteen, Mary eleven. It was...pretty hard on all of us, obviously, but in
a weird way it kind of made us closer."

"No, that makes sense-- it was the same with my siblings and I. What was her name?"

"Elizabeth."

Henry gives half-hearted laugh, "Sorry…it's just…that was mine, as well."

"Oh. Wow, that's…something."

She can't think of anything else to say. Suddenly she feels like they're uncomfortably close. The
sweep of his lashes against his cheek when he closes his eyes is almost too beautiful for to bear. She
can't look at it, anymore, so she doesn't. She scoots farther away from him, puts a few inches of
distance between, them, and somehow that makes all the difference.

"Well, you won't be smoking for a while," she quips.

"What?"

She gestures to the mangled cardboard pack, the gold on it still glinting from in between his fingers. He hasn't let go of it yet.

"Oh. Yeah," he says, uncurling his fingers from the pack, "those are toast."

"Please don’t tell anyone," he begs, "I really can't--"

"I wouldn’t--"

"Okay. I'm... I wish--"

Henry's interrupted by the sound of the door sliding open, and then hears a familiar voice: "Tudor! Get your ass back--"

Will Compton stops in the middle of his sentence.

"Boleyn--what are you doing here?"

"Will," Henry says in a warning tone.

"What?"

"That was rude."

"It's fine," Anne says, getting up, she slides the jacket off and passes it over to Henry, "I'm--"

"No, it's not fine. I don’t care how drunk he is. Apologize."

"Sorry," he says sheepishly, "I just...ah...surprised to see you out here! With...him."

"Why?" she asks.

"Aren't you with Per--"

"No."

"Oh. Well, then, carry on--"

"We were just talking. I'm going to go check on my sister," she says, to Henry, "see you later."

"Are you going to be here Saturday?" Henry asks, pulling his jacket back on, carefully (it smells like jasmine, now, the cotton on the neck of it is still warm).

"Yeah," she says, "I am."

"Okay. See you then."

"I'll be here, too!" Will calls out as she leaves, taking a swig of his beer, muttering, "not that it matters."

"Nice," Henry says, getting up.
"Didn't mean to interrupt--"

"You didn't interrupt anything. Do you have a smoke?"

Will pats around his jeans, then hands him his pack. He gets the one that he had tucked behind his ear and lights it.

"So…" he says, watching as his friend lights up, "nothing go on there?"

"Nope."

"So, you wouldn't mind if--"

"You're not asking her out."

"But I thought--"

"No."

"Noted."

November 18, 2016, Friday, 10:13 PM

Anne hasn't been able to find Mary anywhere downstairs, so she walks back upstairs to her door and knocks.

"Mary?" she calls, "are you in there? I need to talk to you."

She puts her ear to the door and hears music. Maybe she's just putting makeup on (Mary always has music on when she does her makeup, even when she's just doing a touch up): "stealing kisses from your misses/doesn't make you freak out…"

"Hello? Mary?"

Normally Anne would be more respectful of boundaries, but she feels strange, she doesn't understand anything that's been happening to her lately, and she just really needs to talk to her sister right now. So she tests the doorknob and it's unlocked. Maybe Mary just can't hear her? She is playing the music pretty loudly.

Anne opens the door, and Mary is there. She's in bed (is she sick?), under the covers, her eyes closed, face slightly shiny with sweat, mouth open and Anne sees…her feet peeking out from the comforter?

But that doesn't make sense. Because if those were her feet, she would be seeing the top of them. And she sees the back of them. The bottoms of a pair of Converse, actually. The toes facing the wall.

_tell the neighbors i'm not sorry/if i'm breaking walls down_

And there's a lump in the middle of the bed. That is…definitely not Mary.

_building your girl's second story/ripping all your floors out_

The lump's feet kick, and the comforter falls, leaving only a sheet. Mary's eyes flutter open languidly—until she sees Anne, that is.
saw your face/heard your name/gotta get with you

"Close the door!" Mary yells, panicked, tugging the sheet up to cover more of herself--

girls like girls like boys do

--which only exposes the person under the sheet.

Exposes the curly, blonde head of none other than Lizzy Blount.

nothing new.

Chapter End Notes

lyrics are from hayley kiyoko's 'girls like girls', no copyright infringement intended.
"Yeah…our dad's swell, huh? He's only an Easter and Christmas Catholic, never goes to church otherwise…only sent us to Catholic school for the 'superior education', but he sure is righteous about certain things!"

Anne shuts the door behind her, stunned.

"I--"

"Jesus!" Mary snaps, unplugging the mini speakers near her desk, "don't you knock?"

"I did. The door wasn't locked, there wasn't," she stammers, looking at her feet, "a hair tie on the doorknob or anything, I didn't know…"

Lizzy is just sitting on the foot of the bed, crossed legged, mouth shiny. Her hands are folded in her lap, and she's intent on a hangnail, picking away.

"I'll--go," Anne offers, "I'm sorry--"

"Well the mood's kind of killed now," Mary says, crossing her arms, "so you might as well stay."

"I don't understand…are you…gay?"

"I'm not gay," Lizzy says, chewing on the end of her hair.

"Excuse me?"

"I'm not gay," she says, "I'm not really sure what I am. But you shouldn't, like, make assumptions."

"Oh. I mean, I wasn't really talking to you, but--yeah," Anne says, nodding, rubbing her temples, "yeah, no I shouldn't assume anything. I mean-- I only just walked in on you going down on my sister, to a song called--what was it?"

"I don't know," Mary says, "she put it on."

"'Girls Like Girls,'" Lizzy answers, twirling a strand of hair around her finger now, "I don't--"

"Right. So I just walked in on you going down on my sister, to a song called 'Girls Like Girls', which seems pretty GAY to me!"

"Anne," Mary warns.

"But what do I know," she continues, "you know, you're right, shame on me for absolutely leaping to conclusions there!"

"Okay," Lizzy says slowly, "I know you're like, confused or surprised or whatever, but you're being kind of hostile right now and I don't appreciate it."
"I'm sorry, I can't take you seriously when you can't bother to wipe your mouth!"

Lizzy wipes her mouth on the back of her flannel sleeve self-consciously.

"I think I'm gonna go," Lizzy says, "leave you guys to…whatever."

"I'll see you," Mary says, "I'm sorry."

The other blonde leans her head against the door and says, "It's just not very chill, you know?" before leaving the room and closing the door behind her.

"Apparently it's not very 'chill,'" Anne mocks.

"Nice," Mary says, throwing the sheet off.

"Warn me, God!" Anne snaps, covering her eyes.

"Real mature," Mary continues, "I was wearing a skirt."

"Oh."

"Just not underwear," she snaps, bundling the sheet and throwing it at Anne.

"Okay, don't throw things at me--"

"I'll throw whatever I want at you! Why were you such an asshole, huh?"

"I'm just-- I can't believe you didn't tell me."

Mary's dark blonde hair is mussed, a chunk of it stuck to her cheek. Her face is flushed, she's flushed all the way down to her chest, making a red trail down and over her black, lacy bra. She puts her hands on her hips, chest heaving, eyes tearing up.

"Tell you what?"

"That you're--"

"Gay?"

"Are you?"

"Does it matter?"

"Yes! How long have you--"

"I figured it out pretty recently. But you're right, I didn't tell you. And you should know why."

Mary goes over to the comforter that fell on the floor and throws it over her bed.

"I don't know why. I'm a pretty accepting person--"

"Yeah, right."

"I've always been pro-gay marriage, pro gay rights, I've told you as much--"

"You're really fucking judgmental."
"What are you talking about?"

Anne's older sister scoffs, goes over to her dresser, pulls out a drawer, pulls out a shirt, and slams it shut.

"I'm not judgmental!"

"You so are!" Mary insists, pulling a white tee shirt over her head.

"Name one time--"

"George."

Anne's mouth drops open.

"I had every reason to judge George," she hisses, "he's the reason--"

"No, he's NOT!" Mary shouts.

"George spent everything dad gave him for college to go be a bohemian fuckhead in Europe! When he got sick of Europe-- probably borrowed money from everyone there-- and eventually went back to school, he didn't even finish his fucking associate's degree!"

"George was eighteen and stupid--"

"I'm eighteen and I would never be so stupid! That's not an excuse!"

"Well, sometimes people are stupid, Anne. We can't all be perfect--"

"That's not fair--"

"--like you, can we?"

"Why are you being like this?"

"George doesn't owe dad anything."

"Like hell he doesn't! George sure as hell owes me something, at least!"

"Anne--"

"HE is the reason I had to get scholarship! When our dad makes over 100k a year! He is the reason I-- no, he is the reason we have to bust our asses to make it through, caught between two fucking dead zone worlds, not eligible for financial aid and getting NO goddamn help from our parents, either--"

"Well, Mom's dead, so--"

"I know mom's fucking dead! You think I don't know that?!"

"You said parents. And mom probably would've helped--"

"You know what I mean! I can't believe you don't think how we have to struggle isn't George's--"

"That is DAD's fault! That is dad's decision! It might have been because of what happened with George but it is NOT! HIS! FUCKING! FAULT!" Mary shouts, tears sliding down her face.
Anne is speechless. She has never seen Mary lose her cool like this. She's never spoken to her in this way-- actually, Anne's never seen her speak to anyone this way.

"Sorry your head's too far up your ass to see it," Mary continues (and apparently she's not done, Anne thinks), at a lower volume now but with the same level of intensity as before, "sorry all you see is Saint fucking Thomas because you're the favorite but you have to see that there is only one person to blame for this! And it's not you and it's not me and it's not George--it's DAD!"

Mary collapses on her bed, staring at the ceiling, arms crossed, sniffling. The tears trickle down her cheekbones, drop onto her pillow in tiny circles.

Anne feels like the worst person ever. She can't believe she just made her sister cry. She goes over to the dresser, grabs a box of tissues, and hands it to Mary. Mary snatches it from her and uses one to wipe the mascara that's trickling down her face.

"What did you mean when you said he doesn't owe dad anything?"

"There's just stuff about dad you don't know, okay?" she says.

"Like what?"

"Like…how he brought in a priest, for George."

"For George?"

"Yeah," Mary says, sitting up and moving the pillow behind her, against the headboard, "and he made me be there."

"Be there for what?"

"Be there for the priest telling George he was going to go to hell," she says, throwing the crumpled tissue on her nightstand, "if he kept kissing boys."

"What?"

"Yeah…our dad's swell, huh? He's only an Easter and Christmas Catholic, never goes to church otherwise…only sent us to Catholic school for the 'superior education', but he sure is righteous about certain things!"

"I didn’t--"

"Know? Of course you didn't. Dad wouldn't have wanted you to…be there for that."

"When was this? Mom wouldn't have--"

"No, she wouldn't have. He was fourteen."

"Mary, I'm so sorry, I--"

"You know what, Anne? I don't really want to hear about how you're sorry. Because you weren't there."

"Mary--"

"And you're so offended," she continues, "that I didn't tell you right away. But how do you think I would let anyone know-- including myself--that I wanted to kiss girls? After having to be there for
"You're right, I'm sorry--"

"I think you should go," Mary says, moving so that she's sitting on the edge of the bed, facing away from Anne.

"Mary--"

"Please leave."

Mary keeps her eyes trained on the desk against the wall. There's a picture in a frame set up there, of Anne and her in their school uniforms, giving each other bunny ears.

She's not turning around.

She keeps looking at the picture, even as she hears the door shut behind her.

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**November 18, 2016, Friday, 10:35 PM**

"--and he still won't tell me, to this day, who the girl in his bed was!" Brandon says, elbowing Henry.

"You're obsessed," Henry says, swatting him away.

"I think it's sweet," Anthony teases, putting his feet up on the coffee table, "he didn't want to wake her up...maybe she's his secret girlfriend."

"That's what I said," Brandon says.

"Maybe I'm just not an asshole, like some people I could mention," Henry says to chorusing "Oooohs!"

"Hey, isn't that--what's her name?" Will snaps his fingers, drumming his other hand against his beer bottle, "the Boleyn girl--"

"Mary?" asks Anthony, "no, haven't seen--"

Jen Parker comes over and takes the beer bottle from his hands.

"Hey!" he exclaims.

"Take your feet off the table or I'm cutting them off," she snaps, sauntering away.

"Christ," Anthony grumbles, "what a bitch."

"Nice ass, though," Brandon comments, watching her as she goes up the stairs.

Henry's arm is around Will's shoulder. Brandon sees Henry whisper something to him, then watches him shoot up and say, "be right back."

"Where are you going?" Brandon asks.

"Nowhere."

Brandon follows where Will's looking and sees Anne Boleyn, standing by the front door, taking her
coat off the hook and crying.

"Someone had a bit too much," Anthony comments.

Tom Wyatt, who's been sitting at the armchair next to the right of the door (Boleyn's on the side of the door next to the staircase, Wyatt's on the other side), surrounded by girls and playing guitar, sets his guitar down and walks over to her, puts his hand on the small of her back.

"Nothing! It's nothing, I'm fine--" he hears Boleyn say, and then he can make out, "C'mon, let me get you a tea or something..." from Wyatt.

"I have to go, now, I don't want to be here anymore, your guitar's over there anyway, just forget--"

"Fuck the guitar, no one's gonna steal it, c'mon, let's get out of here."

Henry, Brandon notices, who was in such a rush not seconds ago, stands still. The only thing he's done so far is take two steps towards the front door.

Wyatt and Boleyn leave together, and Henry walks back to the couch, sits down next to Brandon.

"What was that about?" Brandon asks.

He sees his best friend's jaw clench from his profile.

"I thought I had to go to the bathroom," he says, "and then I didn’t."

"Christ, Tudor," Will says, laughing, "how drunk are you?"

"Not enough," Henry says.

"Well, here," Anthony says, pulling out a flask from inside his jacket, "this should help with that."

"You know they already have booze at parties, right," Will asks, "it's a little white trash to bring--"

"Shut up, Compton," Anthony says, "they don't have the hard stuff at these girly fucking parties."

"It's--"

Henry drinks. And drinks. And drinks.

"...tequila," he finishes, wide-eyed, as Henry passes it back to him without so much as a cough.

November 18, 2016, Friday, 11:11 PM

The mint tea Tom bought her is cold now, Anne notes as she takes a small sip. This is the first time she's touched it.

They're sitting at a round table at Crave café, a coffeehouse about three blocks from campus that's open till 2 AM on Fridays and weekends.

"I'm sure she'll forgive you," he says easily.

"What?" she asks.

"You said...you and Mary fought?"
"Oh, I don't remember telling you."

"Well, you told me like five minutes ago. And you've been staring into that cup since. I thought maybe you were trying to read the tea leaves, but to do that you'd have to actually drink it."

"Sorry…I just…this has never happened before. I'm kind of in shock, I guess."

"You've never fought?" he asks incredulously, sipping his Coke.

"Not really."

"You're sisters, you must have fought before."

"Little squabbles," she says with a shrug, "nothing like this. This was…a big one."

"You'll work it out," he reassures.

"Maybe."

"Definitely. You two are fiercely protective of each other, for as long as I've known you guys, anyway. So you must love each other fiercely, too."

"You're so poetic," she says, "did you know that?"

"Well, I am a poet."

"Right."

He smiles, gives a mini-bow from his seat, and she laughs.

"Hey, Tom?"

"Yes?"

"I have a question."

"I have an answer."

"Were you ever interested in Mary? Back in high school?"

"Well…I was interested in her sister, if you remember," he says with a self-deprecating chuckle, "so no, not really."

"Right…but…like, if I hadn't been there," she says, folding her hands together, "being charming and magnetic and such…"

"Modest!"

"Not one of my virtues. But seriously…she's really pretty."

"I know."

"Like, prettier than me, most people would say."

"Oh, I don't think--"

"I don't take Eurocentric Western Beauty standards personally," she says with a wave of her hand,
"objectively she's more attractive, by them and I know it. It doesn't bother me anymore."

"Anne--"

"Tom. In all seriousness. In all honesty. If I hadn't been there, say...would you have been interested in her?"

"I don't--"

"Just think about it. Take your time, if you need to," she says, drinking her tea.

"I guess," he laughs, "such a weird question...but, no. Still no."

"Why, though?"

"I don't know...it's hard to explain."

"Try."

"Well, it's not like she's a particularly cold person. She's pretty warm, actually. But still...I know she dated guys, but she never really seemed...into anyone. So personally, I wouldn't want to risk getting involved, because...I don't want to date anyone that's never going to be into me."

"You're right."

"Thanks?"

"Tom," she says, laughing, "I can't explain to you why that makes me happy right now, but...it does."

"It does?"

"It does. Because it makes sense to me now...she was never really into anyone. That she dated."

"Right."

"She wasn't promiscuous...she just wasn't," Anne ponders a more ambiguous way to get her point across, not wanting to out her sister, "ah...dating the right kind of person. So of course she didn't get attached. She probably...just thought she hadn't found the right person yet, so kept trying, but it was futile. Of course."

"Am I supposed to know what you're talking about?"

"No, never mind. Don't worry about it. But I feel better now. Thanks."

"Any time."

---

From: Anne Boleyn
To: Mary Boleyn

Sent November 19, 2016, Saturday, 1:13 AM

Again, I'm really, REALLY sorry.
From: Anne Boleyn

To: Mary Boleyn

Sent November 19, 2016, Saturday, 9:45 AM

I know you're still mad at me but Anna wants me to go with her to the party today still. She says she won't know anyone there.

Well, she'll you know of course but I think she's just feeling kind of nervous…she doesn’t usually go to parties.

From: Mary Boleyn

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent November 19, 2016, Saturday, 10:50 AM

It's fine. I already invited you.

From: Anne

I know, but I won't go if you don't want me there.

From: Mary

I don't care. Do what you want.

From: Mary Boleyn

To: Anna Seville

Sent November 19, 2016, Saturday, 11:30 AM

Hey babe-- want me to help pick you out an outfit?

From: Anna Seville

No…I do know how to dress myself, you know.

From: Mary

Ok, just offering. You can use my room, btw.

From: Anna

Wow. Really?

From: Mary

Yup. If you use it just wash the sheets by tomorrow morning. I changed them for you.

From: Anna
Ok…you sure?

From: Mary

I'm crashing in a friend's room tonight. Don't worry about it.
So she knows she's really hurt, because her older sister doesn't ice people out. Even when she's really, really upset with someone. Anne once borrowed her white Calvin Klein dress without asking and ended up getting red wine spilled on it (some guy at a bar that was so eager to talk to her and so tipsy that when he leaned over to ask for her number he ended up dropping the glass). Mary cried, Anne apologized profusely, and she still bought coffee for her the next morning (though she made Anne pay her back for it, of course).

From: Henry Tudor

To: Anne Boleyn

November 19, 2016, Saturday, 8:35 PM

Hey.

From: Anne Boleyn

Hi.

From: Henry Tudor

What, does your verbosity disappear when texting?

From: Anne Boleyn

'Verbosity', wow. Someone's been studying.

And I replied with the same amount of word(s) as you sent, so excuse you.

From: Henry Tudor

Finals, hello.

And I know big words. Maybe I just don't try to show off with them all the time, unlike some people I could mention…

From: Anne

Wow!

From: Henry

/shrug/

From: Henry
Sent November 19, 2016, Saturday, 8:45 PM

Just teasing. Genuinely enjoy your big words. Very educational.

From: Anne

Why, thank you.

From: Henry

You still going to the Beta Thau party tonight?

From: Anne

Yes, why?

From: Henry

No reason. See you there.

From: Anne

Guess you will.

"How do I look?" Anna asks, spinning around from her mirror to face Anne, who's sitting at the edge of her bed, texting and smiling at her phone.

"Fine," Anne says.

"Fine?!"

Anne says "turn around", and Anna does. She can feel Anne pull her hair from its ponytail and run her fingers through it, mussing it up.

"Let me get you some pomade," she says, opening her desk drawer.

"I look like I just woke up," Anna scoffs, checking out her reflection.

"Kind of the point," Anne says, coming up behind her, hair product in hand, scooping a bit of it out and smoothing it over Anna's hair.

"I don’t wear my hair down."

"Ever?"

"No."

"Well, you want to feel comfortable…comfort equals confidence. Here," Anne says, taking her own hair down, looping her tie with the one she took from Anna and handing it to her roommate, "put it in two braids, loosely. That way it's at least around your face, and you don't get that tight, pulled-back look you get with a ponytail."

"Thanks, " she says, separating her hair into sections, "I don't know anything about this stuff."

"You always look cute," Anne says, sitting on the edge of her bed again and pulling on her knee-
high boots.
"Cute, but not hot."

"Well, let's fix that," Anne says, taking of her shirt and tossing it to Anna, "this should take care of it."

Anna catches it, drops it on her vanity, takes her tank top off and puts Anne's shirt on.
It's a scoop neck, and Anna can see that it goes well below her clavicle.
"This is…a lot of boobage."
"Exactly."

"Okay," she sighs, checking the mirror again, squinting at herself, "if you don't think it's too much… what will you wear, though?"

"Turtleneck," Anne says with a shrug, opening one of her drawers and rummaging through.

"Again? What's with you and those?"

"It's weird, I know," Anne admits, picking out a long-sleeved, royal blue turtleneck and pulling it on over head, "but whenever my neck's exposed I always get, like…these chills."

"That is weird."

"I guess I just get cold easily, and my neck is more sensitive? I don't know."

"Which jacket?" Anna asks, holding out two options.

"Leather, definitely."

"Thanks for doing this," Anna says, pulling the jacket on, "I really needed to blow off some steam."

"No problem," Anne says easily, "and you'll have fun. Jen may be kind of uptight, but she does throw a good party."

"All I'm saying is that they really put the 'white' in Whitehall here," Brandon says with shrug, finishing off his beer and putting the bottle down on the coffee table.

He, Henry, Richard Buckingham, Anthony Knivert, Will Compton, and Francis Valois are all standing in a circle. They started out with a ranking of the hottest girls on campus (Henry was strangely quiet on that front, Brandon noted, even though he's usually pretty vocal about these matters), went to which classes would probably have the hardest finals, and somehow they had ended up here.

Brandon can't help but be defensive on this front. He's on an athletic scholarship, but his mom is Mexican, his absentee father Caucasian. His happiness at acceptance here was somewhat shadowed by his inkling that his checkmark in the ethnicity box probably had something to do with it. He's passing, so he's never told anyone. Henry is the only one at Whitehall that knows (besides admissions, of course).

"What are you talking about?" Buckingham scoffs.
"Exactly what I said, man."

"What, you think we should go back to affirmative action?"

"Would that be the worst thing in the world?" Henry jumps in.

"Yeah. Affirmative action's stupid."

"Is it?"

Their heads turn to the questioner, Anne Boleyn.

Her head's titled to the side, eyes bright.

Brandon can't help but admit to himself that she looks pretty hot. She has yet another turtleneck on (maybe she has Amish inclinations, he thinks wryly), but it's well fitted and it's tucked into a high waisted skirt, showing off her waist. Her legs are encased in lacy, black and white tights. Her hair's down (a rarity), shiny and in waves, and she has the whole smoky eye thing going on. Her glossy mouth is twisted into a smirk.

"Boleyn," Buckingham acknowledges.

"Buckingham," she says, gesturing with her mug (it's steaming, Brandon notices-- is she really drinking fucking tea at a party?), "is this a debate? Because I love debate."

"We're just talking," Buckingham says, turning back to the group.

"You're just talking," Henry corrects, moving a bit to the side to make room for her in the circle, and winking at her, "and I'm getting bored."

"Whatever," Buckingham says with an eye roll.

"Do you have any basis or evidence behind your position," Anne inquires, taking a careful sip of her drink, "or is it just your feelings?"

"Course I have basis. Affirmative action's based on nothing but race and gender. Why should someone get an edge over other applicants for some arbitrary reason?"

"I mean, it's implemented to promote diversity. But I'll play devil's advocate with you for a moment-- you think affirmative action is stupid because it allows applicants to get an edge over others for something not based on talents, grades, etc?"

"Pretty much."

"Tell me, then-- what do you think about students that are legacies?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Students with an edge over others just because their parents and grandparents went to the same school they're applying to? Is that not also-- arbitrary?"

"You can't give me an example of that," he says, laughing, "it's just something scholarship students make up to make themselves feel better."

"Can't give you an example?" she says, also laughing, "I think I'm standing with a few."
"You can't prove it," he snaps, face turning red.

"Fair enough. What about George Bush, then?"

"What about him?"

"Well, I don't know what his high school GPA was. But he got into Yale, and his GPA there, was... 2.3, I believe?"

"2.35," Will corrects, holding his phone out, "according to Wikipedia. Impressively close."

"Thank you," she says sweetly, "so 2.35...and somehow, with that GPA, he managed to get into Harvard Business School from there. Why do you think that was? Because I can't think of any reason other than his name. Rather than his merits."

"It's not the same."

"How?"

"Well you're obviously--just prejudiced against legacy students," he sputters.

"That would be difficult," she says, smirking, "considering that I am one."

"What?"

"My father went here."

"Bull."

"You can look that up on your phone too, Compton. Thomas Boleyn."

Will nods, does so, and pulls up the page in a matter of seconds, passing it to Buckingham.

"She's right," he says, watching as Buckingham reads.

"Well--"

"Aw," she coos, "nice try, though," before walking away from the circle, a decidedly confident sway in her gait as she does so.

"Fuck," Anthony says, pulling out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and sliding one behind his ear, "I just witnessed a massacre."

"You just got dragged," Valois says, slapping Buckingham on his back, "by a girl, no less!"

"Shut the fuck up," he snaps, flustered, "not my fault she's jealous of people that can actually afford college."

"And people that can afford it are, what, better than those that can't?" Brandon snaps.

"We all have to pay somehow," Will says diplomatically, "whether the school gives us the money, whether it's a loan, whether it's our parents...it's all money. Relax."

"Consolation smoke?" Anthony offers.

"I don't need to be consoled--"
"Okay, Buckingham, regular smoke?" he offers.

"Fine, whatever."

"Tudor?"

"Sure."

They go upstairs to the balcony. Valois says he's going to go get a drink, asks the remaining few if they want anything. They decline.

Anne's rinsing her coffee mug in the sink, trying to come up with a game plan for how to deal with this whole fight.

Anna glommed on to Mary pretty early on. Mary has not talked, waved, or so much as looked at her sister yet.

So she knows she's really hurt, because her older sister doesn't ice people out. Even when she's really, really upset with someone. Anne once borrowed her white Calvin Klein dress without asking and ended up getting red wine spilled on it (some guy at a bar she snuck into was so eager to talk to her and so tipsy that when he leaned over to ask for her number he ended up dropping the glass). Mary cried, Anne apologized profusely, and she still bought coffee for her the next morning (though she made Anne pay her back for it, of course).

It's going to take some kind of gesture for sure. She just doesn't know what yet.

"You're fiery."

Anne ignores Valois pointedly, going over to the pot of coffee Jen always has out (to sober people up later on, but Anne doesn't drink, so she's pretty much the only one that has any early in the night) and refilling her cup.

"You can't just ignore me. That's rude."

"You're a little beyond rude," she remarks, entering the security code for the fridge and pulling out the milk, "so I feel it's justified."

"I'm allowed to come in here for a drink, same as you."

"That you are," she says spiritedly, nodding to herself as she pours milk in her coffee, "so go ahead."

He shrugs, goes over to the cooler on the island and pulls out a beer.

"You look hot tonight."

"You have got to be kidding me."

"I am a thousand percent serious," he says, using the counter to pop the cap on his beer off.

"Jen has cameras in here, I wouldn't use that--"

The cap pops off and Valois lets it fall to the ground.

"Never mind…you do remember I pushed you into a fountain, right?"
"Sexual tension can make us do crazy things. I forgive you."

"Uh huh. And do you recall why I did that?"

"Not really."

"Mary Boleyn? My sister?"

"Oh. Well, Tudor likes you, so--"

"What?!

"Tudor likes you," he repeats, "and you don't seem to mind, so…I thought you didn't mind the whole previously-banged-your-sister concept."

"Lovely. And he doesn't like me," she insists, using her hand to cup her neck, resting her chin against it, "he flirts with everyone, it's not--"

"Not like he does with you."

"You're crazy."

"For you."

"Unbelievable."

"That's what girls usually say."

"I don't think they mean it in quite the way you think they do. But actually," she says, cringing as he walks closer to her, "as unappealing as the whole 'banged-my-sister concept' is, I was talking about the rumors."

"Oh…that. Well. I might have done that, but someone else gave me the idea."

"What are you talking about?"

"Brandon said he saw Tudor hand her cash after she slept over. I kind of just ran with that," he says.

"What?"

"Let's get out of here," he says, holding her arm.

"Get the fuck away from me."

"I don't think so."

"Stop--"

"What's going on here?" Henry asks, standing in the doorway.

"Someone," she says, trying to wrench her arm from Valois' tight grip, "seems to think the caveman approach is effective."

"Let go of her," Henry demands, voice like ice.

"I will when she asks nicely," Valois says, laughing, "you don't get dibs on both of the Boleyn girls, Tudor. Sorry."
Henry smiles and laughs, "Oh...oh, no. You're letting go of her NOW."

"And what if I don't?" Valois asks, mocking.

"You know," Henry says, slamming his beer bottle on the island, "I really don't want to hurt you."

"Why?" he asks, in the same mocking tone.

Henry is now inches from both of them, in front of the sink.

"Because I don't think you'd survive."

"Please, give me a break--"

Anne uses this testosterone-fueled interaction as a distraction, as an opportunity to jump on to the edge of the sink (previous experience has taught her the distance she needed to achieve this well enough that she gauges it perfectly) out of Valois' grip on her arm. She kicks him, swiftly, right across the stomach, grazing Henry as she does so. He only stumbles a little bit, so she also pushes her foot forcefully into his groin.

He groans in pain and she jumps down, yelling, "Getting real tired of your shit, Valois," as she storms out of the kitchen.

"Your shoe?" she hears Henry call out behind her.

He catches up to her and hands her the sole of one of her shoes. It must have fallen off...apparently the force of the kick was too much for their five years of use.

"You know what?" she says, eyes bright and frenzied, grabbing the sole from Henry, zipping her boot and shucking it off. "I'm settling this once and for all."

She turns to face the room. The music's blasting, so she assumes no one heard the commotion from the kitchen, and everyone is mingling and definitely not noticing her standing there holding one boot with quiet determination.

"Excuse me!" Anne shouts, "excuse me, everyone!"

Mary, sitting on the couch with Anna, looks up from their conversation and quirks an eyebrow at her.

She turns around and unplugs the speakers from the wall.

"Anne," Jen says shrilly, looking up from where she's holding court, encircled by Beta Thau Sisters and various fraternity brothers, "what is your damage?"

"I have an announcement," she says, "it'll only be a second."

Everyone stops talking and looks at her, expressions ranging from bemused to incredulous to expectant.

Anne holds up her boot in one hand and the broken off sole in the other.

"My sister is NOT a prostitute," she announces, "if she were, she would buy me better shoes."

Mary laughs and puts her hand over her mouth, shaking her head.
"This isn't a sounding board," Jen snaps, "it's a party."

"I'm done, that's all," Anne says, plugging the speakers back in, "carry on."

"Anne--" Anne turns around to see Henry behind her laughing.

"Toss this for me, will you?" she asks, handing him her broken shoe.

"What…why?" he asks, but takes them anyway.

"Think I should go," she says, "don't think Jen wants me here anymore."

"I'll tell her what happened. You know she'll kick Valois out, right?"

She shrugs.

"Do whatever you want," she says.

"You're walking back like that?" he asks, gesturing to her feet.

"Sure am," she says.

"Wait--"

But she's already opening the front door and walking out of the house, onto the damp grass.

She lets the cool night air fill her lungs, taking deep breaths.

"Anne!"

She turns around and sees her older sister on the porch of the Beta Thau house.

Anne waits, standing still as Mary walks over to her.

"Come back inside," Mary says.

"I'm going back to my dorm."

"Don't. I want you here."

"I'll still need to walk over, to pick out another pair of shoes."

"Then I'll walk with you," Mary says, "and then we can talk."

"I'd like that."
always be prepared

Chapter Summary

"…the Greek god?"

"Yes."

"You want me…to beat the Greek god at beer pong?"

Chapter Notes

lyrics to "same old love" are property of selena gomez, no copyright infringement intended:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9h30Bx4K1xg

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"You didn't have to do that, you know," Mary says quietly.

Anne felt unbalanced earlier, so she took her other shoe off and is carrying it. She's sure the feet of her tights will be grass-stained by the time they reach her dorm, but she doesn't care. It was totally worth it.

"I'll always defend your honor. Even when you don't want me to."

"I'm sorry," Mary says, "for yelling at you, for dumping all that on you--"

"Don't apologize, I'm the one that should be sorry," Anne says, hurriedly, "I was really immature about the whole thing."

"Just maybe wait for me to answer the door next time you drop by unannounced," she says wryly.

"I will, I know it was totally my fault. I was mainly just surprised, I didn't mean to be such a jackass."

"You're usually not. It was almost--refreshing?"

"I hate fighting with you."

"I hate fighting with you."

"I really had no idea that happened with George, he never told me--"

"It's okay. It's not your fault that you didn't know."

"Thanks."
"Are you still, like…" Mary searches for the right word, puts her hands in her pockets, "in shock?"

"Not really. I mean, at first it didn't make a lot of sense to me. But I thought about it, and the more I thought the more…it makes sense."

"What do you mean?"

"I guess I mean…I don't know. You've dated a…few guys."

"I've dated a lot of guys," Mary corrects, "believe me, I know. You don't need to spare my feelings."

"Not that many," Anne says with a shrug.

"Yes, that many. I know no one's going to take me seriously about being a lesbian, for that reason, but--"

"I do," Anne says emphatically.

"Thanks. I just know dad won't, especially, so I'm not telling him, so please don't--"

"I won't, I promise."

"What did you mean," Mary asks, waiting for Anne to swipe her key card to the front entrance, "that it makes sense?"

"Well, none of your relationships lasted very long. And you were never upset when they ended," Anne explains.

Anne had, actually, always wondered about that last point. Mary was so blasé after her break-ups that a young Anne thought this was normal, thought that TV shows, movies, and books merely exaggerated how deeply women were affected by break-ups, that the anguish was embellishment, thought that they were, all in all, no big deal.

When, in the seventh grade, she came over to a friend's house and found said friend sobbing, eating ice cream and blasting Alanis Morissette after being dumped, Anne was shocked.

"No, I wasn't," she says with a giggle, waiting for Anne to unlock the door to her dorm.

"And all those hours spent watching Britney Spears music videos…"

"Sto-oop!" Mary groans.

Mary closes the door behind her and sits on the floor next to it.

Anne's glad she's tested the waters to see if teasing was alright. Seeing that Mary's smiling, she begins to tease in earnest.

"All this time, I thought you paid so much attention so that you could copy the dance routines…only to find out their were ulterior motives."

"You're terrible!"

"Oh," Anne says as she shoves the leg of her boot behind her bed frame, "and I'm sorry I swooped in on your crush!"

"And incorrigible."
"Nice usage."

"Missed that question on my second SAT. Never forgot it."

"Though to be fair," Anne says, taking a seat next to her sister, "you did tell me to kiss her."

"I did at that."

Anne takes her hand in hers, and says, in a more serious tone than before, "I hope I didn't screw things up for you...with her."

"You didn't."

"I am sorry."

"I know."

"So... are we good?"

"Yeah," Mary says softly, nodding, "we're good."

Anne puts her head on Mary's shoulder and sighs.

"So... you like her?"

"I like her a lot. I thought we were flirting, during this past week, but I couldn't tell... if she meant it. It's so hard to tell with girls."

"So I've heard," Anne says in mock solemnity.

"Shut up," Mary says, laughter in her voice.

Tom is chewing on a pen, class work in hand, when he feels someone sitting on the couch next to him.

"Wyatt, right?"

Tom lifts his head from the music sheets to see Henry Tudor.

He's wearing a letterman jacket, and looks quite the quintessential American jock.

"That's me," he says, circling a measure on the page.

"You're the lead singer of... what are you guys called?"

"The Bright Beams," he answers.

"I like you guys. Some of those are originals, yeah?"

"Yes. We play originals and covers."

"Who writes them?"

"That'd be me, again."

"Really? They're very good."
"Well, thanks very much," Tom says, "that means a lot."

"You're welcome."

"I like…well, I don't really go to games much," Tom admits, "but I hear you're our best quarterback."

"Mm. Thanks for passing that along," he says politely.

Tom has seen Tudor from a distance, sure, but he doesn't thing he's ever spoken to him directly. He's usually had a girl on his arm, or is surrounded by some of the more popular guys on campus. He's seen him in the midst of raucous laughter, he's seen him walk in to lectures half an hour late with aviators on that he keeps on during the duration, seen him high five and clap his friends on the back…but he's never seen him subdued.

It's a little disarming, actually.

"So," Tudor says, "you know Boleyn, right?"

"Ah…I know all the Boleyns, actually. Even the ones that don't go to Whitehall."

"You know the family? Personally?"

"Sort of," he says, confused, "I mean, I've been to their house…we went to the same high school. We were all friends."

"Wow. Small world."

"Yeah…"

"Did you date her?" he asks abruptly.

"Who?"

"The one you were with last night? The brunette? I don't really remember her name," he says sheepishly.

"Anne?"

"I think so."

Tom has a feeling that there's a right and a wrong answer to his question. The intensity in his blue eyes scares him a little, though his smile is relaxed, even affable.

"No, never. I had a bit of her crush on her, I guess, but every guy at our school did. She's quite—"

"Beautiful?"

"Yes. It was hard not to. But I had a girlfriend. I still have the same one, and childhood crushes are just—"

"Childish?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

"Tudor!"
Brandon puts a hand on Tudor's shoulder and says, "This party sucks, let's go."

Tom gives him a wave but Brandon ignores him.

"Nice talking to you," Tudor says with a nod.

Brandon looks at Tom pointedly and Tom rolls his eyes but gets up. He'll go to the piano instead, there will be more space and privacy to look over his work there, anyway.

"I heard there's going to be beer pong soon," Henry says, "you never want to miss that."

"Every party has beer pong," Brandon whines, "this party doesn't have any girls I want. And they're playing Selena Gomez. We need to hit another sorority house."

Henry looks at the door, then back to Brandon.

"Yeah, okay," he says with a sigh, "let's go."

The door swings open and Mary and Anne Boleyn walk in, laughing together. They take off their coats and put them on the rack.

"Coming?" Brandon asks.

"No. You can go, though. If you want."

"What changed your mind?"

"Nothing," Henry says, smiling, "nothing at all."

Anne opens the sliding glass door to the backyard and sees the back of her friend's head. She taps her on the shoulder. Anna turns around and scowls.

"Thanks for ditching me," Anna snaps.

"I'm sorry," Anne says, taking a seat next to her on the lawn chair, "Mary and I were kind of fighting, but we made up."

"Well, no one told me."

"I didn't want to put you in the middle of it," Anne says, pouting.

"Okay, fine. You just left me to deal with the Brady Bunch Blondes--"

"You're blonde," Anne points out.

"I'm not bottle blonde."

"And that makes a difference?"

"And I had to try this girl's Tiki Death Punch Splenda drink out of politeness, and somehow got stuck listening to a thrilling debate on whether 'drunkorexic' was the way to go on getting buzzed faster at parties--"

"On what?"
"Seriously," Anna says, draining her cup, "don't ask."

"Okay…you're not usually this chatty," Anne quips.

"Tiki Death Punch," Anna explains.

"Ah."

"Hey, do you see that guy at the beer pong table over there?"

"Buckingham?" Anna asks, "yeah, what about him?"

"No his…back is to us…God, turn around," Anne mutters.

"It's a nice back," she observes, "it looks…muscled."

"I guess…Brandon!" she shouts.

He turns around, brow furrowed.

Anna covers her mouth with her hand, eyes widening.

"Yeah?" he yells.

Anne didn't exactly think this far.

"How good are you at beer pong?"

"He's crap," Buckingham shouts.

"I'm awesome at it. Why?"

Anne shrugs, takes a handful of popcorn from the bowl in her lap, and shoves it in her mouth.

Brandon rolls his eyes and returns to the game, sinking another one of Buckingham's cups and hollering as he does so.

"He's a Greek god," Anna whispers, "what the fuck?"

"He's alright."

"Are you fucking kidding me? He's gorgeous. Why do all the girls at this school have their panties in a twist over Tudor, when he's--oh, right," Anna says, snapping her fingers, "it's the money."

"Henry's attractive," Anne says indignantly.

Anna snorts--she actually snorts--and steals a handful of Anne's popcorn.

"He's a redhead," she scoffs, mouth full of popcorn, "please."

"He's barely a redhead," Anne insists, "his hair has, like, a hint of red."

"'A hint of red'? What are you, his hairstylist?"

"This conversation is pointless," Anne says, shaking her head, "what I meant to ask was…you told me you were amazing at beer pong, right? Am I remembering that right?"
"You are."

"You weren't bluffing, were you?"

"Oh, sweetie. I never bluff."

"Good. Can you do me a favor, then?"

"Shoot."

"Kick his ass for me?"

"Buckingham's?"

"No."

"...the Greek god?"

"Yes."

"You want me...to beat the Greek god at beer pong?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Just trust me," Anne says, glaring at him, "he's an asshole. He deserves a good ass kicking."

Anne doesn't ask for favors lightly. Nor is she likely to call just anyone an asshole. So whatever he did to cause this judgment must have been pretty bad. Anna knows this, in the same way that she knows Anne's favorite girl scout cookie is Thin Mints, that she always counts a hundred strokes when she brushes her hair at night, that her favorite color is yellow and that her least favorite thing in the world is when random men tell her to smile.

"Consider it done."

"Hey, Jen!"

Jen, who's on her way to take out the trash, sighs, drops the bag on the grass, and walks over to the beer pong table.

"What's up, Rich?"

"This beer sucks. Can you get us anything better?"

"Makes no difference to me," Brandon mocks, grinning, "I've only had to drink one so far."

"Something better?" she asks, wrinkling her nose, "what do you mean?"

"It's just cheap beer," he says with a shrug.

"Of course it's cheap beer. You want me to get, what? Stella Artois?"

"Sure."

"For drinks that are going to get balls thrown in them?"
Brandon and Buckingham chuckle.

"I mean, I'm sure you're not used to balls being thrown in," Buckingham says lewdly, "but yeah. Basically."

"What was that?"

"I said--"

"Aren't you Valois' friend?" she asks.

"Yeah, so?"

"In the same frat, right?"

"Yeah--"

"Get the fuck out."

"No way."

"Your friend almost started a fistfight in my house--"

"Tudor was there too! How do you know--"

"Tudor didn't corner a girl and not let go of her! He told me what happened. Valois is not going to be invited back here."

"What, and you're just going to believe him?"

Brandon's gaze has been flickering between both Jen and Buckingham, like he's watching a tennis match.

"I do believe him. And I also believe my security cameras."

"I--"

"Get the fuck out!" she snaps again, shrilly this time.

Honestly, Jen thinks as she walks back to grab the trash bag, sometimes the stress of being Beta Thau President does not seem worth it.

"Who wants to play?"

"I will," calls Anna Seville.

She walks over to the other side of the table, takes one of the ping pong balls from the laundry hamper by her side, tossing it in the air and catching it repeatedly.

"You sure?" Brandon asks, grinning.

Anna is maybe 5'2 at most, maybe 100 pounds soaking wet. He's seen her drop books and stumble walking into Chem class, at a normal pace, seen her flinch at frisbees flying in the quad. He doubts she can throw anything.

"I said I will."
"I don't want you to embarrass yourself."

"Oh," she says, laughing, "I don't think I'm the one that's going to be embarrassed."

"Really?"

"Table Tennis State Champion, 2015. It's not that far off from this."

"And that's something you're going to brag about?"

"Yeah, it is."

"You sure about that?"

"Tell you what," she says, "I'll even let you go first."

"Fine by me."

Brandon throws the ping pong ball and lands it in the cup closest to him.

She shrugs, chugs it and wipes her mouth.

"If I sink these next two, let's make it interesting," Anna offers.

"How interesting?"

"Add paddles. Someone told me they're taped to the bottom of the table."

"Wouldn't that make it easier?"

"For me," she says, beaming, "but if that freaks you out…what with me being a literal champion--"

"I've played racquetball, tennis…I think I'll be just fine."

"Great! My turn."

Anna does, surprising Brandon, land the next two. Brandon drinks each cup grudgingly, glaring at her over the rim as he does so.

The freshman girl claps with glee and crawls under the table, bringing out two paddles when she crawls out.

She hands him one, then practically skips to her side of the table.

"Who told you about the paddles?"

"Jen," she says, bouncing the ball on her paddle (show-off), "said she wanted to give the option of 'Dartmouth style beer pong'. I think Dartmouth was her first choice. That girl is not California Chill."

It's Brandon's turn again. He throws the ball and bats it straight away with the paddle, just like he'd do with a racket in tennis.

The ball hits the rim of one of the outer cups in Anna's triangle but ends up falling off onto the grass.

"Oh!" Anna says, "well…" she grabs another ball from the hamper and hits it as it soars in a perfect arc, somehow impossibly landing in the cup closest to him (rather than her), "if there had been a cup there, you would've totally had that one."
A crowd has gathered. The Boleyn sisters and Lizzy Blount are standing under the jacaranda tree that's strung with fairy lights, laughing and cheering for Anna. Jen is at the mixed drinks booth, checking stock with another senior girl, but definitely watching. His friends and teammates are alternately sitting on lawn chairs or standing, huddled in blankets with their girl of choice.

Tom Wyatt, who (yeah, he knows he was kind of a dick to earlier, but whatever, excuse him for wanting to sit next to his friend) is sitting on a blanket with his guitar, strumming along to whatever song's on and smiling, occasionally looking up to give Brandon a grin of the "eat-shit" variety.

Buckingham, incidentally, wasn't wrong--this beer is nasty, especially the more you drink of it. Even by Brandon's standards, and he used to lift Bud Light from the corner market on his walk home from high school and drink it happily.

And Brandon swears if they play one more Selena Gomez song he's going to lose his shit (he had to listen to every single song of hers since Wizards of Waverly Place, thanks to his younger sister being her "biggest fan"):  

*I'm so sick of that same old love/That shit it tears me up*  

Like, if you're so sick of it, stop singing about it, maybe? God.

After every cup he misses, Anna repeats the same mocking phrase: "well, if there was a cup there..."

She only has to drink one more cup of beer throughout the rest of the game before he folds.

"God, hope he doesn't throw up," Will remarks after Brandon's fifth cup.

"He's not a lightweight," Henry says, "he'll be fine."

"What did he drink before he played?" Jen asks.

"One beer, I think," Henry says, "why?"

Jen laughs, sipping on some pink drink with cubes of ice.

"Unless he's secretly a ninety-pound high schooler, I seriously doubt it."

"Why?"

"The beer pong beer is O'Doole's," Jen answers, smirking.

"Non alcoholic beer?" Will exclaims.

"Yeah. I don't want anyone throwing up in the yard. Or God forbid--the House."

Henry makes a note to himself to tell him as soon as he's done. He doesn't want to deal with the placebo effect. Brandon is an obnoxious drunk.

Brandon doesn't normally smoke, but he bummed one from Henry after his defeat. He hasn't been beaten that badly in a while.

He finished that cigarette ten minutes ago and has just been standing outside on the balcony ever since. He's debating going back inside and getting another when he hears the door sliding open behind him.
Brandon turns around to see who it is.

It’s Anna Seville, holding a paper plate in her hand, Clark Kent glasses falling over the bridge of her nose.

“Hey,” he says, relaxed. She’s cute, but not really hot enough to be intimidating. The least attractive of her friends, actually— not pretty like Mary, not striking like Anne. Just cute.

You never know, though, so he pops a piece of gum in his mouth. Just in case.

“Hey,” she replies, equally nonchalant, chucking her paper plate into the trash bin outside.

She stands near the door, arms crossed. Her tawny hair is in two braids that reach the low scoop of her shirt. It's something he noticed every time she bent down to collect the balls that missed and hit the grass, and it's something he notices now.

He feels awkward, and decides he should say something rather than just stare at her chest.

“You’re a— you’re really good at beer pong.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Alright,” he drawls, “just trying to be polite.”

“Yeah, but you suck at being polite.”

“Whatever.”

Anna looks at him, as if measuring him, and walks out to the balcony railing to stand next to him.

“Listen,” she says, “let me be real with you for a sec— I like sex.”

He turns to face her, quirking an eyebrow at this declaration.

“Like, I really like sex. And while I don’t like you, particularly, you’re really hot and I figure you’ll do. Also,” she says, talking faster now, “Mary thinks I need to get laid and I agree and she’s agreed to let me use her room for the night, provided I clean the sheets, and—”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, she’s a true blue friend. So, anyway. You down or no?”

“I mean—yeah. Yeah, I am.”

“Cool.”

She pulls the can of soda he’s been holding (he really didn't want to taste any more beer, fake or otherwise) out of his hand and throws it in the trash.

“What—”

“You’re not gonna need that,” she says with a shrug, taking his hand, “let’s go.”

And so they go, into the hallway of bedrooms, her pulling him behind, him basically along for the ride.
“You gonna take off your shoes?” she asks expectantly.

“Oh, right,” he says, kicking off his sneakers next to the door.

“Are you?” he asks.

“I’m wearing thigh highs and a garter belt with Mary Janes. You want to ruin that image?”

He shakes his head vehemently.

“Good.”

“Well, this is happening,” he murmurs as she unzips her skirt and lets it fall to the floor, stepping out of it and towards him.

Good call on the keeping-of-the-shoes thing, he thinks, drinking her in from head to toe. He's definitely never imagined this underneath her animal-print sweaters in Chem class. He'd assumed she was a basic, cotton, matching underwear-and-bra girl, so the Dita Von Teese get-up is both surprising and thrilling.

“Of course this is happening. Do you usually talk to yourself?”

“I wasn’t—”

“Don’t care,” she says, pushing him until he’s standing, legs locked against the mattress.

“I—”

“First off,” she says, taking off her shirt, “I’m going to be on top. Non negotiable.”

“Oh...alright...”

She can tell that he’s a little taken aback at her assertiveness, but she plows on ahead.

“Also non negotiable,” she says, getting on her knees and making quick work of loosening his belt, “you’re wearing a condom.”

“I don’t have—”

She reaches into the left cup of her bra with one hand and throws three on the bed— “pick one” — ridding him of his jeans with her other hand.

“You carry three condoms on you?”

“Girl Scouts,” she says, by way of explanation.

“Girl Scouts carry condoms? What the——”


“Ooooh.”

“Maybe you just shouldn’t talk,” she says, pulling his boxers down with her teeth.

“I...I can do that.”

"Glad."
tom wyatt's band, the "bright beams", is inspired by the historical sir thomas wyatt's poem, "avising the bright beams".
also i'm not really sure if it's obvious or not, so thought i'd pull a previously-on and remind everyone that valois told anne that he heard brandon maybe kind of suggesting that henry gave mary cash after she spent the night, maybe implying...something else? so if anne didn't like brandon before (which she didn't) she definitely doesn't like him now.
sorry there have already been so many chapters on one day/party. crazy. i was actually going to write another one after this one that still takes place at this party (longest party ever, somehow, the party where everything happens, basically) but i might end up cutting that and skipping on ahead if it ends up not being relevant to the plot. i've done that already, actually-- i wrote a scene with anne and her professor that explains how she becomes a tutor. it's kind of funny but i decided it was kind of unnecessary-- i don't think it's any big leap for a reader that she's a peer tutor, given how intelligent she is. anyway...i hope you guys are enjoying the story. thank you for the comments and kudos. they really mean a lot, and i definitely appreciate them.
shine like small town stars

Chapter Summary

It's hard to say no to her. Maybe she's not trying to flirt, maybe she's just being friendly, but Tom can't really tell the difference. She's sitting close to him, head tilted to the side, smiling while biting part of her lower lip. Eyes alight, she pushes her hair back behind her ears, and Tom gets the feeling that this isn't just the kind of girl that songs get written about (he's certainly written a few himself), that she's one men might have risked kingdoms for, in the olden days.

Chapter Notes

the song "saturday night" is written by and is property of natalia kills. no copyright infringement intended.
couldn't find a duet version, but a cover that most matches how it would sound on a piano is below:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQuVivnkPNs

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Henry Tudor and Will Compton are playing beer pong. There are quite a few sorority girls watching them and cheering, but there's not nearly as many people out as when Anna and Brandon were playing against each other. A cocky, handsome well-known jock being beaten by an intellectual but little-known freshman girl had been a little too Glee for anyone to resist, apparently.

Anne, bored since Anna, Mary, and Lizzy have all decided to disappear on her, sits down on the plaid blanket that Tom's currently occupying.

"Are you really doing homework?" she quips.

"I really am."

"Why'd you bring it to a party?"

"I was trying to work on it at my dorm at first, but...sometimes quiet is more distracting to me than noise," Tom explains.

"I understand. What's the assignment for?"

"Lyricism in Modern Music. We had to pick a song that had a day of the week in the title, which is harder than you might think."

"Well...Friday I'm in Love," Anne offers.

"We don't get extra credit if the song's on the charts."

"And this one isn't?"
"Well, I think it was in New Zealand, but I hope that doesn't count."

"What do you have to do with it?" Anne asks, leaning over the sheet music.

"We have to perform it as a duet, so I'm trying to figure out which parts to split up."

"Interesting. Mind if I take a look?"

"Go ahead."

"You're not even trying," Will complains, "you're making this way too easy for me."

"Yeah, sure," Henry says, throwing the ping pong ball out of the cup Will landed in his triangle and gulping it quickly.

"Why do you keep looking at the door? Are you expecting Emily Ratajowski to stop by?"

"What?" Henry asks, throwing a ball that hits Will on his shoulder and bounces off the table.

"You're not even looking to see where the ball's going! The fuck, Tudor?"

"Do you mind if I make a suggestion?" Anne asks, trading the sheets of music she's been reading with the drink Tom's been holding for her.

"Go ahead."

"Are you supposed to pick your own instrument for this song?"

"Yeah, we are. And you're actually drinking."

"So?"

"You usually don't."

"College experience," Anne says with a wave of her hand, taking a sip of her Cosmo, "but anyway, this song seems more like a piano song than a guitar song."

Tom examines the music, tapping his pen against it.

"Y'know, I think you're right."

"There's a piano in the living room. I've used it before when I've been waiting for Mary to come down, and Jen doesn't mind. Want to work on it together?"

It's hard to say no to her. Maybe she's not trying to flirt, maybe she's just being friendly, but Tom can't really tell the difference. She's sitting close to him, head tilted to the side, smiling while biting part of her lower lip. Eyes alight, she pushes her hair back behind her ears, and Tom gets the feeling that this isn't just the kind of girl that songs get written about (he's certainly written a few himself), that she's one men might have risked kingdoms for, in the olden days.

Maybe her sister's closer to Helen of Troy, maybe Anne's not exactly the face that launched a thousand ships, maybe her features aren't perfectly symmetrical, but she definitely has that je ne sais quoi.
But Tom has had this feeling since he was sixteen, so he tries to brush it off best he can.

"Sure," he says, "that sounds fun."

Tudor has landed absolutely none of his shots into any of Will's cups. In fact, he just raised his arm and so far he has yet to throw, and it's his turn. He's just totally frozen

"You having a stroke there, my guy?" Will calls out.

He follows his friend's gaze over his shoulder. There's Andrea Hastings, who he knows slept with Tudor a year ago, who's been batting her eyelashes at him all night (not that Tudor seems to be noticing, even though she's not exactly being subtle), and her friends, and there's that musician guy, Wyatt, who's leaving with the Boleyn girl that decimated Buckingham earlier tonight.

One of these things is not like the other, Will thinks.

A drunken memory comes trickling back from last night: Will, stumbling out onto the balcony. Tudor and Boleyn, heads close together, them springing apart like repelling magnets as soon as he announced himself. *You're not asking her out*, Tudor had said, in a tone that brooked no argument. *Interesting*.

"Your turn!" he yells.

Tudor shakes his head, then makes the shot into one of the many of Will's remaining cups.

"You win," says Tudor, the most competitive friend Will's ever had, "I'm going inside."

"Tudor--"

Andrea Hastings watches him leave, then follows after him.

So, Will thinks, Wyatt is following Boleyn, and Tudor is following Boleyn, Andrea Hastings is following Tudor, and no one is following Andrea Hastings. *Fucking tragic, is what that is.*

Tom plays the intro the song and sings the first few lines:

\[
mama, you're beautiful tonight/movie star hair and that black eye/can't even notice it/when you smile so hard through a heartfelt lie
\]

Anne joins in and sings:

\[
go kiss the liquor off his laugh--
\]

But is cut off by someone clearing their throat loudly behind her.

Anne turns around to see the tiny but intimidating Jen Parker standing behind, arms crossed.

"Yes?" Anne asks innocently.

"What are you doing?"

"Singing," Anne answers, "is that a prob--"
"I mean, I'm playing music. Specifically picked party playlist music."

"Oh," Tom says, "we're sorry, we can sing more quietly--"

"I can't have that," Jen says with exaggerated patience, tugging at her necklace, "I just, I can't have two things playing at the same time because that would be chaos."

Anne thinks this is the first time she has ever seen a woman literally clutch her pearls in real life.

"Well, we can stop," Tom offers.

"No, I mean, I kind of like the whole impromptu concert thing. It's like, a good vibe. I just don't know…this song kind of seems like a downer."

"It picks up on the chorus," Anne reassures her.

"It really does. It's also called 'Saturday Night'," Tom informs her with a rakish grin, "so, hey. Fitting, right?"

"Can I see the song?"

"Sure," Tom says, sliding the music off the piano stand and passing it to her.

Jen scans it quickly, leans down and whispers something to Tom.

Tom, in turn, whispers to Anne: "She says the third verse is a little too 'Virgin Suicides' for a party, so we have to skip it."

Anne nods.

Tom and Anne throw Jen a thumbs up. Jen nods, then goes to the back of the room to unplug the speakers.

"Thought you didn't follow girls," Will whispers.

"What the fuck are you on about?" Henry asks.

Will's standing with him against the wall in the living room. There's a lot of people milling about. Tom Wyatt's not exactly as popular with the girls on campus as, say, Tudor or Brandon, but musicians always pull in their fair share of female attention. And his is probably the most popular among campus bands, so there's a niche there.

They're flitting about Wyatt, some glaring outwardly at Anne Boleyn, but she seems unfazed, reading through the music with Tom and laughing, pointing things out.

"Nothing."

Will can smell Henry's drink. It's probably more rum than coke.

"Hastings has been checking you out all night, just FYI," Will informs his friend.

"Good for her."

Tom, after marking something on the paper he and Anne are looking at, starts playing again.
Anne sings:

    go kiss the liquor off his laugh/another suitcase filled with cash/shiny apologies in a
    velvet box/what a real good man

Unbidden (maybe it was talking about her last night, he almost never talks about her), memories come to Henry of his mother: her gentleness, her beauty, her kindness, her long, golden hair and the pins she used to put it up every morning.

Her only defiance of his father had been in the keeping of her name: Elizabeth York.

Tom sings:

    we drive brand new cars/and we light fine cigars/we shine like small-town stars/through
    the best days of our lives

Otherwise, she pretty much lived to serve him. When Henry Tudor I wanted her smiles to stop lighting up the TV screens of housewives every afternoon at three, they did. When he wanted more children, she had them.

They sing in unison:

    we will walk right down the pavement/i know we're gonna be just fine/and i'll put on my
    dancing shoes real tight: 'cause it's just another saturday night!

Anne's brow furrows before she begins to sing the next part, and she sings with great carefulness:

    another fist, another wall/we lose ourselves, we lose it all/i wrote him a hundred
    times/can you hear my heart through the prison bars?

Tom sings:

    the boys i kiss don't know my name--

"GAAAY!"

Henry turns, startled, to Compton, who's suddenly coughing violently. Henry punches him in the shoulder and he yelps in pain, "not cool, man."

"Don't be a jackass," Henry says.

"Sorry," Tom says sarcastically, "I don't change the pronouns in songs for 'no homo'."

"Sorry, man," Compton says, "ah…continue?"

Tom rolls his eyes, then goes back to playing, starting over his lines:

    the boys i kiss don't know my name/the tears i cry all taste of blame/bad luck and dirty
    cops

Anne and Tom sing the last line together:

    i'm a fucking teenage tragedy

And then, Anne sings, alone and passionately:
"i walk lonely streets/and i talk big time dreams/so hold on before you see that you're better off without me"

Before they both sing the chorus together again:

'cause when i look up from the pavement…

Anne's eyes flit up from the sheet music to Henry as Tom plays the interlude after the chorus. She holds his gaze, and he can't help but feel that she's singing to him:

*i promise i'll be the one you want/don't tell me i'm unfixable/you don't know what it's like/to be seventeen with no place to go*

She takes a deep breath and sings:

*but give me just one night/and i'll be almost fine/remind me, one more time/it's the best days of my life*

Anne and Tom segue into the chorus again, singing about five or six more 'it's just another saturday night's before he lets his hands slide off the piano and into his lap.

The room claps and they bow their heads.

Will is clapping politely (I mean, they weren't that great). His eyes slide over to his friend, who is applauding and smiling like a kid on Christmas morning.

And, Will guesses, Anne Boleyn is the Christmas present.

Which would make Wyatt…the inconvenient wrapping paper? A ribbon that won't untie? Some kid trying to unwrap the Christmas present that Henry wants?

Whatever. Will's not really an analogy guy.

But, he thinks (as he watches Henry rush over to her and give her a high five), she's definitely the Christmas present. That much he knows.

"Remind me to lose more often," Brandon says, out of breath.

Anna laughs, sitting up in bed and pulling her hair up into a ponytail.

Brandon watches her as she slides the straps of her bra back on, hooking it from behind.

Her skin is slick with sweat and covered in freckles.

She gets out of the bed and picks her shirt up from the dresser (giving him a nice view of her bare ass), pulling it over her head.

"Where are you going?" he asks, puzzled.

"I'm going back to my dorm to change," she explains, picking her skirt up from the floor and pulling it up over her legs, "and then I have to come back, get the sheets, wash them in the laundry room… put the new sheets on that my friend left for me…dry them, put them in here, and then I'll either sleep over or go back to my dorm, since she said I could have it for the whole night. Probably sleep over," she says, nodding to herself like she just decided on it.
Brandon sits up, pulling the sheets up with him.

Anna walks over to the vanity and smears some lip gloss over her mouth. She takes a tissue from the sparkly box that's next to a basket of makeup, licks it, and tries to wipe away some of the eyeliner that's smudged under her eyes.

"So…can I…have your number?" he asks.

"Why would you need that?"

"So we can do this again sometime."

Anna steps away from the mirror, turns around and looks at him through squinted eyes.

"...why?"

"Because it was fun. You seemed to enjoy it, anyway."

Anna sighs, pushes her glasses back up her nose, and leans against the vanity.

"I did. I don't fake anything for the sake of male egos," she informs him, crossing her arms, "not IQ, not orgasms."

"Noted."

"So it was fun," she explains, "for the night."

"Why wouldn't it be just as fun...another night?"

"Brandon, have you never been one night stranded before? Because I'm trying to tell you, as gently as possible, that I'm one night standing you."

"So there's like...nothing I could say to make you give me your number?"

"Nothing comes to mind..."

Brandon racks his brain, trying to think of something.

She's pretty hot, actually (he amends his previous just-cute opinion, after seeing her naked, it's changed considerably), which he never noticed before, and she kicked his ass at beer pong and asked him to hook up right after (also hot) and she likes sex as much as she said she does, and she's also really, really good at it.

And she didn't even want to cuddle? Like, what the fuck, honestly. When does that happen?

Basically he wants to tug on her ponytail and make her scream his name. Like, as soon as humanly possible.

"Can I go down on you?"

"In exchange for my number? That seems vaguely prostitution-like."

"Hardly."

"Besides," she says with a shrug, "you already did."

"As a segue. Not as the main event."
She considers this. Sighs, chews on the end of her ponytail (which should be kind of gross, but it's actually just making him think about tugging it more).

"I just changed," she says.

"You're wearing a skirt, but not underwear," he counters.

"Okay…deal."

---

**From: Anna Seville**

**To: Anne Boleyn**

**Sent November 20, 2016, Sunday, 3:35 PM**

Hey, can I ask you a favor?

**From: Anne Boleyn**

Of course. What's up?

**From: Anna Seville**

My Creative Writing grade has been in dangerous A- territory lately (dumbest elective choice of my liiiIIIFE), so I've been working on this extra credit thing for it.

**From: Anne**

Sounds intriguing. Where do I come in?

**From: Anna**

Well, I had to write a play. My prof needs to see it performed. It's just a read, though, everyone can hold the scripts in their hands, you just have to follow stage directions from me.

**From: Anne**

Sounds fun.

**From: Anna**

Should be! Someone already agreed to be the lead but they flaked. So you'd have a lot of lines, hope that's ok…

**From: Anne**

It's ok. What time is it at?

**From: Anna**

It's on Tuesday. We perform at 3:30 but be there like 3ish?
I can make that.

From: Anna

Great! Oh, one more thing…it's kind of a romantic play?

From: Anne

So?

From: Anna

So…Tom's playing the romantic lead, opposite you. Is that ok?

From: Anne

Yeah, it's fine.

From: Anna

Yay! Ok so I'll message you on Facebook with an attachment of the script. Thanks so much!!!!

From: Anne

No problem.

From: Anna Seville

To: Charles Brandon

Sent November 20, 2016, Sunday, 5:35 PM

Hey, can I ask you a favor?

From: Charles Brandon

To: Anna Seville

Is it dirty?

From: Anna Seville

No.

From: Charles Brandon

Oh. Well, if I do it, will you do a dirty favor for me?

From: Anna

Oh my GOD. Never mind.

From: Brandon
Relax. Just giving you a hard time. What is it?

**From: Anna**

I had to write this play for extra credit and I need a reader for one of the roles.

**From: Brandon**

You need extra credit?

**From: Anna**

Yes…why?

**From: Brandon**

How the mighty have fallen.

**From: Anna**

What?

**From: Brandon**

We're just not so different, that's all.

**From: Anna**

You're asleep in Chem class half the time and I'm top of that class. I know because I've seen the curve. We're a little different.

**From: Brandon**

Ha ha, so you watch me sleep ;-)

**From: Anna**

I hear you. Sometimes you snore.

**From: Brandon**

I've definitely never snored in my life.

How many lines?

**From: Anna**

Well, then, apparently you're dead.

Ten.

**From: Brandon**

Do I have to memorize?

**From: Anna**
No, it's just a read. Everyone will have their scripts with them.

From: Brandon

Sounds alright. What time is it at?

From: Anna

It's at 3'oclock this Tuesday.

From: Brandon

Okay, I'll be there.

From: Anna

I'll send you a copy of the script. Can I have your email?

From: Brandon

You can have anything you want.

From: Anna

You have $250K?? Omg, thanks so much!!!

From: Brandon

No. Athletics scholarship.

From: Anna

Brandon, do you know what "anything" means?

From: Brandon

Seville, do you know what "annoyingly literal" means?

From: Anna

Touché.

From: Brandon

charlesbrandon@whitehalluniversity.edu

Chapter End Notes

just some random trivia thrown in:
anne hastings was rumored to be one of henry viii's earliest mistresses. for modern times,
i changed the name to 'andrea hastings'. she probably won't be coming back, but thought
i'd add that.
elizabeth of york was henry viii's mother. people did describe her as kind, gentle, and a great beauty. so in this story, her name is elizabeth york. and, like in history, she passed away when henry was 12 years old.
"I'm going to the post office, if you must know."
"To do what?"
"Send mail."
"You know, there's a rumor I heard that that's also open tomorrow. Did you know that?"
"Sure, but--"
"Is this super urgent mail? A donor organ? Legal papers?"

French quotes are from the 2001 movie Amélie—no copyright infringement intended, all translations can be found at the bottom notes. Some of the quotes are from people in historical figures, and I will attribute them at the end as well.

November 22, 2016, Tuesday, 11:00 AM

written on the 34th page of Henry's spiral notebook:

you look nice today.

Henry, you're supposed to be taking notes, not passing them.

I'm bored. And I have an 85 in the class, anyway.

Then you should cancel—this is supposed to be for struggling students.

And give up my slot? Never. Besides, this is for anyone that wants help.

I'm sure you have better ways to spend a Tuesday.

None come to mind.

You're supposed to be doing your practice problems.

I'm supposed to do many things I don't want to do.

If you're going to write, at least do so en français. Proper punctuation and accents.

"Voilà ma petite Amélie, vous n'avez pas des os en verre."

You watched it again?
Oui.

"Les jours, les mois, puis les années passent. Le monde extérieur paraît si mort qu'Amélie préfère rêver sa vie en attendant d'avoir l'âge de partir."

is that how you felt? growing up?

sometimes.

"Ca s'appelle se confronter à la réalité, mais ça justement, Amélie n'y tient pas du tout!!"

is that how you feel?

Oui.

what's so bad about your reality? i can't see how don't have everything you want.

not everything.

so, what's wrong?

not looking forward to seeing my dad this holiday.

Pourquoi pas?

Il est très critique.

what does he have to criticize? you're well-liked, a good student, a great athlete, polite (most of the time)...

Merci.

De rien.

trust me, he always finds something. Last time it was my "lack of focus". And he had a 4.0 during his entire four years at Whitehall, so he doesn't see why I can't.

what's your gpa?

3.5

that's good, though!

not good enough. anyway: what will you be doing over break?

well, café will be closed. but i booked a gig as an extra on some teen soap. it's shooting near sunset and vine.

sounds fun.

hopefully it will be. now, can you please actually do your worksheet? we have five minutes left in our session and i don't want to get fired.

dictator.
Brandon wakes up with a dry mouth. He sits up in his bed, leaning against the wall, and stretches his arms above his head.

Henry is sitting on top of the covers on his bed, back against the headboard. He runs his hand over his head. There’s a clipboard placed across his knees, a piece of paper attached to it. He writes, and crosses something out. Writes, crosses out. He yanks the paper, crushes it, and throws it on the floor, adding to a sizeable pile of crumpled papers already there.

"What are you doing?" Brandon asks, grabbing the open can of coke on his nightstand and drinking it, grimacing when he tastes how flat it is.

"Nothing," Henry says, tossing the clipboard onto his desk, "good nap?"

"Fine, I guess," Brandon says, groggy, wiping sleep out of his eyes, "don't remember taking it though."

"You came in at half past noon, said 'fuck morning classes', dropped your textbooks on the floor and crashed," Henry informs him.

"That sounds like me."

Brandon has a weird feeling…like he's forgotten something.

"What time is it?" he asks.

"It's…" Henry checks his phone and answers, "2:30."

"2:30?!"

*Shit, Anna's play…*

"Goddamn it!" Brandon exclaims, rolling off the bed and landing on the floor in his haste to get up (luckily the comforter, twisted around as it was, manages to cushion his fall somewhat).

"Jesus! What's wrong with you?"

"I have to be across campus in like, half an hour…"

"Where?"

"Humanities building," Brandon says, pulling on his shoes and tying them. Thankfully he fell asleep fully dressed, so he doesn't have to worry about putting jeans on or anything like that.

"For what?"

"Extra credit thing."

"Ah, well, you could use some of that."
"Not even mine, though," Brandon says, "motherfuck--where did I put it?"

He's rummaging through everything atop his desk: tangled headphones, USB drive, lab papers, crumpled syllabus, a receipt with a barista's phone number written on the back (female), a receipt with a bartender's phone number on the back (male), a dozen highlighters, a sock (for some odd reason), graphing calculator, pencils, his student planner…

"What do you mean 'not even yours'? Who's it for?"

"A-ha!"

Brandon pulls out his copy of the play, grabs his book-bag from off the floor and shoves it in.

He can't find his cell phone on the desk so he starts searching on his bed…only to find it under his pillow! Of course. He falls asleep with his phone all the time.

"Brandon? Who's it for?"

"A person," he says, putting his phone in his bag, too, "get off my ass, maybe?"

"Is it a girl person?"

"Yes," he snaps, "and I'd like to sleep with her again, so I can't bail on this favor--"

"'Sleep with her'? Aw. Do you tuck her in first?"

"No, that'd be your thing," Brandon shoots back.

Henry's mouth drops open.

Brandon's pretty proud of himself for that one. He's usually not so quick with the comebacks, especially not right after waking up.

"Do we have anything to eat?" Brandon asks, "I don't have time to stop for food, so--"

"I have a donut," Henry says, grabbing a grease-spotted bag atop a stack of magazines on his desk, "catch."

Brandon catches it, opens the bag and shoves it in his mouth.

"Thanks!" he says around the donut, opening the door and letting it swing shut behind him.

Henry walks over to the trash can to throw away the bottle of water he just finished when he notices that Brandon's keys are still on his desk.

Shit.

He was planning on leaving soon, but he can't leave Brandon locked out.

Henry sighs and grabs the keys from Brandon's desk.

He grabs his bag (which is always packed and ready to go, because he is a prepared person and not a disorganized mess, unlike some people he could mention) and leaves the dorm.

Henry can see the back of his friend, running along the most direct path on campus that leads to
Humanities.

He groans, but runs behind him, trying to catch up.

Brandon gets to room 302, the one Anna told him to meet him at.

Anna is there in the hallway, pacing, her hand covering one of her ears, phone against the other one.

"Tom--no, Tom, you cannot do this to me! You promised!"

She's chewing the end of her ponytail.

Brandon waves. She waves back, distracted.

"Well, I don't really care that you have strep throat! You cannot leave me hanging like this!"

*Jesus.*

"Your voice isn't *that* hoarse… *I* can hear you…Well, what the fuck am I supposed to do?!"

"Brandon!"

When Brandon turns to see who put their hand so familiarly on his shoulder, he sees Henry, who's dangling keys above his head.

"You forgot these."

"Oh, thanks man--"

"Yeah, yeah, you're REALLY sorry, I'm SO sure…whatever. I have to go. Thanks for fucking me over," Anna half-screams into her phone.

'*Is that her?* Henry mouths, barely containing his laughter.

"Hey," Anna says, running over to Henry and Brandon, "hey, you! Tudor!"

"Yes?"

"You're not busy, are you?"

"Actually--"

"Because I don't know if you heard--"

"Oh, I think everyone heard--"

"But my lead just bailed on me--"

"Ah, *actually*, I have to get going--"

"Why? Why do you need to go?"

"I have an errand to run."

"Really? What kind of errand?"
"The kind that needs to *get done,*" Henry says impatiently, shooting Brandon a disbelieving look.

Brandon shrugs back, in a 'don't look at *me*' sort of way.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the post office, if you must know."

"To do what?"

"Send *mail.*"

"You know, there's a rumor I heard that that's also open tomorrow. Did you know that?"

"Sure, but--"

"Is this super urgent mail? A donor organ? Legal papers?"

"Seville, chill," Brandon says.

"I mean--"

"Could you maybe send it tomorrow?" she asks.

Her hands are literally shaking. Actually, *all* of her is vibrating, *like she's just had a hundred shots of espresso or something.*

"Seville!" Henry says.

"Tudor. Like…" Anna trails off, puts her hand over her nose and takes a deep breath, "look, okay, I know I may not have always been the warmest to you--"

*Math that's an understatement.*

"But if you could do this one thing for me, I will be," she sighs, "eternally grateful."

"*How* grateful?"

"I…"

She looks at Brandon, then Henry.

"I will…tell you a secret."

"So what?"

"I will tell you…a secret about my roommate."

"Who's your roommate?" Brandon asks, brow furrowing, looking to Henry.

Henry is rigid, suddenly, his hand gripping the strap of his shoulder bag so tightly that Brandon can see his knuckles turning white.

"Bye, Brandon," Anna says.

"Why would he--"
"Bye, Brandon," Henry echoes, eyes never leaving Anna's.

"Screw you guys," Brandon says, but he walks down to the other end of the hall and sits on a bench. 

Whatever, he thinks as he reads over his ten highlighted lines one more time, not like I care.

"And why do you think a secret about Boleyn would interest me?" Henry asks as soon as Brandon's out of earshot.

"Please."

"We're friends."

"If that's what you want to call it."

"Not even close friends, really."

"Sure."

"I don't… like her. If that's what you're suggesting," Henry says, flustered, his gaze drops to the floor.

"Oh, buddy. You are not fooling anyone with that."

Anna smirks and Henry scowls.

"I just have to watch a French movie with you, right now," Anna continues in a deep timbre, "I just have to text you incessantly, and gaze longingly at you at parties--"

"What is it?" Henry snaps.

"What is what?"

"The 'secret'."

"I'll tell you after."

"I don't believe you."

"Well, I don't believe that you'll read the part if I tell you now."

"I'm a man of my word."

"Sure you are."

"You have any other options?"

Anna sighs, puts her face in her hands and lets out a strangled scream.

Henry watches her, bemused.

"Fine," she says, shaking her head like she's getting that out of her system, "fiiine."

Henry crosses his arms.

"I'm waiting."
"She talks about you, okay?"

"Oh?"

"She talks about you…a lot."

Henry grins, and there's something fragile and hopeful in his expression that, if she liked him at all, might just break her heart.

But as it is, all she can grudgingly admit to herself is that his smile could only be accurately described as 'dazzling', that when his face is lit up it's something of a masterpiece, and that she can see, objectively, why other people (not her, definitely) find themselves charmed by him. That is a smile that wins people over, plain and simple.

*Brandon's definitely cuter, though.*

"How do I know you're not making that up?"

"Reader's Digest version? I have to go over some of this before we go in."

"Fine."

"Something about you being in the library, making some sort of stupid comment, something about…a masque, I think? That you're stubborn?"

" Doesn't sound very flattering."

"She said you're attractive, too."

"Really?"

"But mainly she complains about you. But it's with such frequency that…I have to assume you're on her mind. Frequently. Within what context, I couldn't say, of course."

"Of course."

"Will you read the part?"

"Yes."

"Great."

Anna opens the folder she's carrying and hands him a neat pile of papers held together with a staple.

"Your part is 'Peter'," she says, "do you have a highlighter?"

"No."

She pulls one that's behind her ear and hands it to him.

"Get to it, we're on in a few minutes," she says, clapping her hands, "thank you!"

She runs off to where Brandon's sitting on the bench at the end of the hall and sits next to him.

"Hey, sorry about that."

"That wasn't some weird sex thing, was it?" he asks.
"What?"

"You said you'd be 'very grateful', he said 'how grateful'…" 

"Oh, God no. I think he's kind of an ass, honestly."

"You think I'm kind of an ass, and you had sex with me," Brandon points out (fairly, Anna has to admit).

"True…but I don't find him even remotely attractive."

"Oh. Good."

"Anyway…you have any questions about your lines?"

"No," he says, smiling, tucking in a piece of hair that came loose and tucking it behind her ear, "it's pretty straightforward."

"What are you doing?"

"Fixing your hair."

"Can you not?"

"Sure, I guess…"

"What are you doing here?"

Henry looks up from the page he's reading.

Anne Boleyn is looking at him, brow furrowed, confused.

"Marking my lines. Apparently someone bailed on your friend."

"Tom?"

"That's what it sounded like. What are you doing here?"

"I'm the female lead. Which would make you…?"

"The male lead, I guess."

"Oh."

"Disappointed?" he teases.

"No…just surprised."

"Well," he says, turning a page, "it's wasn't in my plans either, but…Seville can be very persuasive."

The chairs in the class are full, mainly of other students trying to get their work in for some last-minute extra credit before finals.

They're pretty attentive, though--they're about two minutes into the play.
"This kind of life isn't meant for kings," Brandon reads from his page, "you have to know that."

"Peter puts his hand on Kingsley's shoulder," Anna reads from the script.

She's standing in the corner of the room, tucked away. Her professor is sitting at her desk, writing notes.

Henry follows her direction and says, "isn't the point of being king that you can choose your life?"

"You'd think that, but a king's life is already chosen. It's chosen by the history of his father, it's chosen by what's best for his family. A wife is no different. She is chosen in the cards before you get to play your own hand," says Brandon.

"Then I have to go back," Henry reads, "for I feel she is what has been chosen for me longer than the stars themselves."

"Kingsley exits and Kate enters," Anna reads.

Anne, who up till now has been sitting in a desk in the front row, gets up and trades seats with Brandon.

Anna walks from her corner and hands Henry a book, then returns to the corner.

"Peter hands the book to Kate. She opens it, and reads aloud."

"'If you remember my love in your prayers as strongly as I adore you, I shall hardly be forgotten. For I am yours, forever.'"

"Do you like it? I wrote it for you."

"Is it true?" Anne asks.

"God himself could not write truer words."

"Blasphemy, love."

"Then let Him strike me down."

Anne, getting into the acting, runs a finger down a passage of the book.

"They step towards each other, closer together now," Anna reads.

"You have not read my part yet, then?"

"Which part, my darling?" Henry inquires.

"Kate turns a few pages, then hands the book back to Peter," Anna reads.

"'By daily proof you shall me find, to be to you both loving and kind,'" Henry reads, smiling.

"They kiss," Anna reads.

Anne stills, her throat suddenly dry as a desert.

They're standing pretty close, a fairly short distance, but in this moment it feels as if the length between them is a country's worth.
It's a cliché, but she really does feel weak in the knees, like she used to get when she had class presentations due, which she got over by the seventh grade, but suddenly that feeling is back and bigger than ever.

Students turn to look at each other. The professor is tapping her pen against the desk. The clock is ticking.

"They kiss," Anna repeats, an edge of exasperation in her voice.

*You okay?* Henry mouths, gaze steady on her.

She gulps, nods.

*Now or never.*

They move towards each other. And then, as if dancing, she turns slightly away from him, although they are still close, tilting her head. Their chests are almost touching, now.

Their height difference is such that when she turns her head slightly, her mouth is on level with the bottom of his chin.

Their noses touch, brush against each other, lightly.

She tilts her head upwards and looks into his eyes.

He cradles her face in his hands, gently, and presses his mouth against her: the lightest of brushes, the most exquisite type of agony she has ever felt.

---

Time slows, like it has with her before, like it did on the first night they met.

She deepens the kiss, pulls him closer, and everything in the world goes soft for a moment, soft like light breaking through stained glass windows, soft like a sigh, soft like the kind of expensive paper you try to only write beautiful words on.

He breaks away first, respectfully.

Truly, he breaks away first because he's afraid that if he continues he'll never be able to stop, that he'll keep kissing her for as long as she lets him, that the depths of his feelings for her will sink him, this girl of his literal dreams, who he's kissed in dreams (dreams that feel realer than dreams, more like visions, really, or glimpses of a past he's never had) so many times; will take over, that he will keep kissing her till the glaciers melt, till everyone else disappears, that he will take her hand and pull her out into the hall, to his room, and touch every inch of her body until his name is all but written underneath her skin, the way he feels hers underneath his (she's gotten under his skin, somehow, quickly but surely).

When he goes out for runs at 4 am it's Anne, when he falls asleep it's Anne; her name a whisper, quiet but insistent and constant, in the same way a prayer is, in the same way dreams that just won't fade are.

He fears that if he had kept kissing her, fantasy and reality would have collided: it's what he wants most and what he fears most at the same time, a heady and intoxicating combination if ever there was one.
"Did you tell them to do that last direction? Because it was very good," asks Professor Thorne.

Anna is sitting in an office chair in front of the desk. Everyone that submitted a play gets a Q and A right after, and this is hers, though it seems to be winding down.

Brandon, Anne, and Henry stand, awkwardly clustered, behind her.

"Sorry," Anna says, "can you clarify what you mean, please?"

"Right after they kissed," she says, "they sprang apart, and mirrored each other, totally identical reactions: gazes to the floor, and then they touched their mouths, as if they were still…feeling the kiss."

"Ah, yes! I did!" Anna lies enthusiastically.

She really needs the extra credit.

"That was very well done," Thorne says, checking a few boxes off the sheet, "you could really feel the fragility of that moment, that couple. And the language! I couldn't tell what era it was, exactly, it felt timeless, but in any case, I felt very transported."

"Thank you," Anna says sweetly.

Thorne nods, hands her the paper, and calls out for the next group's scene.

Anna gets up from the chair and giggles.

"I got an A!" she gloats as soon as they've left the classroom, "you guys! I got an A!"

"That's great," Anne says weakly.

"Great," echoes Henry.

"God, what's wrong with you guys? You need coffee or something?"

"I could go for a coffee," Brandon says.

"I'll buy you one!" Anna says.

Nothing cheers her up like an A (well, maybe sex. they're pretty much on equal footing).

"Do you guys want any?" Anna offers, "as a thank you, you all really saved my grade."

"I have to go pack," Henry says abruptly, "but thanks, anyway."

Henry half-runs down the hall. Anna's not about to try to keep up with him.

"Anne?"

"No, thanks, I'm supposed to meet up with Mary in a few minutes, so I should take this door…" she trails off, pointing to an exit that takes you most directly to the sorority houses from this building.

"Okay! Bye!"

"Looks like it's just us," Brandon says.

"Looks that way."
from: margaret tudor

to: henry tudor

sent november 22, 2016, tuesday, 9:04 PM

katherine says she hasn't heard from you in a while.

from: henry

well, i haven't heard from her in a while.

from: margaret

ok. who are you seeing?

from: henry

idk what you're talking about.

from: margaret

you always do this. you get interested in someone, you ice her out, then you get bored and come back to her. you both know that's going to happen anyway, so why do this? why hurt her in the process? what's the point?

from: henry

i'm sorry, what qualifies you as a relationship expert, exactly?

from: margaret

i'm an expert in your relationship. because i see the same thing happen, over and over.

from: henry

well, maybe she's seeing someone. maybe she's seeing someone and you're just trying to throw me off! hmm? check AND mate.

from: margaret

…are you drunk?

from: margaret

you're not going to throw me off by quoting parks and rec at me, brother.

from: henry

what about that guy, alfonso herrera? know she's been on at least one date with him.

from: margaret

really?!? the sense8 guy?
from: henry

i guess. all i know is he used to be on a telenovela she watched.

from: margaret

rebelde???

from: henry

yeah, that sounds right.

from: margaret

wow!! he's hot. why is she still with you?

from: henry

hey!

from: margaret

call your girlfriend.

from: henry

do your homework.

from: margaret

already took my GED. just waiting for results.

from: henry

there is NO WAY dad is letting you just get a GED.

from: margaret

"GEDs are for unwed teen mothers, illegal immigrants and the future janitors of america"…yeah, yeah, yeah, i know.

from: henry

doesn't your parent have to sign?

from: margaret

he did.

from: henry

no, he fucking didn't.

from: margaret

well…he thought he was signing an application to brentwood private school.
from: henry

margaret!!!!

from: margaret

i mean, what's he gonna do?

from: henry

ggee, idk…disinherit you?

from: margaret

…oh, shit.

from: henry

yeah. and what's going to happen when he puts in a call to see if he can bribe them to let
in a previously expelled daughter?

from: margaret

shit.

from: henry

you better actually apply there ASAP. or you are gonna be in deep, DEEP shit.

Chapter End Notes

"Voilà ma petite Amélie, vous n’avez pas des os en verre." roughly translates to = Well,
my little Amelie, you do not have bones make of glass.
oui = yes
"Les jours, les mois, puis les années passent. Le monde extérieur paraît si mort
qu'Amélie préfère rêver sa vie en attendant d'avoir l'âge de partir" = days, months, and
years pass. the world outside seems so dead that Amelie prefers to dream her life until
she's old enough to leave
"Ca s'appelle se confronter à la réalité, mais ça justement, Amélie n'y tient pas du tout" =
that is called facing reality, the that's the last thing amelie wants!
Pourquoi pas? = why not?
Il est très critique. = he is very critical.
Merci. = thank you
De rien. = you're welcome
C'est vrai.= that's true
The historical quotes:
"If you remember my love in your prayers as strongly as I adore you, I shall hardly be
forgotten. For I am yours, Henry R., forever," is something Henry VIII actually wrote in
Anne Boleyn's book of prayers!
She responded in the book with: "By daily proof you shall me find/to be to you both
loving and kind."
Okay so I feel like I did a really bad job describing the kiss and how it was sort of like dancing before. I was sort of trying to describe this:
http://stewartmary.tumblr.com/post/121594542125
So if anyone has any advice on how to make that description better, I would be totally appreciative!
Hope you guys are enjoying this so far! I'm kind of new to this fic thing--is it common to not let the main couple of the story kiss until the 16th chapter? Is that ok?? Hope no one feels cheated by how slow of a burn this is.
"you're just a beautiful freak of nature."
"thank you?"
"no problem."

"the art of losing isn't hard to master/so many things seem filled with the intent to be lost/that their loss is no disaster" is a quote from the poem "one art" by elizabeth bishop. no copyright infringement intended.

the 'you looked it up/facebook' is inspired by a scene from 90210 and also one from gilmore girls: http://lukesdane.tumblr.com/post/97781780103/gilmore-girls-one-gifset-per-episode-happy and http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/137249086002/honestly-whats-better-than-this

there's a list of some history trivia, some more explanations and inspirations for this story/universe at the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

From: Anna Seville

To: Charles Brandon

Sent November 23, 2016, Wednesday, 11:21 AM

Btw, just to clear things up and avoid any drama (and don't get offended pls): I don't really want to us to be seen together.

From: Charles Brandon

To: Anna Seville

Excuse me???

From: Anna Seville

C'mon, Brandon. I've seen the kind of girls you date. You don't want to be seen with someone that doesn't look like a model; and I don't want to be seen with a known asshole. I think that's more than fair.

From: Brandon

'A known asshole'?!
From: Anna

Yeah.

From: Brandon

I am not…whatever! I'm nicer than you are!!

From: Anna

See, I'm meaner than you in my head, but people think I'm nicer. Don't feel bad, it's something that took me years to cultivate. You just don't know how to fake it.

From: Brandon

You're mean to me!

From: Anna

Yeah, you. Not the general public.

From: Brandon

A known asshole? Really? Says who?

From: Anna

Girls you 'date', mainly.

From: Brandon

Why?

From: Anna

The general consensus seems to be that you make them fall in love with you and then forget they exist? And that this behavior makes them cry?

From: Brandon

Oh. That.

From: Anna

You don't have to worry about that with me.

From: Brandon

About what?

From: Anna

I don't cry.

From: Brandon
What do you mean 'you don't cry'?

From: Anna

I mean, I don't cry.

From: Brandon

What, ever?

Anna:

Nope.

Brandon:

What the fuck?

Anna:

Also, you shouldn't take me being mean to you personally. I'm always mean to people I sleep with. Especially if I have no emotional attachment to them.

Brandon:

You're hurting my feelings.

Anna:

Please. Do you even have feelings?

Brandon:

Yes!! And you are hurting all 3 of them.

Anna:

Oh, nice Carrie Fisher reference.

Brandon:

Thanks.

From: Charles Brandon

To: Anna Seville

Sent November 23, 2016, Wednesday, 1:01 PM

Okay, but? Consider this: I am very attractive. In case you haven't noticed.

From: Anna Seville

To: Charles Brandon
Yeah? You're breathtaking. So what?

**From: Brandon**

What do you mean so what?

**From: Anna**

I mean what is your point?

**From: Brandon**

That I'm very attractive, and lots of girls would love to be seen with me. Just saying.

**From: Anna**

I'm sure they would. But if I was seen with you, it would ruin my street cred.

**From: Brandon**

Your 'street cred'? Are you in a gang?

**From: Anna**

The intellectual crowd can be just as cutthroat as the mafia. Don't joke about it.

**From: Brandon**

Wow. I had no idea.

**Anna:**

But I think it's unfair of you to brag about it? Or act like I don't know?

**Brandon:**

How's it unfair?

**Anna:**

The level of attractiveness is just unfair. On like, a human level.

I mean at first I was like, there's obviously something wrong with that guy. No one is that anatomically perfect. I figured you had an ugly belly button or something, like John Stamos.

**Brandon:**

John Stamos has an ugly belly button?

**Anna:**

Yeah, it's hideous.

But, no. Absolutely no physical imperfections. I know because I have seen all of you.
You're just a beautiful freak of nature.

From: Brandon

Thank you?

From: Anna

No problem.

From: Anne Boleyn

To: Henry Tudor

Sent November 23, 2016, Wednesday, 3:12 PM

How did you know my shoe size?

From: Henry Tudor

It was on the sole of the shoe that broke.

From: Anne Boleyn

You looked for it?

From: Henry

I happened to see it.

From: Anne

Oh my God. You looked for it.

From: Henry

I didn't "look for it". I only saw it accidentally before I threw it out and happened to remember it.

From: Anne

Sure.

From: Henry

Do they fit?

From: Anne

They do. Thank you.

From: Henry

You're welcome.
From: Anne

How did you know to get Doc Martens?

Henry:

It was the first thing that came up online in the search.

Anne:

Search for what?

Henry:

Well, when I typed "shoes for tiny brunette girls to kick frat douchebags with that won't break" into Google, I got "Doc Martens, lace-up".

Anne:

Really?

Henry:

No. Get it together, Boleyn.

Anne:

!!!!!

Henry:

What?

Anne:

You got me purple doc martens.

Henry:

So?

Anne:

I know how you know.

Henry:

Know what?

Anne:

That I like them.

Henry:

It was available in that color. I don't know what you're on about.
Anne:
It's the first thing under my Facebook likes.

Henry:
If you say so.

Anne:
I know, because when Mary asked "what do you want for Christmas this year?" I said, "I'll like some stuff on Facebook, and that should give you some ideas", and I did, and that was the last thing I liked, "purple Doc Martens"…and you looked it up!

Henry:
That's really very interesting.

Anne:
You looked it up, and you bought them for me.

Henry:
Well, we know I bought them for you. I saw you ruin a pair and so I bought you another to replace them. Been over this. It was a noble gesture, I thought.

Anne:
Of course.

Henry:
Any other conspiracy theories you'd like to share?

Anne:
You looked it up.

Henry:
Christ, you're relentless.

Anne:
Relentlessly right.

Henry:
It must be nice up there.

Anne:
Where?

Henry:
Your head.

Anne:
Yes, it's lovely.

Henry:
It must be, thinking everyone's obsessed with you.

Anne:
Not everyone. Just you.

Henry:
ANYway…what are you up to?

Anne:
I'm helping Mary dye her hair. You?

Henry:
On my way to New York.

Anne:
Flying?

Henry:
Well, I'm certainly not walking.

Anne:
You're not supposed to be texting! You have to turn it to airplane mode! Or wifi, if they have it, but not roaming…

Henry:
They don't care about that on this one.

Anne:
Oh. My. God.

Henry:
What?

Anne:
You're on a private jet!

Henry:
Anne:
You have to be, because that's the only way they'd let you text on a plane.

Henry:
Fine, Boleyn. I'm on a private jet. Your sleuthing skills are extraordinary. Happy?

Anne:
I knew you had a private jet. I knew it.

Henry:
No, you didn't "know it".

Anne:
First time we hung out alone together and watched Amelie, I said you probably had a private jet that delivered your groceries.

Henry:
It doesn't deliver groceries. We’ve been over that, too.

Anne:
How do you know? How do you know what your jet does when you're not around?

Henry:
You are truly ridiculous.

Anne:
A private jet…you're the only one on it…wow. What kind of environmental impact is this, Tudor?

Henry:
Terrible, I imagine. I might as well strangle an orca while I'm at it, hm?

Anne:
Might as well.

Henry:
I'll have you know I am not the only person on this jet. It's not as wasteful as you're making it out to be.

Anne:
Really? Who else?
Henry:
The pilot, the air hostess, my sister, Margaret.

Anne:
And you.

Henry:
Yes.

Anne:

Henry:
It’s not a big deal.

Anne:
Right, of course not. Every third or fourth person in the world has their own jet.

Henry:
You're merciless.

Anne:
I have new shoes, you looked it up, you're trying to downplay the fact that you're flying from Los Angeles to New York on a private jet…this is the best day of my liiiife.

Henry:
You're easily amused, then.

Anne:
Well, all Mary has to read are tabloids, so.

Henry:
Funny, that's all Margaret has, too. Did you know that Jerry Seinfeld dated a 17-year-old high school student?

Anne:
Yeah…but wasn't that in '93?

Henry:
Our mom kept them. She used to always take them when she traveled, so now Margaret does it, too.

Anne:
It's good to have something to remember people by.

**Henry:**

That's why I read them, too.

**Anne:**

I do that, too, but with the Bell Jar. Or the Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath. They were my mom's favorites.

**Henry:**

Sounds like our mom's were a little different.

**Anne:**

Besides the names.

**Henry:**

Besides those.

**Anne:**

My mom picked up the occasional tabloid.

**Henry:**

My mom picked up the occasional book. Usually poetry. She loved Elizabeth Bishop.

**Anne:**

'The art of losing isn't hard to master.' I do, too.

**Henry:**

'So many things seemed filled with the intent/to be lost that/their loss is no disaster.'

She also liked Rilke, William Carlos Williams, e.e cummings…

**Anne:**

Sounds like she did read.

**Henry:**

Yeah, I guess she did. She'd have me read to her, sometimes.

**Anne:**

That's sweet.

**Henry:**

Sorry to get…heavy. I don't know how we started talking about this.
Anne:
Neither do I, but it's ok. I like being able to talk to someone who understands it.

Henry:
So do I.

From: Charles Brandon
To: Anna Seville
Sent November 23, 2016, Wednesday, 4:30 PM
What are you doing later?

From: Anna Seville
Later is a state of mind, Brandon. Be more specific.

From: Brandon
Fine, what are you doing later tonight?

From: Anna
Oh.
You, probably.

From: Brandon
Awesome.
Henry's not here.

From: Anna
I don't care if he's there. We can just use your curtain.

From: Brandon
You're not embarrassed?

Anna:
No, why would I be?

Brandon:
So you're fine if someone's in the same room when we're fucking but you don't want to be seen with me in public?

Anna:
Yeah, pretty much

**Brandon:**

WTF?

**Anna:**

Don't ask me to explain it.

And it's not 'someone'. It's Tudor. He wouldn't tell anyone.

**Brandon:**

Yeah, I guess you're right.

**Anna:**

Of course I'm right. It's my sexiest attribute ;-) 

**Brandon:**

No.

---

**November 24, 2016, Thursday, Thanksgiving, 1:03 PM**

"Hey."

Mary looks up from her textbook to see her sister standing in her doorway.

She didn't hear a knock-- not because Anne hasn't learned her lesson about *that*, she *definitely* has -- but because Mary left the door open. She's the only Sister at Beta Thau not going home for Thanksgiving, so she's basically holding down the fort until Jen comes back tomorrow.

"Hey, yourself."

"You seem busy," Anne says, wringing her hands, "I don't want to interrupt…"

"I'm doing calculus practice sets," Mary says, throwing her pencil down, "believe me, I am grateful for the interruption."

Mary watches, lying on her stomach, as Anne sits down on the edge of her bed, then sighs, gets up, and starts pacing.

"So…"

Mary trails off, leaving the space empty for Anne to fill, but Anne's just chewing on her nails, walking from the bed to the vanity to the bathroom door…

"What's up?" she prompts.

Anne stops pacing and points to the top of Mary's dresser.

There's folded flannel shirts, a puka shell necklace, and a brownie wrapped in plastic wrap on top of it.
"You don't wear flannel."

"Nooo," Mary says, closing her textbook and sitting up, "but Lizzy does."

"Is she…sleeping over a lot, or…?"

"No. This freshman girl was having some drama with her roommate, so she paid Lizzy to switch rooms so she could get a single."

"I see."

"She says she needs the money."

"Okay…isn't that kind, of, um…soon?"

"It's not really that big of a deal. It's not like we're here all the time. She's either in class, studying, or at some M.M. store…"

"M.M.?"

"Medical Marijuana. She has a card."

"But yeah, she'll go to a few of those, to buy and then resell. And then I'm either studying, in class, at dance team rehearsal…and then we're both busy with sorority duties, of course. So it's a ships passing in the night situation."

"I mean…as long as you don't think it's too soon."

"I don't," Mary says, firmly, but not unkindly.

"Where is she now?"

"In Venice with her family."

"Oh."

Anne is standing in the middle of the room.

"You want to sit?" Mary offers.

"No, I better stand."

"Okay…hon. Much as I love the distraction, my Calc problems are starting to look more interesting than this lack of convo. So you want to tell me what this is about?"

"I have…a dilemma."

"Okay."

"It's just hard to tell you, because I'm afraid you'll think it's kind of…gross?"

"Probably won't, but go ahead. You've warned me."

"I like someone."

"You're right. That's disgusting. Why would you tell me that?"
"Mary, this is serious."

"Okay, got it. Serious face," Mary promises, frowning as she does so.

"I like someone…"

Anne trails off, squeezes her eyes shut so hard her eyelids crinkle, and puts her hands over her face.

"That you've slept with," she confesses in a muffled voice.

"So…Henry."

"What? No!"

"No?"

"I mean, yes, but…how did you know?"

Her younger sister tugs at the hair near her scalp, fingers entwined in her dark waves, something she's done as long as Mary can remember-- sometimes to relieve headaches, sometimes out of frustration or stress. Finals in the Boleyn house always came with strands of black hair on the floor, on the couch cushions, more than usual on the bottom of the tub.

Mary always picked them up when she found them. It wasn't like it was something she enjoyed, but she didn't want Anne to get yelled at by their father. She never handled that very well, maybe because it rarely happened. George and Mary were used to it, and so were never very much affected.

And George would sweep them up grab them and toss them with wet paper towels, too, so she felt she owed it to him. He never complained, either, or mentioned it to Anne.

"Well, I've only slept with two guys this semester, and I doubt you're poaching my exes from high school, given the distance thing…and I know you sure as shit don't like," here Mary makes an 'ick' face, sticking her tongue out, "Francis, so…"

"Oh."

"Also, I have eyes."

"What?" Anne asks, brow furrowing.

Mary pats the space on the bed next her. Anne comes over, grabs one of the pillows, hugs it, and sits down.

"Anne-- you are aware that you and Henry are like, the will-they-or-won't-they couple of the moment?"

"…no?"

"You are. You guys should have your own teen soap on the CW. You're that ridiculous. And obvious."

"Not really."

"People haven't shut up about your guys' kiss from that play since Tuesday. The sexual tension! The chemistry! You'd think they were reviewing something on Broadway. It's all anyone's been talking about."
"There were like, thirty people in the classroom! And why would anyone care?"

"Then they must have talked to their friends, then. And I assume the majority of the girls are jealous. Guys, too."

"Wow. I had no idea."

"Yes. You're a tad oblivious. But, anyway. Explain to me how it's 'gross'?"

"How isn't it? To want to be with him after he's been with my sister?"

"You're being ridiculous," Mary says, leaning over to grab her textbook and flipping it the page that has a sheet of her notes, "and I don't want to talk about this."

"Why?"

"Anne!"

Mary slams the book impatiently, and says, "you do realize you're calling Lizzy and I gross right now?"

"How--"

"Or did you forget that we've both slept with Henry and are together now?"

"Oh…yeah. Sort of," she admits sheepishly.

"College," Mary says, "is like a small ecosystem…oh, shit. That's a really good example. That's going to help me memorize it for my Bio exam," Mary says, grabbing a notebook and pen on her desk, flipping to a blank page and scribbling that down, "anyway. A small ecosystem. There's bound to be some overlap. Maybe it's not ideal, maybe it's even borderline, pseudo incestuous sometimes, but really, who cares?"

"Who cares?"

"Yeah. And I mean, really, what is gross?" Mary asks philosophically.

"A question for the ages," Anne quips dryly.

"I mean, it's really all about perspective. I once dropped a pair of sunglasses in a public toilet accidentally-- I did that stupid thing where you put it over the collar of your shirt, but it was all loose-fitting and-- anyway. They were Dolce and Gabbana, so I washed them with hot water and soap and put them back on like nothing had happened," Mary says in a breezy tone, missing Anne's horrified expression, "so, I mean, compared to that…it's not really gross at all!"

"And besides," she says, flipping to another page of her notebook and making a note about how exposure to germs increases immunity (Bio, again-- man, I am on a roll!), "it's not like he was ever inside of me, or anything. In the Biblical way, anyway. It was only a few blow jobs--"

"La, la, LAAA!" Anne shouts, putting her hands over her ears.

"Okay, be mature, please. I told you about that ages ago."

"What about…okay. But I'm your sister. I feel like liking him goes against some kind of code?"

"I mean, usually, yes? But I'm gay. So that kind of negates it."
"How so?"

"Well," Mary says, chewing on the end of her pen, pondering how to best explain it, "basically, one dick is the same as any other when you're lesbian. To me personally, anyway. I won't try to speak for everyone. But for me, honestly? I hardly remember any of them. I could not pick a single one out of a line-up if my life depended on it. It's all just a blur of dick."

"Lovely."

"Yeah. Icky memories. I am a victim of compulsory heterosexuality, basically."

"Oh, I read about that!"

"You did? Where?"

"I," Anne admits, picking at a loose thread on the pillow she's been holding, "did some research?"

"You did research about lesbians?"

"Well, it's about you. I should know stuff about it."

"You did lesbian research for me? That is so sweet," Mary says, putting a hand to her heart.

Anne shrugs.

"All I ask," Mary says, "is that you don't sleep with any of my female exes. Should I have any."

"That seems fair," Anne says, laughing.

"Cool. Then I think we're good."

"What do you think about him?" Anne asks.

"Henry?"

Anne nods, gaze cast down on the pillow.

"My impression is that he has a good heart. He's…a little arrogant, maybe? But he obviously likes you a lot. So that makes me like him."

Anne smiles, say's "ok", and leans over Mary's notebook.

They start to talk about what she's expecting for the Bio final. The only science class Anne is taking this semester is Intro to Astronomy, so they talk about that, too. Anne says she doesn't like it, that she's sure she'd like an astrology class more, and why isn't that an option?

But the whole time, Mary is thinking about what Christmas break will bring. And what Anne's going to find when she gets home. And how happy she's going to be about it (well, Mary is pretty sure she will be, now that her sister's told her she likes Henry, it seems pretty much like a sure thing).

She can hardly wait.

---

From: Marina Tudor

To: Henry Tudor
Sent November 25, 2016, Friday, 9:46 AM

Why aren't you at breakfast?

From: Henry Tudor

Because I'm tired.

From: Marina

Where were you this morning?

From: Henry

In bed.

From: Marina

No, I came into your room at 8 AM and you weren't there.

From: Henry

Why were you in my room?!

From: Marina

Why weren't you in it?!

From: Henry

I had an errand to run.

From: Marina

Why so early?

From: Henry

Stop asking questions. I'll come downstairs in a few minutes, ok?

From: Marina

Margaret says you kept smiling at your phone on the flight and that you wouldn't look up even when she called your named FIVE TIMES.

From: Henry

Yes, well, I've learned how to tune out the younger Tudor voice.

From: Marina

She thinks you were talking to a GIRL.

From: Henry

I was talking to Brandon.
From: Marina

She says he's hot. Is he hot?

From: Henry

Couldn't say.

From: Marina

Is he hotter than Oscar Isaac?

From: Henry

I don't know.

From: Marina

Ok, but…is he hotter than Oscar Isaac with a beard???

From: Henry

You're 14. Please stop saying men with beards are hot.

From: Marina

But is he???
this story, to make it more realistic for modern times, she is three years his senior.

-Whitehall Palace was one of the largest and grandest courts in Europe. So, in this story, Whitehall University is the most prestigious college in the world.

-At least one historian has said that Anne Boleyn had a "pleasant singing voice".

-Henry Percy, the 6th Earl of Northumberland, was betrothed to Anne Boleyn. In this story, his father owns the corporation of "Northumberland".

-Sir Thomas Wyatt wrote a poem titled "Avising the Bright Beams", so in this story he is the lead singer of a band called "Bright Beams".

-Elizabeth of York had several children: Arthur, Margaret, Henry, Mary, Elizabeth, Katherine, and Edmund. Only Henry, Margaret, and Mary survived to adulthood. Margaret was older than Henry. In this story, Elizabeth York's children are Arthur, Henry, Margaret, Marina (to limit the amount of Mary's in this story), Elizabeth, and Kate (to limit the number of Katherine's), in that chronological order.

-"Nan Seville" was a fictional character in the Tudors, Anne's closest lady-in-waiting when she was queen. Somehow she became a pretty big character in this story! Oops. Wasn't really planning that, but I love her.

-Jane Boleyn, Viscountess of Rochford, was born Jane Parker. She did play "Constancy" ("Constance", in this story) in Chateau Vert (which was my inspiration for the Virtues' Masquerade). In this story her name is Jennifer Parker, a modernized version of that name.

-Elizabeth "Bessie" Blount was Henry VIII's mistress. In this story her name is Lizzy Blount, a nickname for Elizabeth, and again, a modernized version of that name.

-In one of the earlier chapters, Brandon tells Henry that he saw Lizzy Blount talking to Gil Talboys in the library. The real Elizabeth Blount was married to Gilbert Tailboys (sometimes spelled Talboys).

There's more "historical easter eggs" in here, if you will, but those are all that come to mind off the top of my head. If anyone's interested, I'll post some more I can think of next chapter.

I hope everyone is enjoying the story! I really enjoy writing it --well, as much as anyone can enjoy writing, because it's really hard! But rewarding at the end. Kind of like how running doesn't feel good, but the feeling you get when you're done running is. I think Dorothy Parker said it best: "I hate writing. I love having written."

Also I make "aesthetic photosets" with excerpts of this story on Tumblr, if anyone likes visuals: http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/tagged/tudors-au
pass off as pride

Chapter Summary

Somehow she knew there had to be a catch. When Mary had told her she was okay with it, she knew there had to be something else, knew there had to have been something wrong with Henry beyond the flaws she had begun to find endearing: his arrogance, his impatience, the insecurities he tried to mask and pass off as pride…

Chapter Notes

i think the block-quotes make the texts look more readable, can't believe i didn't think of that before...but if anyone likes it better the other way, let me know!

November 26, 2016, Saturday, 10:05 PM

Brandon got the invite to this party yesterday via text message. The theme is "post-family madness". It's something only Jennifer Parker could come up with, something only she could make successful.

The concept is pretty ingenious, he has to admit: everyone has to bring a piece of luggage (the idea being that most everyone is flying or driving back either Friday, Saturday, or Sunday). Those that are smart travel on Saturday, knowing it's a good compromise between upsetting your family ("But we never get to see you!") and not being driven totally crazy by them ("Mom, Dad, I'd love to stay, but I need a day to adjust my sleeping schedule with the time zone change/meet up with my study group to study for finals…gotta pass, tuition's steep, your pockets, gotta ace them’’, etc.).

Admission is a $5 cover charge and a suitcase (which only Jen gets to inspect, to make sure they have at least a few things in them, and that none of them are dirty clothes) to be auctioned off, contents unknown.

It's very Storage Wars.

The vibe is chill. Brandon passed a long table loaded down with comfort food when he walked in: mac n' cheese, chips, mashed potatoes, and an open ice cooler full of mini Ben & Jerry's.

Right now he's standing in line with his little rollaway, waiting to turn it in. There's a drug deal going on behind him, which isn't too surprising. The biggest drug dealers on campus are always thrilled this week. Both pre-finals and post-holidays (and pre-holidays, come to think of it), it's their busiest time of the year.

Brandon smirks, thinking of how horrified Jen would be to know that there's probably going to be a pharmacy-stocked level of Adderall, Ritalin, Xanax and caffeine pills in her precious House.

The two people behind him have disappeared by the time he makes it to Jen.

She's seated at a card table, a sizable pile of luggage by her feet, a notebook open with a pen lying
neatly across it in front of her.

"Hey, Jen," he says, sliding his suitcase on to the table, "how was your break?"

"Fine, Brandon," she says, unzipping it, "do you have a ticket?"

He flashes her the paper ticket stub he got after paying at the door, and a smile along with it.

He puts his hands in his pockets and whistles as he waits, looking around the room. He's early, but he assumes more people will be coming later. Different flight times, and all that.

"Brandon," she says, folding her hands, "all you have in here is a bottle of hot sauce and a pack of gym socks."

"Brand new gym socks," he points out.

Jen tugs at the collar of her green button-down blouse, her mouth pressed in a tight line.

"It's all my mom gave me when I visited," he says with a shrug, "sorry."

"The text said there had to be at least four things per bag."

"I know, I'm sorry…I can pay extra for the cover charge, if you want," he offers.

"I don't know…"

She trails off and rubs her temples. She looks stressed. Not that that's unusual, she kind of seems high-strung by default.

The text he got from Anna comes back to his mind. It's been bothering him the last few days. Maybe something about the phrasing: "a known asshole". Like it was definitive.

"You look nice," he says.

"Don't suck up," she snaps.

"I'm not," he insists.

He maybe kind of is, but she does look nice: her face has that glittery weird stuff girls are always gushing about (something about contour? highlighting?), but it looks good on her, makes her cheekbones seem sharp, the gold shimmer complimenting her pale green eyes. Her mouth's glossy, cheeks rosy, blonde hair curled around her shoulders. She has some sort of white-lace thing that's peeking under the open buttons on her blouse. He can't really recall what that's called either (cami? bralette? why do girls have so many words for shit), but it has a nice overall effect.

"Thanks," she says softly, admitting, "I try really hard, you know?"

"It shows," Brandon reassures.

"It does?" she asks, sounding disappointed.

"No, I mean…in a good way. You throw the best parties on campus, no one disputes that. All the girls I talk to want to rush Beta Thau, or wish they were in it. I even liked that masquerade thing, and I thought it'd be like, really girly and shit, but that…was lit. The sword-fighting and the effects were awesome. Really."
"Thank you."

She looks over his shoulder, then behind hers, before admitting, "my break was terrible, actually."

"Oh?"

"Yeah…God, I fucking hate my parents," she says, almost as if it's an after-thought.

"Can't say I know the feeling," he says apologetically, scratching the back of his head, "well, one of them actually, but he's not around so it's…ah…more or less irrelevant."

"Oh. Sorry."

"It's alright."

She sighs, zipping up his suitcase.

"This is fine. I'll just throw in some books or something."

"Thanks."

"Don't tell anyone I'm cutting you slack, though, or they'll expect--"

"I won't. Promise."

November 26, 2016, Saturday, 10:59 PM

Anne's maybe drunk. She had some Mike's. And maybe a-- iced tea? Iced tea something, something iced tea…but it did not taste like any sort of iced tea she's ever had before.

Like, at all.

She's been helping Jen, Mary and Lizzy set up suitcases for the auction since 9 o'clock. Drinking in between. Her hands were shaking, and she had wanted to still them.

They're definitely still now, but instead of her hands shaking she feels like her insides are buzzing. And also, somehow, at the same time, falling in waves.

Henry texted her that he'd be at the party.

But he is not here.

He is not here yet.

But there-- oh, there he is. He's standing in line to turn his suitcase in to Jen. He sees her and waves, and she waves back, surprised that she can still use her hands, that they work in the same way they usually do.

"I think he was waving at me."

Anne turns-- she'd been standing outside on the porch, taking peeks through the sliding glass door sporadically when she'd finally caught Henry's eye--to see Brandon, smoking a cigarette.

Where'd he come from?

"What's your problem with me?" she snaps, bold, even for her, nervous energy coursing through her
veins at the immediate confrontation she just instigated.

"Take it easy."

"I'm not going to."

"You're wasted. I don't have a problem with you. I don't think about you."

"Why did you say you saw Henry giving Mary cash after she slept over? Why would you say that? Hm?"

"What?"

"Don't lie. Valois said that's how he got the idea. Sounds like something you would do."

"Fine," he admits, shrugging and taking a drag, "I kind of remember saying that."

"Why would you say that?!"

"Because that's what happened."

"He was paying her back for buying coffee. You knew that."

"I didn't tell him to start a rumor about your sister. Relax."

"But you knew what that implied."

"I guess," he drawls.

"Why? She turn you down, too?"

She notices when his jaw clenches, but Anne plows on:

"You know, I know you don't like me, but what'd Mary ever do to you? She's literally the sweetest person I've ever known, and I'd say that even if she weren't my sister. She didn't deserve that."

"Look, I--"

"So, what? Was it just to get back at me?"

Brandon stubs his cigarette out against the porch railing.

He leans against it and glares at her.

"It was, wasn't it? God, you're pathetic."

"I'm pathetic? That's rich. You're all full of yourself, when you're just one of a hundred girls following Henry around, and none," he laughs, pulling his hands over his face like he's trying to rub away a headache, "none of you have got a fucking clue."

"What are you talking about?"

"You're barking up the wrong tree," he says with a sneer, "let's just leave it at that."

"Brandon, what the fuck-- you know what? I'm not doing this. I'm not playing into your little mind games, when you obviously have NO idea what you're talking about--"
"He's engaged."

Brandon's coursing with adrenaline over the bomb he just dropped, at finally, finally saying something that shut her up.

Before she was a thousand feet of fury, and now she looks very, very small.

"Engaged…to what?" Anne asks in a small, disbelieving voice.

"Engaged to be married," he says smugly.

Her hands start to tremble and she shoves them in the pockets of her jeans.

"What," he mocks, "you didn't know that? You two don't tell each other everything? Aw, and I thought you two were close.'"

"You're so full of it--"

"You think I'm lying?"

She'd like to think he is, but…he's too cocky, too happy, too pleased to be telling her this news for it to be anything but true. Anne knows this with a certainty that feels like it's sinking her.

Somehow she knew there had to be a catch. When Mary had told her she was okay with it, she knew there had to be something else, knew there had to have been something wrong with Henry beyond the flaws she had begun to find endearing: his arrogance, his impatience, the insecurities he tried to mask and pass off as pride…

"What do you want to know?" he asks.

She remains silent, just stands there, looking at him like he's just crushed all her hopes in one fell swoop.

He thinks of what Anna said, again. "A known asshole." But it's too late now, and she's the one that egged him on, and there's no way he's backing down from someone that just called him "pathetic".

She stays silent, but she stays, so he answers his own question.

"Let's see…she's Spanish. Got that hot, older-woman thing going on. She's…God…I want to say 23? I think it's 23. They didn't start dating till he was 18, though, so it's nothing too scandalous. Three year age difference. She's pretty. Auburn hair, fair skin, blue eyes, and she's like…five feet tall. Nice body. Super religious, though, won't give it up till they're married."

Anne's eyelashes flutter, so he adds, to really hit the point home, "I guess that's where you come in, huh?"

"Stop," she says, voice barely a whisper, "I don't want to hear--"

"Oh, and God is she rich! And her parents and his dad are really close, good friends. So I can't really see them breaking up, ever. Gee…did I leave anything out? No," he says, really more to himself, "I think you know just as much as I do now! You're all caught up. Hey, maybe now we can both be his buddies, huh? I don't mind sharing him if you don't."
Anne sways slightly, grips the railing, and swings both of her legs over. Barely landing on the grass outside the porch, she takes off in a run.

November 26, 2016, Saturday, 11:21 PM

Anna's putting all the clothes from her suitcase away into her dresser drawers (clean, thank God for parents and their coin-free washers and dryers, she thinks) when she hears the door swing open behind her.

She looks up to see Anne, standing in the doorway, wiping tears from her face, hiccuping.

"Anne, what's wrong?!"

Anna rushes over to her, taking her friend's hand.

"You know how you said I was asking for trouble?" Anne asks.

"What?"

"When Henry was here?"

"Oh. Yeah?"

"You were right!" she exclaims, collapsing into full-fledged sobs.

From: Anna Seville

To: Mary Boleyn

Sent November 26, 2016, Saturday, 11:30 PM

Can you come to our dorm?

From: Mary Boleyn

I don't think so, Jen still needs my help with the auction. What's going on?

From: Anna Seville

It's Anne. Well, it's an Anne and Henry thing.

From: Mary Boleyn

What happened?

From: Anna Seville

I don't really want to get into it, but she's really upset. I think she'd really like you here.

From: Mary Boleyn

Okay, I'll be over ASAP.
From: Anna Seville
To: Megan Sheldon

Sent November 26, 2016, Saturday, 11:32 PM

Hey, are you busy tonight?

From: Megan Sheldon

Well, I'm unpacking…why, what's up?

From: Anna Seville

Anne emergency.

From: Megan Sheldon

Anne doesn't have emergencies.

From: Anna Seville

Yeah, exactly.

From: Megan

I see. I mean, we're not super-close…I don't know if she'd want me there?

From: Anna

We have to do some sleuthing. Of the Internet variety. I know a little bit about it, but since I know it's more of your specialty…

From: Megan

That's actually going to be awesome practice for my final. I'll be over later tonight.

From: Anna

Ok, thanks so much.

November 26, 2016, Saturday, 11:59 PM

"So, how does this help with your final?" Anne asks, taking a careful sip from the cup of hot cocoa that Mary made her.

She's changed from her party clothes (jeans and a red sweater) into more comfortable ones. She's wearing a Whitehall sweatshirt and yoga pants, her hair pulled away from her face in a loose bun, feet in slippers.

Anna's sitting on her bed, Megan sitting next to her with her laptop. Anne and Mary are sitting on Anne's bed, Mary rubbing soothing circles onto her sister's back.

She had managed to escape the party by lying and telling Jen that Anne was sick. Jen had actually let her go pretty easily (she had been in a better mood than usual, who knows why), although Henry had
overheard and asked, "Anne is sick?" with genuine concern in his voice. Mary had given him the coldest, curtest "yes" she could muster, which had seemed to puzzle him.

"Well," Megan says, typing onto her laptop, "the class is Intro to Hacking, so…"

"I didn't know we had that! What the hell," Anna says, "that sounds awesome."

"Yeah, it is but the prereq's are insane. Big job market, so getting in is super-competitive."

"Remind me to go on the waitlist," Anna says.

"Do they really call it hacking? Isn't it called something different when you get paid to do it?" Mary asks.

"I guess," Megan says, "but euphemisms don't change the essence of their original concepts."

"Right," Mary says, nodding.

*Whatever that means.*

"Okay," Megan says, "so, most people don't know this, but there's actually a pretty simple URL you can put in to see who on Facebook looks at your page the most."

"Oh my God! Can you write that down for me?" Anna asks.

"Sure."

Mary shoots Anna a *this isn't about you* look.

"What?" Anna says, "I want to know who's obsessed with me. It's important."

"So I pulled up Henry's."

She turns the screen around to show everyone, then puts it back in her lap.

"The person that looks at his page most is…Charles Brandon, actually."

"Ugh."

"What," Anna asks, "he's not that bad--"

"He's the one that told me. He was really mean about it," Anne says, hugging her knees to her chest.

"Oh."

Anna starts chewing on the end of her braid.

"Do you know what her name is?" Megan asks.

"He said it was Katherine."

"Ah…yeah. Katherine Aragon is the person who's viewed his page the second-most. Let me pull her up."

Megan searches the name and finds the profile.

"It's set to private," she says, "but I can fix that pretty easily…here."
She passes the laptop to Anne, who says, "wow, that was fast."

Megan shrugs, rolls her shoulders and cracks her back.

_She is pretty, Anne thinks._

Everything adds up. It says on her profile that she's 23, that she was born in Madrid, Spain, that she's Roman Catholic…it doesn't say she's rich, exactly, but the photos she posts seem to suggest that.

She likes pomegranates, the Pope, horseback riding, and the United Nations…but there's nothing in her relationship status. Absolutely nothing.

"It doesn't say she's in a relationship," she says, "it doesn't say…anything. I guess she didn't check any of the boxes?"

"It doesn't say anything on Henry's profile, either," Mary says, checking the Facebook app on her phone.

"That's weird," Anna says.

"Let me see if I can find anything else. But first," Megan says, putting a hand over her mouth and yawning, "do you guys have any soda?

"Yeah, I think we do," Anna says, getting up and walking over to Anne's desk and sitting down to open the door on the mini-fridge underneath it, "is Coke ok?"

"Perfect."

"Sorry we're keeping you up so late. I really appreciate this," Anne says.

"It's no big deal. I love cracking a mystery as much as the next girl."

Twenty minutes and four decimated serving-size Ben & Jerry's later, Megan gasps.

"Okay, I found something _really_ interesting…back in August, she posted engagement photos. One photo of him kissing her cheek, another one of this, like, _ridiculous_, could-sink-the-Titanic ring, and an announcement. But they were deleted on the same day they were posted."

"So it's true," Anna says, looking over Megan's shoulder.

"Yeah, but? It gets weirder. On the same day she posted them, he tagged her in an 'open relationship status.'"

"Cold," Mary observes.

"So maybe they're open?" Anne says.

"Maybe," Megan says, "want to check it out?"

Anne nods, so Megan passes her the laptop again.

"I don't know what this means," Anne says, passing it to Mary, "but I'm tired."

"It could mean they're open _and_ engaged. Weird, but not impossible," Anna says.
"Could be. My theory is that they're engaged but that it's secret for some reason. She seems pretty conservative from her profile, so I doubt she's dating other guys. Maybe he just wants to date other girls," Megan says.

"Or maybe he's an asshole," Anne says.

"No one here is arguing with that," Mary reassures her.

"Why would she put up with that, though? She's so beautiful, I'm sure she could find someone that would put her first," Anna says.

"The heart wants what it wants?" Megan postulates.

"Brandon said something about her being rich, about her parents and Henry's parents being close… could that have anything to do with it?"

"Definitely possible," Megan says, "people have gotten engaged for stranger reasons than pleasing their parents, for sure."

From: Mary Boleyn

To: Lizzy Blount

Sent November 27, 2016, Sunday, 1:25 AM

Ok, babe, a little head's up on the whole Henry-Tudor-is-engaged thing might've been helpful!

From: Lizzy Blount

Oh…sorry? I didn't know you kept up with that?

From: Mary Boleyn

What?

From: Lizzy

It is really surprising, though. He loved Elizabeth York so much, everyone thought he would be a widower forever…

From: Mary

What?? Are you?? Talking?? About???

From: Lizzy

Henry Tudor and Elizabeth York, Henry's parents. What are YOU talking about??

From: Mary

No, babe…Henry Tudor II is engaged. Son, not father.

From: Lizzy
Whaaaattt? No way.

From: Mary

Apparently.

From: Lizzy

Well, you're probably regretting giving him the go ahead with Anne then…

From: Mary

You think?

Lizzy:

AND that information to help him...well, I feel bad for sleeping with him, too!

Mary:

Apparently they're open, but still.

Lizzy:

Oh. Well, not as big a deal, then.

Mary:

Not a big deal?! I don't want my sister to get involved with someone she can't have a future with. That is nothing if not a road to heartbreak.

Lizzy:

True, I guess...well, "engaged ain't married," as they say.

Mary:

Who, Lizzy? Who says that?

Lizzy:

Michael in the Office. Engagements can be broken, that's all.

Mary:

Ugh. I could kill him, I swear.
Chapter Summary

Two and a half weeks later, and she's not any less wrong than she was when she read him the first time. Back then, Anne had read him like a book that was just open in her hands for the taking, read him lazily, even, like she had had to read the passage about his importance before, like she had memorized it without even trying.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

From: Charles Brandon
To: Anna Seville
Sent November 27, 2016, Sunday, 12:38 PM
Want to hook up later tonight?

From: Anna Seville
To: Charles Brandon
Hell nope.

From: Brandon
Are you busy?

From: Anna
Not even a little bit

From: Brandon
Not in the mood?

From: Anna Seville
Oh, I'll be in the mood for sex. Just not with you.

From: Brandon
Because…?
(Read 12:49 PM)

From: Charles Brandon
November 27, 2016, Sunday, 3:00 PM

Anna and Anne have a Spotify studying playlist on. Anne is going through flashcards, still wearing the sweatshirt and yoga pants from last night.

Anna is typing up a story for her Creative Writing class (the test is timed, and she'll be damned if she's not going to have some idea about what she'll be writing, regardless of the fact that her professor wants it to be "spontaneous and organic" and whatever other hippie words she uses every week).

There's a knock on the door. They look up at each other at the same time.

Anne looks startled.
"Are we expecting anyone?" she asks.

"No…"

"Maybe we can just ignore it."

"Could be important."

"Could be a serial killer."

Anna gives her friend a 'please' look.

"I think I know who you think it could be."

Anne pulls the blankets on her bed up around her legs, making herself a little half-way cocoon.

"If it's him, I'm not here. But I think you should just ignore it."

"Yes, because that always works," Anna says, putting her laptop down on her bed and getting up from her bed to answer the door.

Anna cracks the door open.

Quelle surprise, it's Henry Tudor.

Anne's bed is out of sight of the immediate doorway, closer to the window, but erring on the side of caution, Anna opens the door and actually leaves the dorm to talk to him in the hallway.

His hair's standing up, messy, like he just rolled out of bed.

"What's up, Tudor?" she asks, crossing her arms.

"Nothing, just…is she okay?"

"Um…"
"Isn't she sick?"
"...yes. Yes, she is."

"Is she here?"
"No, she's..."

_Fuck. Think fast._

"...at the nurse. Getting some ibuprofen and stuff."

"Oh. Alright," he says, "well..."

He pushes a gift bag towards her, lamely. It's gold and white, tied with a ribbon on the handles.

"Aw," Anna coos, taking it, "for me?"

He rolls his eyes, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"It's just...some stuff I had. For colds."

"You're well stocked," she says, rummaging through, it.

There's Echinacea extract, B-12 vitamins, tea, Emergen-C, Tylenol, Nyquil, honey, lozenges, a tiny plastic bottle of ginger ale, an orange...

"You had all this stuff just on hand, huh?"

"Yeah," he says.

"Uh-huh. Well, I'll tell her you stopped by."

"Thanks."

"Sure."

---

**November 28, 2016, Monday, 9:39 AM**

It's overcast this morning, a rarity in Los Angeles (though it _is_ nearly December). Most of the sky is the color of dirty snow, but there are some darker grey clouds scudding the horizon.

Anna wonders if it's going to rain. Given the drought and all the recent laws enacted because of it, she doubts it, but anything is possible.

She's been waiting outside the library for what feels like _forever_. She wanted to beat the line for the printers so that she could print out all the notes she's saved for her Chemistry class. They're doing a lecture reviewing everything today, and her plan was to highlight everything in her notes that's mentioned in class.

She had hoped against hope that somehow, lurking outside the library with a hangdog expression would inspire pity in a librarian or janitor, that they _might_ open up early for her.

No such luck.

"Hi."
Anna looks up to see Brandon, standing with a backpack slung over his shoulder, a sheepish grin on his face.

He looks very Marlon Brando right now—leather jacket, jeans, white t-shirt. *His ridiculously attractive face,* she thinks, somewhat regretting the decision she made to *not* sleep with him last night.

*Or maybe James Dean?*

"Hey," she says, starting to pick at a loose thread on her hoodie.

He sits down next to her on the bench.

"Did I do something wrong?" he asks, hands clasped.

"Kind of."

"What was it?"

She really doesn't want to look at him, because if she does she will be hypnotized by the gorgeousness and her willpower will disappear. She *knows* this.

"You know Anne's my friend, right?"

"I guess I've seen you two hanging out, yeah."

"Connect the dots, dude."

It takes him a while, brow furrowed, but then he sighs and she thinks she sees something like realization pass over his face, then a grimace.

"Oh…well—"

"Like, *how* did you think that was a good idea?"

"Why are you mad, though? You don't think she deserved to know?"

The fact that he managed to throw down some logic seems unfathomable to her in this moment.

Wait-- was that it? Why else is she mad at him? His eyes are brilliantly, *stupidly* blue and she's having trouble racking her brain for the reason…

"She said you told her in a mean way," she manages, but it sounds lame, weak even to her ears.

"I was…probably harsher than I should've been, yeah," he admits, "she sort of…antagonized me. She was drunk and she started—"

"What, your excuse is 'she started it?' Are you in third grade?"

"I'm not making excuses. Just trying to explain."

"Fine, you explained," she says, pulling the books on her lap up to her chest.

"So are we good?"

"If you apologize."
"Okay…I'm sorry I was mean to your friend. Honest."

"I'm not the one you should be apologizing to."

"Oh, come on--"

"I'm serious."

He tugs at the collar of his jacket and groans.

"Is angry sex off the table?"

"Definitely off."

"What about angry sex on a table?"

"Brandon!"

"Sorry."

They sit in silence. She gets so uncomfortable that she actually takes her phone out. Her headphones are wrapped around and she's unwinding it, getting ready to listen to music when:

"You really think you can abstain from sex?"

"With you, sure."

"Exactly. With me."

"I see your ego is just fine," she says, rolling her eyes, "but it's up to you, really."

He shrugs, then gets up.

"See you in Chem, Seville."

"Bye, Brandon."

---

**November 28th, 2016, Monday, 11:04 AM**

Anna doesn't understand *how* it happened, exactly, but she came in a minute late to class. The only seats available were in the very last row.

This time of year always makes her think of her ex. He was a weirdo about the holidays--like, super-obsessed with them. Christmas sweaters and everything. He was more excited for holiday drinks at Starbucks than she was. They did twelve days of Christmas (regardless of the fact that she's Jewish, but hey, she wasn't about to complain about twelve gifts from her boyfriend plus the eight from her parents).

(So, okay, she *knows* the reason she was late was because she was kind-of-sort-of-maybe Facebook stalking him, but it's not like she wants to *admit* that, even to herself.)

It's not even that it's such a big deal that she's this far back. This professor tends to drone, his voice one that could push even the most caffeinated of brains towards a nap, so she'll stay awake. All she really needs is to see the slides, and the font's huge so that's not a problem.
But she hates being late, so she's already agitated when Brandon slides into the back row.

Her agitation doubles when he sits way closer to her than is strictly necessary.

"Hey," he whispers, pulling his notebook out, "do you have a pen?"

"How do you not bring a pen to class?"

"Because I don't."

Anna scoffs, but digs through her purse and hands him one anyway.

"Just give it back, alright?"

"Sure…if you give me your underwear first."

She coughs, grabs her water bottle and takes a swig.

"You're depraved," she says hotly, wiping her mouth (she spilled a little) with the back of her hand.

"Deprived," he corrects.

"Sex isn't oxygen, Brandon. Maybe if you paid more attention in this class, you'd know that."

"It is to me," he says, leaning over and doodling a heart on her sheet of paper (what the fuck is that about?), "and it is for you, too. You just don't want to admit it."

Anna feels like she's about to explode in a billion little pieces.

But she will be damned if she lets him see that she feels that way, so she gets as close as she can possibly get to his ear and whispers, "so help me God, if I get any less than an A on this final because you've decided that this is up-the-sexual-tension hour, not only are we never having sex again; on any day we are inevitably in a class together, on any day we happen to be at the same party, I will blow you a kiss. And after that, I will leave, to the bathroom, probably. And when I come back to our mutual class or party, just know that, if I was wearing underwear in the first place, they are now gone, and you will have to know that you can't do a goddamn thing about their absence."

He grips the table and she pulls away, leans back in her seat, crosses her legs primly and highlights some random passage in her notes.

She has a feeling he won't be bothering her anymore.

---

**November 29th, 2016, Tuesday, 10:58 AM**

Henry takes a seat across the assigned tutoring table from Anne, his usual spot.

"Feeling better?" he asks, putting his notebook down on the desk and dropping his bag off his shoulder onto the floor.

"What?"

"Mary said you weren't feeling well…wasn't that why you left the party in such a rush the other night?"
"Right. Yeah. Sorry," she says, tugging at a lock of hair that's come loose from her braid, "I'm a little distracted."

"That's okay," he says, "want to talk about it?"

"No, we need to work on your French," she says, opening her file.

Henry opens his notebook to a blank page, takes out the pen he's had tucked behind his ear, and pushes it towards her.

"Here, you can write it down."

"We're not passing notes."

He gives her an easy smile. She's obviously kidding around, but if he didn't know her any better he'd think she was serious.

"Okay, sure, we're 'not passing notes'--"

"I'd really appreciate it if you'd just do your work like everyone else," she snaps, "do you think you can do that for me?"

Henry has no idea why she's so upset. She looks tired, maybe, but he's talked to her when she's been tired before and she's never spoken that harshly to him.

"Sure," he says, trying to brush it off, "I have the study outline here…"

"Great, so do I," she says, opening her file and taking out the first sheet of paper on top, "let's begin."

11:55 AM

Henry watches the rain hit and fall against the windows in uneven patterns, drumming his fingers along the table as Anne reads over his work.

She pushes it towards him.

There's only two red marks, which is a lot better than he usually does.

"I have to leave a little early today," Anne says briskly, shutting her file and closing it with a paper clip.

She gets up from her seat and turns the file in with the others, then returns, grabbing the coat from her chair.

"Sorry," she says, not sounding sorry at all.

Henry shoves the paper and his notebook in his bag, crinkling it as he does so, rushing to follow her out of the room.

"Why are you mad?" he asks when he catches up to her and her brisk pace.

"I'm not mad," she says, putting her hands in her pockets, "I just have to go."

"Wait, what's--"
"I have to study, Henry! Not everyone's parents pay for school, you know. I know that's a completely foreign concept to you, but some of us have to maintain certain GPA's so that we can continue our--"

"Hey," he snaps, starting to get annoyed, "I have friends on scholarships, don't talk to me like I don't- -"

She shoves her way through the throng of students in the hallway, and he struggles to keep up.

"Excuse me, sorry--"

She waits at the elevator, shoulders back, her posture stiff.

Henry manages to make it into the elevator next to her by the time the doors open.

There's no one else inside but the two of them.

"Leave me alone," she says, voice scarcely a whisper.

"Tell me what's wrong and I will."

Anne pounds the "R" button and crosses her arms, sighing dramatically and shaking her head as the doors close.

"You're studying on the roof?"

"Yes."

"It's raining."

"What can I say," she says, voice flat, gaze fixed on the closed doors, "I like ink stains."

She's the first to leave when the elevator dings.

He follows her outside, shielding his eyes from the rain.

Usually there's a few people up here, soaking up the sun rays, and some Friday nights there's illicit parties, candlelit parties; hosted at a location that's only open during the day and forbidden by administration otherwise.

But because it's raining, they're alone.

"Anne, wait--"

"Don't follow me!"

He gets a strange, sudden, overwhelming feeling of déjà vu. His head twinges, as it comes back:

…she stalks through the forest, crushing branches in her wake.

"Anne, wait--"

"Don't follow me!"

"Anne!"

He chases after her, a red blur, the long train of her gown trailing behind her through
the leaves on the ground….

Her coat is red (she's wearing a red gown), she has lipstick on, lipstick the color of apples and sin (her mouth is stained red, she's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen) her hair is splayed across her back in bountiful curls (hair flowing around her shoulders) and she is running, (he chases after her) she has been running away from him and he is following her (he chases after her… but that can't be right, because Henry doesn't follow girls, he waits for them to follow him, except if that's true, then what is he doing now?).

But this, this is not a dream.

Is it?

"Please," he says, walking out to the center of the roof (there's shaded areas that could be protecting them from the rain but she's chosen to stand out in the open, maybe to dissuade him), "can you please tell me what's going on? This isn't like you--"

"You don't really know what's 'like me', though," she shouts, the wind whipping around them, threatening to drown her out, "do you?!"

"I think I know a little bit--"

"I guess I just thought we were friends--"

"We are friends--"

"Maybe even close friends, but--"

"We are close--"

"But I was wrong! I shouldn't have assumed! It's not like we've even known each other that long, really…"

Thirty days since their first dance, twenty-nine since his first dream about her, twenty since he found out she was his tutor, eighteen since she fell asleep on his shoulder, twelve since she opened up to him (and he opened up in return, more so than he ever thought possible, speaking to her of things he almost never spoke of), seven days since they kissed…

Not that he's counting.

"We are close," he insists again, "I've shared things with you I don't usually share with anyone."

She shrugs, wiping the rain out of her eyes, a futile gesture, as it's truly pounding down now.

"You've told me about your past, but not your future."

"Oh, sure, sure… you know, I don't think that was quite cryptic enough, maybe you can try--"

"You're engaged!"

"How…"

Henry looks around as if he's lost. His hair is completely plastered (though hers is probably not much better) to his forehead, and his schoolbag is utterly soaked. It would be a rather funny image, actually, if she were in the mood for laughing.
"Who told you that?" he asks, and she can barely hear him, his voice a whisper almost buried by the thundering rain.

She's glad her phone is tucked away on her inner-most jacket pocket, the one that zips from the inside, on the interior of her coat rather than the exterior, glad it's insulated and that she knows from the experience of the rainier East Coast that it'll stay dry.

"Does it matter who told me? Doesn't it just matter that I know?"

"I don't…" he runs a hand over his hair, and asks again, lamely, "who told you?"

Anne doesn't want to tattle, doesn't want to stoop to Brandon's level, gratifying as that might be. So, she settles on a lie of omission, a partial truth (tit for tat, she thinks).

"My friend takes an Internet hacking class," she says as the rain eases up, pulling her hood over her hair, "she looked into you, and told me."

Henry lifts the hood of his sweatshirt up as well, as if her doing so prompted a reminder that he had one all along.

"Who, who hacked me? Seville? I know she hates me--"

"God, would you get over that?! Not everyone has to like you! What is it with you and your constant need for approval? You're popular, you're charming, the world falls at your fucking feet, what more do you want--"

He takes her hand, and to her it's a harsher interruption than if he had yelled back.

"You could've told me," she says, desperation staining her voice, feeling desperate as he traces circles on the back of her hand with his thumb, almost absently, as if he doesn't know what he's doing, as if he's hypnotized, "I asked you to tell me something most people don't know, and instead of telling me you were engaged, you told me about your brother--"

Henry's hand stills, and he pulls away from her.

"No one," he says, voice harsh, "no one knows about that, no one outside of my family. Not even Brandon."

"What do you mean 'no one knows about that'? When you search the Tudor family online, he has to-"

"NO! He doesn't! He erased him! He erased him like he doesn't exist, do you understand how much of the Internet he controls," he snaps, rubbing his temples, "of course, people know, people that were around know, he's in pictures in old magazines and newspapers if you care enough to go find them, but everyone knows not to mention it to him, it's the one thing that will get a journalist kicked out of a press conference, it's the one thing that will get them fired, actually."

"Henry--"

"And I told you! I told you and I had only known you for a week. And there are people I've known for years, people I've spent a lot more time with, and I've never told them. What does that mean? I don't know…I don't know what that means."

Well, she certainly doesn't know how to answer that question. She doesn't know how to answer a
few questions of her own: Why does she feel like she's alight ever time he touches her? Why does she wake up and touch her mouth first thing, as if she's just been kissed and can scarcely believe it? Why does she feel like she's known him for a very long time (longer, even, than the amount of time she's been alive, which makes no sense), that she's met him before?

_What does that mean, hm?_

"Were you ever going to tell me?"

"I...I don't know."

"So that's a no, then."

"I haven't been thinking about it much, lately, honestly--"

"You haven't been thinking about your fiancée much lately? Do you realize how that makes you sound?"

"I know, like an asshole, but I'm...wait. Why do you care?"

"What?"

She's caught off-guard by the question. The wheels are spinning furiously in her mind: why does she care? Well, shit, better think of something and quickly, quickly, quickly!

"Why would you care about whether I'm...engaged or not?"

"Because we're friends," she says, "and it's something that's important, and you didn't...tell me. Which means I'm...not important."

He raises both eyebrows and crosses his arms, obviously reading her (she hopes she's illegible, she feels illegible, scrambled, like a page after a printer jam, like a handwritten poem left outside in the rain).

"And it's kind of fucked up," she says, "that you're dating other girls when you're engaged."

"I think it's probably-- more complicated than what--"

"You know what? I really don't think it is."

"Anne, you don't--"

"Don't understand? But I do. You're engaged. You've promised someone you'll marry them. You will marry them, in your future, unless they change plans, or you change plans. That's what engagements are."

He covers his mouth with his hands and closes his eyes, slowly, as if he's exhausted.

"Anne," he says, voice hoarse--

"And by that token," she says, "and maybe you're right, maybe I shouldn't judge you, maybe you and--" she swallows, because it feels like something's stuck in her throat, then continues, "you and her have some sort of agreement, and you can see people until the wedding, I don't, I don't know anything, really, but--"

"Anne!"
He holds her shoulders and she can feel him looking at her, but she's not looking back. He strokes one thumb under her chin and raises it, gently, until she makes eye contact.

"Please," he says softly, "please slow down."

She takes a deep breath and he brings his hand back, puts it in his pocket.

"Maybe," she says, "maybe you can date. I don't know what the arrangement is, if there's an arrangement at all, but I do know, that anyone you date is just a…. placeholder. Because you're… engaged."

"I…"

Henry trails off, looks down at the cement floor of the roof, as if there are some answers written there.

"Am I wrong?"

"You were taught that you were important. That your name was important and that you were too, for carrying it."/"Am I wrong?"

She's not wrong. Two and a half weeks later, and she's not any less wrong than she was when she read him the first time. Back then, Anne had read him like a book that was just open in her hands for the taking, read him lazily, even, like she had had to read the passage about his importance before, like she had memorized it without even trying.

"No. No, you're not wrong."

Anne nods, gives a tiny smile that doesn't quite reach her brown eyes, which are as dark and unfathomable as they were on the night he first met her.

"Thank you," she says, her voice breaking, "for being honest."

And with that, she fixes her gaze on the elevator doors and walks away from him, from the rain, from his answers.

He's not going to follow her this time.

Chapter End Notes

there's a sort of dreams-interspersed-with-reality bit in the last scene, the dreams/past quotes are in italics. hopefully it's really clear what they are, if it's not let me know! it's supposed to be like, a coming-full-circle thing, so i hope it comes off that way.

other stuff:
- so i'm kind of putting my hands over my eyes posting this because i know it's not what some of my dear readers were hoping for.
- rest assured nothing in this story is "going away", and every "secret" will be revealed. henry will eventually find out it was brandon that revealed his relationship status, anne will eventually find out about henry tudor "nudging" henry percy towards the internship and away from anne (i haven't forgotten about it!), people will find out about mary/lizzy. the only thing i can't tell you is when. but i hope there's some trust with that! anne did
find out about katherine, after all. maybe it took her eighteen chapters to do so, but... ;-)

-i welcome constructive criticism, so if there's something you don't like, something that feels OOC or too unrealistic, any continuity errors, anything at all, please let me know and i'll see what i can do!

-thanks for reading! i know it's cheesy but i really do cherish every single comment. it means a lot that people seem to enjoy and be entertained by this little universe that's taken me so long to create. thank you, thank you, thank you!
"Boleyn," he says evenly, spreading peanut butter onto one of the slices, "have you ever heard the expression 'don't shoot the messenger'?"

This is less of a party and more of a chill group study session. The music is Vitamin String Quartet and acoustic covers, there's more mugs filled with coffee than red cups filled with beer, more people with flashcards than people dancing.

Tom's grateful for that, at any rate, because he can play his guitar and no one bothers him.

"'Sup, Tom?" Anne asks, taking the open seat next to him on the couch.

Already that tips him off that the flute of pale gold liquid in her hand is probably not sparkling cider. Anne doesn't say "sup". Anna might. Mary…might, but she's more likely to avoid it and a lecture about "proper English" by her younger sister.

"Just practicing," he says, pick in mouth.

She laughs, puts a hand on his shoulder-- much touchier than she usually is. Literally the only person he's ever seen her hug is Mary.

"Are you drunk?"

"Um…"

Anne puts a finger on the tip of her nose, and then uses the same one to bop him on the nose:

"Correct!"

"Maybe we should get you some food, coffee…"

"I drink 'too much coffee'," she says petulantly, using air quotes, "and that’s 'bad for you'. Or so people say."

"Right," he says, taking his guitar and putting it back in its case, "but I think in this instance it's probably necessary--"
"Some people can be bad for you, did you know that, Tom?"

"Yes, I do."

*I think I'm looking at one of them.*

"Can you tell me," she says, stirring her drink with a straw (*wait--is she drinking champagne with a straw?*), "what is it about me, exactly, that makes me a magnet for guys with girlfriends?"

Anne bats her eyelashes prettily as she drinks from the straw, ending a slurp by biting it and sliding it out of her mouth.

"Anne…"

"I thought you might have some insight," she says, waving a hand vaguely between the two of them, "because…you know."

"Okay, I think you've--"

"I mean, is it something about the way I wear my hair or… is it my bubbly personality? What *is* it about me, exactly, that screams, 'Future Mistress'?"

She makes an expansive gesture on that last point and some of the drink ends up sloshing over, at which point he eases it from her hand and sets it on the table.

"What about me," she continues, not skipping a beat, "says 'Wannabe Homewrecker'? Because I have been *racking* my brain and I just cannot seem to figure it-- where's my drink?"

"Can't figure it out?" he prompts.

"I just can't…" she bends her head and her hair falls over her face, she pushes it back, "can you tell me what it is? Because maybe then it can stop happening, and I can like, *live* my *life* and shit…"

"There's nothing about you that says homewrecker," he reassures, trying to push her gently so that she's sitting upright, "but at the moment there's quite a bit about you that says 'wrecked'."

"Wrecked? I'm not a ship--"

"Toasted, wasted, drunk, whatever expression suits your fancy."

"Pssshhh. What's this?" she asks suddenly, grabbing the sheet music that was sticking out of his pocket.

As she swoops in, Wyatt locks glances with a *quite* miserable-looking Tudor.

"My final," he says, agitatedly pushing off the feet she's just started to rest against his leg, "listen--"

"Is this a duet again?" she asks, flipping through the pages, eyes bright.

"Yes."

"Wow. Your professor isn't Ryan Murphy, is he?"

"She. And no. But I think she *has* probably watched every episode of Glee."

"These lyrics are all different," she says, "they don't match, they don't rhyme…?"
"The assignment was to put several songs together and make them like a conversation, to make them flow together, somehow."

"Oh, that sounds fun!" she chirps, clapping her hands, "let me sing it with you, please?"

"I will if you let me get you something to eat first. And wait a bit before we practice, because I'm surprised you can even read right now."

"Deal," she says, making a shotgun symbol with her hands and a clicking sound with her tongue.

---

**December 3rd, 2016, Saturday, 11:00 PM**

*The problem is, girls are boring.*

Or, that's probably not really fair. What Brandon *means* is, girls are boring compared to Anna Seville.

He's come to realize this in her absence.

They look up at him in adoration, or like they want to eat him up. He's never really minded this before, but Seville never looks at him like that (well, the second one, maybe a little bit, but she reserves that for private, which he honestly prefers--women looking at him in public like he's a dessert they're just dying to have makes him squirm, and not in the good way).

They don't bring up random bits of trivia in the middle of a conversation, or while they're buttoning up their sweaters after sex, or tug at his hair during.

The way *Seville* looked at him could best be summed by some of the first words she spoke to him out on the Beta Thau balcony: "you'll do."

And he misses it. He's not sure why, or what that may mean, exactly, but he does.

He doesn't enjoy the "call me's", doesn't enjoy kissing a cute girl in his Chem class that sidled up to him after he was done with the exam (he asked her to nip at his lip, just a little bit, like Seville did, and she barely grazed it, and apparently she didn't grasp the concept of 'middle ground', because when he said 'harder' she practically drew blood), doesn't even really enjoy it when a Beta Thau Sister blows him in the bathroom, can only come when he concentrates on what *Anna* Seville whispered to him during their last Chem lecture.

So basically, somehow, she's ruined him.

Because here he is, at this 'end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it:-finals' party, with only five weekdays left in the semester, and he's hoping to run into *Anne Boleyn*, of all people. Of all the sentences he never thought would run through his mind, that one's definitely up there.

Because he cannot deal with the possibility of not having sex with Anna Seville one last time in 2016, before he has to go on a bus home for break. He *definitely* can't deal with not having sex with her forever, just because he can't manage to quiet his pride.

He's been looking for her for fifteen minutes or so when he finally accidentally finds her, only because he went into the kitchen to see if he could find a bottle of water.

"Ooooh, woow," Anne says, laughing as soon as she sees Brandon, dragging the last syllable and
swinging her legs back and forth from her perch on the counter, "déjà vu."

"Yeah, listen--"

"You're not going to try to fuck me again, are you?"

*Well, she's not making this easy.*

Wyatt turns around from the sink, where he's washing dishes, and raises his eyebrows at Brandon.

"No," he says, slowly, calmly, trying to rein in a few dozen snappy replies that just came to him, "I just wanted to talk to you."

"So talk," she says, scooping a handful of popcorn from the bowl next to her and shoving it into her mouth.

"Can you eat something else?" Wyatt asks, putting a plate in the drying rack, "that's basically air."

"Make me something," she says, licking the butter and salt off her fingers.

"Little busy here," Wyatt says.

"Brandon, it'll have to be youuu," she says liltingly, voice going up on the last word.

*You've got to be fucking kidding me.*

"Fine," he says with a smile, "that's just…that's fine."

Brandon goes over to the pantry and starts rummaging through.

He feels a chin on his shoulder.

"So what's up?" she asks.

"Can you get off of me?"

"Mmmm, few months ago I basically asked you the same thing and you were very rude about it. So I think I'll be just as rude, if it's all the same to you."

Brandon sighs, grabbing a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of bread.

"On second thought, your cologne is fucking awful!" she exclaims, giggling and withdrawing.

*On second thought,* him making her food might not actually be the worst idea in the world. Taking the bread out of the package, finding a butter knife, opening the jar; none of these things require him to look at her as he speaks.

*Might make it easier.*

"Look," he says, as he unloads everything on the island, "I just wanted to say…I'm…"

"Stupid?" she fills in.

*Be cool, be cool, be cool,* he chants inwardly as he puts two slices of bread on the cutting board.

"Rude? Mayor of Dickville? The worst?"
"Look, I know I wasn't nice to you at the last party we were at. I just--"

"Brandon, you're _never_ nice to me at parties. Why mention it this time?"

"Boleyn," he says evenly, spreading peanut butter onto one of the slices, "have you ever heard the expression 'don't shoot the messenger'?"

"Brandon," she replies, matching his tone, "have you ever heard the expression 'don't deliver the message like an asshole'?"

"No, I haven't."

She glares at him.

"I haven't! That's not an expression. That's not something people say. But," he accedes, "fair point, I guess."

Anne gives him a scathing look, and he says, "okay, alright, _fine_, fair point, point blank."

"I was an asshole," he says, slapping the two pieces of bread together.

"Yeah, you were."

"I'm _sorry_."

"What?"

"I said, I'm sorry,'" he snaps, "don't make me say it again."

"Huh. Gracious _and_ handsome."

"You think I'm handsome?" he can't help but asking, surprised.

"Yeah, you're a handsome jerk," she says, picking the made sandwich up from the cutting board and saying, with a full mouth, "just like your _friend_." 

"Right. Well…"

This doesn't seem like it's finished. Anna might not take his word, and Anne's tipsy at best, and who knows if she'll drink more as the night goes on.

"Can you do me a favor, actually," he says, patting his pockets, he finds an old receipt from the student café, and a golf pencil (still in there from an exam he took yesterday, he was probably supposed to return that, _oops_), scrawls the briefest message he can ('Brandon apologized'), "and sign this?"

Anne takes the scrap of paper he shoved at her, squinting at it.

"You want me to sign something saying you apologized to me? Why?"

"Because you're drunk and you might not remember, and…honestly, I don’t know if I'm a big enough _person_," he says, gritting his teeth, "to be able to apologize again, so--"

"Probably not," she says, but she takes the pencil from him anyway.
From: Charles Brandon

To: Anna Seville

Sent December 3rd, 2016, Saturday, 11:14 PM

[1 image attached]

Here.

From: Anne Seville

To: Charles Brandon

Interesting. And you made her do that why?

From: Brandon

She's drunk. I didn't know if she'd remember.

From: Anna

I've never seen her signature. It kind of looks like her handwriting, though, I guess.

From: Brandon

So…?

From: Anna

So, I would like some further confirmation. I will get back to you.

From: Anna Seville

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 3rd, 2016, Saturday, 11:19 PM

[1 image attached]

Is this your signature?

From: Anne Boleyn

Hi. This is Tom.

From: Anna

Where's Anne?

From: Anne (Tom)

She's sitting on the kitchen counter, eating chips, and saying she's the greatest person to ever walk the earth.
From: Anna
That doesn't sound like her…

From: Tom
Nope, it's her narcissistic and extroverted cousin, Drunk!Anne.

From: Anna
Ah. Why do you have her phone, though?

From: Tom
She told me to take it from her. Said she was worried she'd "keep Instagram-stalking the pretty redhead girl."

From: Anna
Oh no…

From: Tom
Is she lesbian now or something?

From: Anna
Not to my knowledge, no.

So hey, random question: do you know if Brandon talked to her?

From: Tom
Yeah, he came in here a bit ago and apologized for something. I was washing the dishes, so I couldn't really hear what for.

From: Anna
Ok, thanks.

Tom's pulled two chairs from the dining room into the kitchen. He and Anne are practicing their respective parts (it is good that he's practicing with another person, considering his final for Lyricism in Modern Music is in two days, but it might be better if it were with a sober person), when Tudor walks in.

He stands in the doorway for a few beats, blinking like he's just stepped into some harshly bright light.

"Hi," he says, opening the cooler and grabbing a beer.

"Hi," Anne says, face pale, hand suddenly gripping the paper she's holding so tightly it becomes totally bent.

"Hi," Tom says, gaze flickering between the two of them.
Tom sits awkwardly as they stare at each other, drumming his fingers against the wood of his guitar.

*Tap, tap, tap.*

Tudor clears his throat, fishes a set of keys from the pocket of his jacket, flicks through them until he finds a tiny bottle opener, and uses it.

"Bye," he says, pocketing the bottle cap.

"Bye," Anne says.

"Bye," Tom mimics, watching the other guy's retreating figure, his quick gait almost comical.

"What was that about?" he asks as soon as he's gone

"Dunno," she says with a shrug, "he's just weird, I think."

Tom studies her face--she's gnawing on her bottom lip, eyes glazed as if she's in a trance.

"Listen," he says, taking the strap of guitar up and over his shoulder and putting it in his lap, "I don't know if an acoustic performance is really the best idea."

*That* snaps her out of it.

"What? Why? You promised," she pouts, "I ate and had coffee and everything."

"Yeah, but...you know, Tudor obviously has a thing for you--"

"Psssh!" she exclaims, starting to bite her cuticles.

"And he's probably jealous, judging the way he was looking at me, or...us, earlier. And I don't want to disappear like Percy," he says quickly, "alright?"

"Disappear like Percy? Percy didn't disappear. He just took a job. It doesn't start until January."

"Well, I haven't seen him around in a while!" Tom says, panicked, throwing his hands up, "okay?!"

"Tom. I literally saw him in Macroeconomics like, four days ago."

"Oh," he says, calming down a bit, "I didn't know."

"What does that have to do with--"

"It just kind of seemed like a weird coincidence to me. Y'know, one Henry disappears, another replaces him..."

"Another Henry replaces-- we're not dating! I was dating Percy. So he's not replacing him. You...what...are you even saying?"

"Nothing," he says, sighing, "I guess we can do the song."

"Yay!" she says, clapping again, "let's start again, I don't want to talk about Tudor or Percy anymore."

"Okay," Jen says, "first, Tom, thank you for doing the dishes, I super appreciate that."
"No problem," he says, giving her a thumbs up as he tunes his guitar with the other hand.

"Right. Anyway, so the key of this is to look spontaneous but not actually be spontaneous," she says as she paces through the kitchen, her hands folded behind her back, "so I have set some nice, colorful hand woven blankets in the corner of the living room, rather than the center, because that seems too obvious. So you're going to sit there, start like, riffing a little bit, and I'm going to start fiddling with the speakers, like 'oh no, these don't seem to be working', and then you'll start and I'll be like, 'oh, okay, guess that's fine since it's not working anyway, whatever'," she finishes, spinning around on her heel, "got it?"

"I think so," Anne says.

"Okay, Anne. But you can't just think. You have to know. Do I need to go over it again?"

"No," she says, too quickly, she realizes as Jen's eyes narrow, she tries to relax her tone a bit, "no, no…I got it. Thanks."

"Great. Okay, see you in a bit!" Jen chirps.

---

**December 4, 2016, Sunday, 1:04 AM**

They've followed all of Jen's instructions, pretty much to a tee. She left some pillows on the pile of blankets for them, too, which was considerate, Anne thinks.

Tom begins playing the intro and sings the beginning of "Good Together":

\[
\text{you're still smoking cigarettes/i've been begging you to quit for days/i know you won't stop/so i guess i'll love you to your grave}
\]

Apparently that song has transcended hipster status, as a few people know to clap at the words "cigarettes" and "grave".

Tom stops, switches, and gives a long, elegant strum, hands moving deftly, moving into the intro of another, slower song. Anne smiles, and sings:

\[
\text{don't look at me/ you've got a girl at home/and everybody knows that, everybody knows that}
\]

The lyrics are so close to her present state of mind she could almost laugh (laugh or cry). It's so strange that Tom picked this song, these particular lines, like it's predestined (or karmic, she thinks as she locks gazes with Henry) or something.

Tom picks up, as the next song, "I Know Places", is faster paced, a different one than his first line:

\[
\text{you stand with your hand on my waistline/ it's a scene and we're out here in plain sight}
\]

Anne sings the next line of "Girl at Home":

\[
\text{and it would be a fine proposition/if i was a stupid girl}
\]

Her duet partner sings, voice husky, girls in the room exchanging glances and giggling as he does so:

\[
\text{I hear them whisper as we pass by}
\]
Anne's next line from "Girl" is one of her favorites (she actually really just likes when Taylor Swift calls people 'honey' in her songs, it may just be her aesthetic):

\[ \text{but honey, i am nobody's exception, this i have previously learned} \]

Well, Henry's ignoring her now, or pretending to, at least, talking to William Compton and Anthony Knivert, not even glancing at her.

\[ \text{Fuck that, she thinks, scooting closer to Tom than is necessary, evoking whispers around the room.} \]

Tom switches to the song of his first line:

\[ \text{well maybe i should shut my mouth/it makes no difference} \]

Henry's definitely looking at her now, staring at her, actually, some heat behind it. Will Compton has a "the tea is hot" expression on his face as he gingerly takes a drink from his cup. Anthony looks like he's stoned, probably, not that that's unusual. Tom gives her a warning look, and she thinks of his panicked response earlier ('I don't want to disappear!').

Maybe she can make Henry disappear, she thinks, as she switches songs with Tom and sings a line from "I Know Places" in a voice that sounds like it could burn you if you came too close:

\[ \text{loose lips sink ships all the damn time/not this time} \]

Tom plays another intro to the next song, "New Romantics," and begins:

\[ \text{we're all bored/we're all so tired of everything/we wait for/trains that just aren't coming} \]

Anne goes back to "Girl at Home", singing:

\[ \text{while she waits up/you chase down the newest thing/and take for granted what you have} \]

Now even Knivert is beginning to notice that Henry's not paying attention to anything going on around him but Anne; mouth set in a firm line, blue-grey eyes glittering with intensity.

Tom sings his next line from "New Romantics":

\[ \text{we're so young/but we're on the road to ruin/we play dumb/but we know exactly what we're doing} \]

Anne has pretty much dropped all pretense of this being a casual, spontaneous-but-not-really fun performance, as Jen urged. At the point it's more confrontation than song, as she sings another line from "Girl at Home":

\[ \text{it's kind of like a code yeah/and you've been getting closer and closer/and crossing so many lines} \]

Tom segues back into "Good Together":

\[ \text{you're still biting your nails/I've been begging you to try and quit} \]

Anne, keeping the same intensity in her voice, switches songs to "New Romantics":

\[ \text{we show off/our different scarlet letters/trust me, mine is better} \]

Tom switches to the next song, "Welcome to New York", singing in a staccato:
when we first dropped our bags on apartment floors

Anne keeps singing "New Romantics", and again the lyrics hit close to home:

we cry tears/ of mascara in the bathroom/ honey, life is just a classroom

Tom continues to sing "Welcome":

took our broken hearts, put them in a drawer

Anne switches back to "Girl", and Tom switches to the smoother, slower beat of that song:

wanna see you pick up your phone/ and tell her you're coming home

In unison they sing:

and every day is like a battle/ but every night with us is like a dream

Anne sings "New Romantics" again:

we're all here/ the lights and boys are blinding

Tom continues to sing "Welcome":

it's been waiting for you

Anne sings:

we hang back/ it's all in the timing

Tom is starting to struggle to keep up, he is having to make a lot of chord changes, as he sings:

it's a new soundtrack/ i could dance to this beat, beat

As Anne sings the next line of "New" she remembers the rooftop, how floored he was that she knew, that she put all her cards down on the table and won, how it didn't really feel like winning at all (and considering the way Henry's face changes as she sings, an acerbic sting to the words, she's guessing he remembers, too), and it feels something like catharsis:

it's poker/ he can't see my face/ but I'm about to play my ace

Tom keeps singing "Welcome":

the lights are so bright/ but they never blind me

Anne sings another line of "New" and Tom smiles, proud of how well he matched the line he just sang and Anne's next one, because they have the same amount of syllables, they complement each other really well:

we need love/ but all we want is danger

The next one he sings is one of Tom's favorites, the song might be called "Welcome to New York" but this is pretty true of Los Angeles, too:

and you can want who you want: boys and boys and girls and girls
He notices Anne's eyes are downcast as she sings the next line of "New" (it's not supposed to be a sad line, more of an angry one, but maybe it brings up a bad memory or something):

\textit{the rumors/are terrible and cruel/but honey, most of them are true}

Tom sings the next line of "Welcome", excited that he found two lines that from two different songs that rhymed:

\textit{it's a new soundtrack/it's been waiting for you}

Anne sings, with a strange emphasis:

\textit{the \textbf{best} people in life are free.}

He's \textit{really} excited for this part, he doubts anyone else in his class will think to do this, picking a brand new song to stick at the end and still overlay it with a previous one, he sings from "Demons", playing much more slowly as he does so:

\textit{no matter what we breed}

Earlier he told Anne to slow down the pace of "New" on this line, to match his, and luckily she remembers:

\textit{'cause baby I could build a castle}

Tom sings, even more slowly:

\textit{we still are made of greed}

And Anne sings, matching his decrease in tempo:

\textit{out of all the rocks they threw at me…}

Now, for the grand finish he made to tie it all together, they sing the last line at a speed about three times more slow than the radio version of "Demons":

\textit{this is my kingdom come, this is my kingdom co-ooome.}

Everyone cheers, and it could be wishful thinking, but to Tom they really do seem impressed. He's definitely more confident about his final than he was before.

Well, Tudor doesn't seem impressed. He looks decidedly unimpressed, actually, as he turns around and leaves his friends without saying goodbye, far as he can tell.

If he's newly on his shit list, at least Tom will know why, he supposes, hoping it doesn't come to that.

Anne heads back to the kitchen and decides to make herself another drink.

She wants to erase the way she feels right now, because she feels like she's burning and filled with regret and flipping through the pages of certain memories she'd like to forget, and it's just...\textit{not good}.

So she makes herself a rum and coke and rummages through the drawers for a straw (straws quicken consumption, thus quickening the effect of alcohol-- Anne is nothing if not practical. And a lightweight to boot).
She sucks it down, but now she feels trapped, the air in here feels stale, she feels like she's forgotten how to breathe, so she puts her glass in the sink and takes the side door in the kitchen that leads to the porch.

Henry's walking back to his dorm, watching the smoke from his cigarette curling above him, thinking about dark hair and rain and things unsaid when:

"I'm...hi."

He recognizes the voice, but doesn't turn around. Typical, he thinks.

She appears in his peripheral vision, walking besides him, arms crossed.

"Can I bum one?" she asks.

"Thought you were allergic," he says dryly, taking a drag.

"I lied. Former smoker. I usually don't, but, it's...finals."

"Stressed?"

"You have no idea."

"I think I might."

He takes his pack out, and she pulls one out, thanks him, puts it in her mouth. She takes a lighter out, tries to light it herself (to his credit, he stops walking and waits for her to do so), but fails once, twice, thrice.

"Sorry," she says, "cold hands."

"Here," he says, lighting it for her (with a Zippo...of course he has an expensive lighter, she thinks, not one where you have to flick your thumb over the wheel, not one you have to buy at a gas station every few weeks).

"You shouldn't smoke," he says, after she already is, "it'll wreck that pretty voice of yours."

"Mmmm," she says, enjoying the nicotine buzz too much to even register the word 'shouldn't'.

"You've been...you're leaving me alone, right?" she asks softly, checking.

They've walked down to Hugo fountain, and they stand right next to it now, grass and trees and rose bushes framing them, shadows cast around by the streetlamps, watching each other as they smoke.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you asked me to. And I'm finally listening," he admits.

Well, that's fair.

They both finish their cigarettes and dispose of them in the fountain (littering, of course, but it does cut down on the risk of fire hazard and the fountain water is filthy no matter what, so what else is
there to do?).

"You do want me to leave you alone," he asks, hands in his pockets, stepping closer to her, "don't you?"

"I…"

She should say yes. She doesn't want to say yes, but she knows she really, really should.

But in this moment she doesn't want to do the things she should do.

His eyes search her face like he's looking for something he's lost.

"Right," he says finally, "why wouldn't you?"

"I should go," she says quietly, "it's late, and--"

"Me too. Just…"

He laughs, more to himself, than her, it seems, looking down as he does so, then up at her again.

They're standing close. He leans even closer, closing the distance between them effectively, and cradles her face in his hands, gently, as if he's about to kiss her.

Anne expects that, but he just weaves his fingers through her hair, and she feels like he's trying to memorize her. That's how deeply he's taking her in.

She sighs, lets her face fall a little bit left into his hand, as if she's melting into it, and he brushes his thumb against her cheek.

"Don't forget," he whispers intently.

"Don't forget what?" she asks, brow furrowed, confusion woven in her voice, along with something else he can't name (want?).

"Just-- don't forget."

"Henry, what do you--"

"I'll see you," he says, withdrawing his hands.

He walks away, backwards, though, so he's facing her, giving a wave as he does so.

"You'll see me?" she asks incredulously.

"See you around," he says, putting his hands in his pockets, and shrugging, "see you later… whichever."

And then he does turn around, walking straight down the path to his dorm, walking towards something and very much wishing he could walk in the opposite direction, instead.
tom made a list of songs into a 'mash-up'. sadly no mashup of them actually exists, since but i'll put the links and names of all the songs tom and anne sang to:

good together, the runaway club: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZi8PfcHeMw
girl at home, taylor swift: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIZLZYaBkt4
i know places, taylor swift: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leIw8gfBTtw
new romantics, taylor swift: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj9CzAkUO20
welcome to new york, taylor swift: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddEpowNt6k8
demons, imagine dragons: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWRsgZuwf_8

okay: this is a little personal, so skip ahead if you want, but given that this somewhat of a milestone for me (the twentieth chapter!), i thought i would write it.
i'm at a kind of difficult time in my life right now: post-breakup with someone i was with for two years, at sort of an in-between stage, feeling kind of lost, honestly. it's been tough.

so, writing this, going to this universe, is helping me. it helps to know that i'm creating a world that others enjoy visiting. i'm so glad to know that my little escape, can also be yours.

thanks for stopping by, and i hope you all enjoy the chapters to come. i've outlined this story, written pieces of the timeline, but i honestly have no idea how many more chapters it will be. could be ten, could be twenty, or more. university is four years, after all, and so far we're just finishing the semester. so who knows?
gorgeous clarity

Chapter Summary

"I eat the hell out of donuts, you don't know me."

Chapter Notes

"they slipped into an intimacy from which they never recovered." - F. Scott Fitzgerald

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 4, 2016, Sunday, 9:30 AM

Anne tried the teen television drama thing. She drank more than she should have, she flirted with a (kind-of) ex, she had a passive-aggressive confrontation with an enemy *(did Brandon...apologize? that doesn't sound right)* she sang, she tried to make the boy she likes jealous, she shared a cigarette and an exquisitely torturous, exasperating moment (never has an almost-kiss ever messed with her head so much) with said boy. She pretty much did it all, followed the whole formula.

Teen dramas, she decides as she grabs the travel packet of Advil on her nightstand (attached is a post-it note that just reads "girl.", signed with Anna's name and a tiny heart drawn next to it), are stupid. They're probably written by people that didn't get invited to parties in school and glamorize them, and their aftermath, for this reason. She officially denounces the teen drama method.

Because the thing is that the inside of her mouth feels like cotton balls, and her hair is three different kinds of tangled, and she's overslept through the hours she was going to be studying today (she's three hours behind the study schedule she wrote for herself yesterday, before she had gone to the party, seen Henry from across the room, and decided alcohol was a better idea). The thing is that her head is in absolute agony (she thinks as she unscrews the water bottle Anna probably left on her nightstand and takes the Advil to remedy that fact, the cool water soothing the dryness), and when she catches her reflection in the mirror across the room she looks like a raccoon (mascara smudged down to her cheeks), a raccoon that's had a very hard night, indeed.

And that's not fair, because in teen dramas the female stars have glowing skin and perfectly messy, shiny hair, even when they wake up with hangovers. They may groan a little bit, yawn prettily and go back to bed, or get out of bed and make themselves some sort of smoothie "cure", but they do not look like raccoons as they list last night's regrets to their bestie.

Speaking of besties...Anna isn't here. Which is odd. And also annoying. Because in teen dramas the best friend is always there, chirping "heeeey, party girl" as soon as their friend wakes up.

So that's another unrealistic bit, apparently. They just keep coming.

But she shouldn't be so hard on Anna. She did save her with a nightstand treatment, after all.
She realizes, as she's in one of communal showers, scrubbing at her face with her citrus-scented cleanser, that she wants to see Henry.

She wants to see him, because he finally listened to her 'leave me alone' (she's the one that followed him on the walk, after all), because despite herself she misses him. Has missed him.

Anne had missed the little things (the way his laugh lacked any trace of self-consciousness, the calluses on his fingers as he gripped a pen, the way his tongue peeked out a little bit whenever he was really concentrating on something), and the big things (the way he looked at her like she was the only one in the room, even amidst a crowd, his gentle patience when she was at a loss for words).

Next semester, she won't be his tutor anymore. Everyone switches, even if they're continuing in the same subject. They will no longer have Tuesday's. She will no longer have any excuse to see him.

She's already decided on her 2017 New Year's resolution. It's to avoid him, and thus any temptation. So, she reasons with herself as she shampoos her hair, she deserves one last day with him, really. Because next year she won't see him at all.

_I'll see you...see you around, see you later...whichever._

Well, 'later' is going to have to be sooner than he's probably anticipating, she thinks, and if he doesn't like it, tough.

---

**December 4, 2016, Sunday, 10:22 AM**

Brandon's checking his student email on his cell when Anna, who's been sleeping on his chest, stirs.

"What time is it?" she asks, getting up and rubbing her eyes, pulling back the curtains.

"Holy shit it's morning!" she yelps, shielding her gaze from the sun, answering her own question.

"Yup."

"Why'd you let me fall asleep," she snaps, throwing the covers off and starting to jump around the room, frantically picking up clothes and pulling them on, _"when did I fall asleep?"_

"Some time after our fourth round," he says lazily, watching her struggle with the zipper of her skirt with some amusement, _"relax. It's not a big deal."_

"I don't do sleepovers," she insists, flustered, picking her glasses up from his nightstand and slipping them on, _"it's one of my rules."_

"But you did. Sleep over," he says, smirking, _"among other things."_

"On accident! I don't _do_ that," she says, finally yanking the zipper upwards, _"it blurs the lines."_

"The lines of what, what are you--"

"The lines, Brandon! The _lines!"_

"Oh, sure," he says, as she puts on her sneakers, _"the lines, of course."_

He hears a persistent knock. Henry's bed is closer to the door, but of course he sleeps like the dead, so Brandon will have to answer it.
"I'll be back," he says, getting up from the bed and stretching as soon as he's standing.

"Who is that?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm going to answer it."

"Well," she says, jumping onto the bed, standing on it and pulling the curtain around it, "I'm not here, okay?"

"Okay, you're 'not here'…crazy," he mutters under his breath, opening the door.

---

Jesus.

Brandon's answered the door wearing only sweatpants, and he may be evil, but Anne's human, after all…human and susceptible to the hypnotic power of six-pack abs.

"No, it's Brandon, actually," he says with a smirk.

"What?"

"Brandon, not Jesus."

"Whatever," she snaps, cheeks coloring (hardly able to process that she said that aloud without dying of shame and embarrassment on the spot), "is Henry here?"

"He is, but he's asleep."

"Well, I don't mind. I'll just wait inside. It's important."

"Listen," he says, looking behind, "I'm kind of in the middle of something…or someone, that is…"

"Gross."

"No need to be bitter just because you're not getting any. But I think she probably wants privacy--"

"I doubt she cares. And you guys have curtains around your beds, anyway."

"Well, true, but-- wait, how do you know that?"

"I--"

His mouth drops open.

"You two fucked? Wow, I'm surprised he hasn't bragged about that yet--"

"No," she hisses, "we haven't 'fucked'--"

"Why else would you be in our room?" he says, grinning, obviously very pleased by what he thinks is juicy news.

"We were studying here. Don't be a jackass. I know that's hard for you, but at least try--"

"Oh, wow. You're Mystery Girl."

"I'm what?"
"The one that was sleeping in his bed, the reason he kicked me out…I didn't even think of you as a possibility."

"Gee, thanks," she says dryly, "anyway--"

"Let me check," he says, closing the door behind him.

"Your friend's outside," he says, sliding the curtain around his bed open, "want me to tell her to leave?"

"Which friend?" she asks in a panicked voice.

"Boleyn."

"Anne?!"

"That's the one."

"Fuck," she says, sitting on the floor, crawling under his bed and grabbing her purse, "fuck shit fucking…shit!"

"Alright, I'll tell her to leave …why are you freaking out?"

"She can't know. And Anne's stubborn," Anna says, "she's going to find a way to get in your room if she wants, come hell or high water."

The knocking on the door commences.

"I think you're overestimating her…the door locks from the outside--"

"Or Henry will wake up, find out she's here, or she'll call him or something, and you know he's going to let her in if she's asks," she says with rapid-fire speed, chewing on her hair nervously, "and who knows how long she'll be here--"

"Slow down! I have no idea what you're saying--"

Anna turns and looks out the window, both hands on her hips.

"How safe is your fire escape?" she asks.

"I don't know, I've never used it--"

She's already opening the window, purse under her shoulder, swinging both legs over the sill.

"You have got to be kidding me…Anna," he yelps as she jumps out onto it, "you could get hurt, you mental patient!"

She's landed and now she's going down the stairs.

"Later!" she calls out, waving from the steps.

Apparently she'd rather risk injury than let Anne know she'd stayed the night.

He could be insulted, but it's honestly kind of flattering, from Brandon's perspective, anyway. It means she wanted to sleep with him even though her friend hates him, that she wants to despite the fact that she doesn't want anyone to know.
That's got to be a strong kind of desire. A reason-defying kind. And that can't be anything but flattering, really.

11:00 AM

When Henry opens his eyes to the vision of Anne Boleyn sitting on the floor, flipping through the pages of a textbook and adding post-it notes, he thinks he might be dreaming. That is how unlikely that sight seems.

Except she's wearing clothes, so he's probably not (when she is clothed in his dreams, she's always wearing gowns, sometimes strange hoods inlaid with pearls and jewels).

"Good…morning?" he says, sitting up against the headboard.

How she responds will probably tell him for certain if he's dreaming or awake. If she starts speaking with a British accent, saying strange, old words, calling him "Your Majesty", it's a dream. If she takes her shirt off, it's a dream.

"Good morning, " she says, "sleep alright?"

So that's a no, then.

"I slept fine…why are you--"

"I need help on my History final."

"Okay, and…?"

"You have a 99% in the class and you took every AP class associated with it in high school and got 5's on all the exams."

"Oh, that. Well," he admits, crossing his arms, "I'm good at…remembering dates…pass me my shirt, please? It's next to you."

Anne looks up from her textbook and then down at the floor, to the crumpled navy blue shirt lying by her feet.

"You can't get up?"

"'Up' is the problem," he says, shifting in his seated position, leaning over slightly to grab the comforter he must've kicked to the foot of his bed when he was sleeping and yanking it over himself.

"Oh," she says, blushing, she grabs the shirt and throws it at him.

It hits him the face, and he pulls it over his head, his 'thank you' muffled by the fabric.

"Anyway," he says, scratching the back of his head, "how do you know all that, exactly?"

"Your file."

"Right…well," he says with a shrug, "yeah, I never have to study for that subject, for some reason."

"Maybe you remember past lives," she quips, "but whatever the reason, you're good at it, and I'm not."
"And you want me to help you?"
"Yes."

Henry slides down, lying down and putting his head on the pillow.

He's just…staring at the ceiling.

He stares at it for five minutes (she literally times it, on her phone), before she snaps:
"You owe me."

Absolutely no reaction.

He rolls over, facing the wall.

"Henry?"

"Fine," he says.

"Fine?!"

Honestly, she was expecting him to put up more of a fight than that.

"Fine," he repeats.

"Fine," Anne parrots, "so…"

"Come back in half an hour."

"Why?"

"Because," he says, turning on his side so that he's facing her, "I need my beauty sleep."

"Your what?" she asks, laughing.

"Do you think this," he says, waving a hand around his face, "happens by accident?"

"Henry--"

"I already said yes. Go away. Come back in half an hour. And I'll help you."

Unbelievable!

Anne runs into Brandon on the stairwell on her way down from Henry's dorm.

Great.

"Where are you going?" he asks, coffee in one hand, bag of pastries with the student café logo stamped on it in the other.

"He kicked me out," she huffs indignantly, as if in a state of total disbelief, "can you believe that?"

"That's hilarious."
"He was rude! Almost as rude as you!"

"Yeah, he's not really a morning person."

They stand in the stairwell awkwardly, her crossing her arms, seething, him waiting for his cue to go.

"Well," he says finally, lifting the hand with the bag in it, "I'd offer you a donut, but you don't really look like you eat them..."

"I eat donuts," she snaps, grabbing the bag, before he realizes what's happening, before he even thinks to yank his hand away, "I eat the hell out of donuts, you don't know me."

"Actually, I was just being polite," he says, "and trying to manipulate you with a compliment about your figure into *not* eating one--"

"Well," she says, biting into the jelly one (his favorite, *of course, what else*), strawberry oozing out and staining the corner of her mouth, "that backfired, didn't it?"

"Hey, give it back!" he shouts as she takes off down the stairs.

She runs back up, tosses the bag to him, and he catches it.

"Good reflexes."

"The best. Am I going to see you up there later?"

"Yes, if you're going to be there in half an hour."

"Great," he says, rolling his eyes, then, continuing the sarcasm, "looking forward to it."

12:36 PM

"Which king was executed during the French Revolution?" Henry asks.

Henry is sitting upright against the trunk of the tree they're under. Anne is lying on her back on a blanket she brought to protect herself from grass stains, looking up through the branches, sunlight dappling her face.

"Louis."

"There were a lot of Louis. Which one?"

"Are you telling me you *know* this number? *Without* that piece of paper?" she asks incredulously.

"Yes. Which Louis?"

"All I remember is Marie Antoinette. I can't help it, she was just more interesting than her husband. And there's not a movie by Sofia Coppola with his name in the title, so…"

"Okay…when was he executed?"

"Before 1800."

"Boleyn!"

"I don't know! Like right before 1800. Like…within ten years before?"
"Well, at least that's right."

"Hey!"

"Let's see…what do you know about Marie Antoinette? Give me some number things…"

"Number things?"

"Dates, ages."

"She was fourteen when she was married."

"Yes, and how old was her husband?"

"Not much older, I think."

"He was fifteen. So," he says, ticking off 'one' on his finger, "she's married at fourteen, and," raises two fingers, "he's married at fifteen, and he's Louis the…"

"Sixteenth!"

"Right! She's fourteen, he's fifteen, he's the sixteenth. That's how you'll remember."

"That's…really smart. Wow."

"Don't sound so surprised."

"I didn't!"

"You did."

"Maybe a little…just…how do you know all this stuff? The last execution of a witch in Scotland, the sons of Eleanor of Aquitaine, the economic policies of Jimmy Carter…you've only looked at that paper to write down notes on what I'm getting wrong. You know all of it."

"I like history," he says with a shrug, "I like learning about leaders especially. How they've failed, how they've succeeded…I have to be in a leadership position myself some day, whether I want to be one or not."

"What do you mean, whether you want to or not?"

"It's…it's not important," he says, shaking his head, "stop trying to distract me. We have a lot more questions to get through."

"Do you have anything you should study for?"

"Probably," he says, doodling the shape of France onto the paper, "but I promised I'd help you."

"You know," she says, lifting herself up by her elbows, sitting up and crossing her legs, "analysts that specialize in studying say that the likelihood of memorization is higher when you switch between subjects every now and then."

"Sounds like something a procrastinator would say," he says, rolling up the practice questions sheet of paper and swatting her on the knee with it.

"Ah!" she gasps, then puts her hand over heart, "I am so offended by that that I will not even"
respond, thank you…what I am going to do is look up the *American Psychological Association* article that proves the point I just made."

"America is a lazy country," he says, unrolling the paper, "that's why I went to secondary school in London."

"You're American," she points out, waiting for the webpage to load on her phone.

"Yeah, exactly."

Anne rolls her eyes, passing her phone to him to read.

"There's another article that supports it in the Scientific--"

"Let me guess: American?"

Anne crosses her arms and pouts (actually *pouts*), pushing his knee with her feet, which happen to be in the purple Doc Martens he bought for her.

*How different we are at night versus day*, he thinks as he pushes her feet off, saying, "tsk, tsk", and holding her phone over her head so that she can't reach it.

"Henry!"

"Anne."

"The Scientific American," she says, trying to take her phone back as he waves it around, "is a very prestigious and well-respected magazine! It's been around since 1845! Albert *Einstein* wrote articles for it, for God's sake!"

"Oh, now you know your history," he teases, "while you're at it, give me a list of Einstein's accomplishments, from 1905 to 1939."

"Give me my phone!"

"Give me an accomplishment."

"E = mc²."

"What year did he publish the paper that introduced it?"

"Not part of the deal--"

"What…year?"

"Nineteen-oh…nineteen-oh-give-me-my-phone!"

"Well, half of that's right."

"Henry!"

"What's the other half?"

Anne lets out some sort of weird combination sound: half scream of frustration, half growl.

Before he can fully process what's happening, she's scooted over to him and moves herself until she's
sitting in his lap.

That’s pretty much the only thing running through his mind (she’s sitting on my lap she’s sitting on my lap she’s sitting on my lap, God help me) when she plucks her phone from his hand and gets off of him just as quickly as she got on him.

She lies down on her blanket again, taps a few times on her phone, and says, "1905."

"Looking it up," he says, clearing his throat, "is cheating."

"When you’re taking the test, sure. Not now. And I can’t answer anymore questions about the French Revolution, Henry, I just can’t. Not for at least another half an hour."

"Fine," he says, smoothing the paper out again, "we’ll stay on the 1900s for now--"

"Please. Let’s at least try the switching the subjects thing, and if you hate it we can switch back after like, half an hour."

"Fine," he sighs, "I do have an American Lit exam tomorrow I should probably study for…"

"I love lit classes! Awesome. Should we go back to your room to get notes?"

"Tell you what," he says, pocketing her study outline in his jeans, "since someone very little and annoying interrupted my REM sleep this morning, I could use some coffee. Why don’t you pick some up for us and I’ll meet you at my dorm?"

"Deal."

"How much was it?" Henry asks, opening the drawer of the nightstand and taking his wallet out.

"It was free, don’t worry about it," she says, removing his cup from the cardboard carrier and putting it by his bed.

"Free?"

"I work there, remember?"

"Oh, right…must be dangerous, for you. Do they ever cut you off?" he asks, taking the lid off and blowing on his drink before taking a careful sip.

"They wouldn’t dare," Anne says, gripping her cup with two hands, protectively.

"God, how do people just sit down and read for hours? Anything longer than ten minutes is too much…"

"How can you not like reading? You like history."

"You don’t have to read a lot to like history. History is just Wikipedia-link-jumping. It’s easy to scan. You can’t scan literature or you miss some terribly important plot point or random paragraph that’s somehow symbolic of the main character, the entire novel, the era, the human race, or some other shit…"

"’Some other shit’?"
"Excuse me for missing how a red chair means that war is a necessary evil, or whatever-the-fuck. Why don't writers just say what they mean?"

"Then it'd be a technical manual. There'd be no art to it."

"I guess," he says, flipping a page in This Side of Paradise, "but I know Fitzgerald only wrote this book to impress his girlfriend. And I'm not his girlfriend. So I resent having to read it. And didn't he end up plagiarizing her?"

"True, but there are some beautiful quotes in there!"

"Yes," he says, "buried in between long passages of the narrator's exhausting inner thoughts, I guess there are."

"'They slipped into an intimacy from which they never recovered'? Beautiful."

"I guess," he says, trying to jot down the chapter summary from his notes and skimming the book to see if there's anything he missed.

"'Was it the infinite sadness of her eyes that drew him or the mirror of himself that he found in the gorgeous clarity of her mind'? Beautiful."

"Yeah," he says, closing the paperback and throwing it across the room, "if nothing else, he got laid after writing this."

"Henry!"

"What? He did. She married him, didn't she?"

"Yes, but--"

"And they had a daughter, so that's pretty irrefutable proof that he got laid."

"You're terrible."

"Terribly tired of this book."

"I think I got that when you threw it."

"Back to history," he says, picking up the textbook sitting by her knee.

"Don't throw that," she says, "it cost me way too much to be thrown."

"I wouldn't throw your history book, Boleyn. I wouldn't throw my history book. I like history."

"So you've said."

---

From: George Boleyn

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 4, 2016, Sunday, 7:04 PM

Hey, sis…
From: Anne Boleyn

George!! I haven't heard from you in forever!

From: George

Well, yes, you know. Been busy sinning and such.

From: Anne

Have any holiday plans?

From: George

Well…funny you should mention it…

From: Anne

Oh, no.

From: George

I'm currently crashing on a friend's couch…

From: Anne

Oh, NO.

From: George

And I thought…that maybe you could use those doe eyes of your to convince dad to let me stay there? Only till the end of December, I swear, no longer than that.

From: Anne

I don't wield as much influence as you think.

From: George

You're the favorite. Please?

From: Anne

I and my 'doe eyes' will do our best.

From: George

That's all I ask.

From: Anne

No promises.

From: George

Of course. Love you, sis!
From: Anne

Love you, too.

From: Mary Boleyn
To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 5, 2016, Monday, 9:12 PM

Hey, wanted to ask you this in person but things have been so crazy with finals and us being so busy that I'm texting it. You up?

From: Anne Boleyn

Yes I'm up, it's not even 10 yet!

From: Mary

Idk, you were always weird about your study/sleep schedule in high school!

From: Anne

I don't go to bed before 10. What's up?

From: Mary

So…as you know, Dad hasn't bought us plane tickets yet.

From: Anne

Yeah, I know…he said he would but I'm too embarrassed to remind him, honestly. Can we call him together?

From: Mary

Well, thing is, Lizzy's not coming down for the holidays this year. Instead she's driving to the East Coast to visit some friends in New York-- she says they're 'more like her family' anyway.

From: Anne

Oh?

From: Mary

Yeah. And she says she's totally willing to have us come, since she can easily drop us off, since home is on the way, anyway.

From: Anne

I don't know…Los Angeles to Washington D.C. is a really long drive.

From: Mary
True, but we'll get some sister-bonding time! And it'll give you a chance to know Lizzy better.

From: Anne

Hmm…

From: Mary

Look, do you want to tell Dad and remind him he forgot and that he'll now have to buy us expensive, last-minute plane tickets? Or do you want to call him and tell him we figured it out and he doesn't have to worry?

From: Anne

Okay…road trip it is.

From: Mary

Yaaahs!

From: Anna Seville

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 6, 2016, Tuesday, 4:04 PM

Did you return it yet?

From: Anna Seville

Did I return the beautiful, solid gold necklace with a trinket of an envelope inlaid with sapphires? Is that what you mean?

From: Anne

Anna…you know I couldn't accept it. It would send the wrong message.

Anna:

Yeah, and so might having "moments" with him by the Hugo fountain.

Anne:

Anna! I am not sharing things with you if you are just going to use them against me.

Anna:

Then we are going to have a very quiet friendship.

Anne:

…I didn't ask to be read like this.

Anna:
Lmao. But yeah, I returned it. He wasn't there, Brandon was, so I gave it to him to give to Tudor.

Anna:

Do you even want to know what the note said?

From: Anne

Sent 4:25 PM

No.

From: Anne

Sent 4:45 PM

Yes.

Anna:

"Thanks for the tutoring help this year. Zelda's got nothing on you.

Yours, Henry"

Anne:

Is that it?

Anna:

Yeah. What were you expecting?

Anne:

Idk…more, I guess?

Anna:

More than a gold necklace and a handwritten note?

Anne:

No…never mind. It's hard to explain.

_____________________________________________________

From: Henry Tudor

To: Katherine Aragon

Sent December 7, 2016, Wednesday, 1:03 AM

Do you still love me?
From: Katherine Aragon

Funny, I was about to ask you the same thing.

From: Henry Tudor

Do you?

From: Katherine

Yes, I do. Do you?

From: Henry

Yes.

From: Katherine

Was that it?

From: Henry

No…I don't think I've ever asked you this, but…are you in love with me?

From: Katherine

You are asking for honesty?

From: Henry

Please.

From: Katherine

I don't know.

From: Henry

Looks like we're on the same page there, too.

Chapter End Notes

quotes that Anne reads while they're studying Lit are from F. Scott Fitzgerald and do not belong to me. no copyright infringement intended.

hi!!! ok so this wraps up the winter semester, they're all done with finals and we're going into winter break in the next chapter. stay tuned!!

oh btw the 'teen soap' thing is a bit of a poking-fun-at-myself thing, because on my tumblr (also boleynqueens, if you want to check it out) i always say how i wish i could write this fic as like a teen soap on the CW or something and actually watch it! i think that would be wild.
all you wanted

Chapter Summary

"Yeah," Lizzy quips, stretching an arm to the roof of the car and rolling her shoulders, cracking her neck, "because I know the last time I slept with a guy the first thing out of his mouth was, 'wait, how close are you with the Pope, though?"

Chapter Notes

links to songs at end notes...no tom wyatt covers, i promise! just road trip music.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 10, 2016, Saturday

Lizzy, Mary, and Anne load into Lizzy's blue 2006 Saturn at 5:00 AM ("dark and early!" Lizzy chirps as Anne and Mary wince) to avoid traffic and get a good head start. They have a long drive ahead of them.

Mary is really not a morning person. Anne is, once she's had her coffee. Lizzy, with hair gold as sunlight and a voice gentle as butterflies, is, of course. ('She gets up at 4:00 AM to ride her bike to the beach-- isn't that fucked up?' Mary informs Anne from the front passenger seat as Lizzy laughs and kisses her on the cheek).

They pull into a Starbucks drive thru. Anne gets a holiday spice flat white (what the hell, 'tis the season, jingle bells and all that jazz), venti (of course). Lizzy gets a strawberry frappucino (it's forty-eight degrees outside, but sure, whatever, Anne thinks, and also she knows for a fact that that drink has no caffeine, so she's temporarily questioning Lizzy's sanity just all around), and Mary falls asleep before they can order, but Anne gets her a venti iced white mocha (which Mary always wants but never gets, always citing 'calories' as the reason) so that it keeps if she wakes up later.

After they get their drinks and pay, Lizzy pulls into the parking lot and parks the car.

"I'm not going to crick my neck trying to talk to you," she explains, "let's move her to the back, she'll be more comfortable anyway."

Mary grumbles as they try to move her, but between the two of them it's pretty easy to do so.

And as soon as they pull onto the I-15 N (the first long leg of their trip, Anne announces, '66.2 miles'), Mary's out, snoring, the movement of the car having effectively put her to sleep.

Like a baby, Anne thinks.

Mary has a bad habit of pulling all-nighters before exams. It's counterproductive, Anne always tells her, because you can't be at peak performance when your brain needs sleep, but she doesn't listen to her, of course.
Anne learns a lot about Lizzy Blount on the drive. Granted, she learns some things that don't really surprise her, like that she has every single Michelle Branch CD, and also a sizeable collection of Florence + the Machine, Lana Del Rey, Vanessa Carlton, and Britney Spears. Or like the fact that she was a model during high school (though Lizzy tells her she didn't like it very much).

There are things she doesn't expect, like the fact that Lizzy's a pacifist (well, that part's not surprising) and can eloquently explain all the reasons why.

There's a lull in their conversation around the 30th mile of I-15, and Lizzy says, "Ask me anything, the more personal the better…it'll prevent me from getting drowsy, and it makes it go faster. Just music doesn’t do it for me."

"Okay…um…"

Anne's not really good at that sort of thing.

"Should I make a reservation for a hotel for us?" she asks instead, "I can't believe I didn’t think--"

"Oh, we don't need that. I have friends all across America," Lizzy says cheerily, "I've arranged everything, overnight location wise."

"How?"

Lizzy explains that her parents, trust fund hippies, consider everyone their friends. That her mom would meet a struggling actor at the farmer's market, find out they were getting evicted, and let them crash on the couch. That her dad would strike up a conversation with a busker at the train station and bring them home for a 'home-cooked meal', which often turned into a week of overnight stay, and that her parents did this over and over again.

"When you were…how old?" Anne asks.

"First stranger I remember sleeping on our couch…probably seven. From seven onwards."

"Didn't they think that might be unsafe?"

"It wouldn't have crossed their minds…they were kind of remiss with the whole parenting thing," Lizzy says, matter-of-factly.

"They just did whatever they wanted, basically-- pass me my sunglasses? They're in the glovebox."

Anne pulls out a heart shaped pair and passes them to Lizzy, who slides them on.

"Which, you know," she continues, "is fine if you're alone or whatever, but not so great if you have a kid."

"How else were they remiss?"

Anne hopes that's not too much. Her sister's girlfriend did tell her to err on the side of personal, after all…

"Gosh, I don't know…I mean, my mom would do things like pack me a lunch for school, but I'd open the bag at the table and it'd end up being a container of marshmallow fluff and a bad apple or something. I guess she started to pack and then forgot…anyway, stuff like that made it hard for me in school."
"What do you mean?" Anne asks, feeling very sad thinking of a little Lizzy sitting at a cafeteria table with nothing to eat.

"I was not popular at school. Like, ever."

Anne can't imagine that-- Lizzy is so pretty and so sweet, it's hard to imagine her being unpopular.

"Was it like...a you-were-a-model-and-all-the-boys-liked-you-so-all-the-girls-were-jealous-type situation?" Anne prompts.

"Not really. I mean, I was a model, since freshman year. But it was always something...it was like a 'if it's not this it's something else' situation, actually. Like the lunch thing....that was in elementary school. And people would laugh, and I acted like it was normal, I'd just like, toss the apple and eat some marshmallow fluff like it was no big deal. So eventually I figured out I needed to pack my own lunches, but the thing was that they never had, like, kid food...they'd be so proud of themselves, 'we got you soy string cheese, Lizzy!' and I was like 'I am never, ever eating that,'" she says, laughing.

"So what happened?"

"Oh, right...well, so I think in third grade I got fed up, and because of that I ended up getting busted for shoplifting some Lunchables and fruit roll-ups, and you can bet everyone heard about that. And I was never really able to shake it."

Wow.

"Was that it? I mean, that doesn't sound so bad..."

"Oh, no, that wasn't it," Lizzy says easily, "not by a long shot. That was just elementary school. And there was other stuff, too...I'd go to class with flowers in my hair, I was clumsy. I never knew if the teacher was talking to me, never knew how to answer the questions...I was sort of just off in my own little world a lot of the time. I had imaginary friends...they had a field day with me."

Anne tugs at her hair, feeling unsure about what to do with her hands, smiles nervously.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable. This is kind of heavy," Lizzy admits, easing her now-melted strawberry frappe from the drink holder, "we can talk about something else, if you want..."

"No, it's okay...tell me about...junior high?"

"Well, okay...if you don't mind," Lizzy says with a shrug, "it doesn't bother me, talking about it, honestly, but if you're--"

"No," Anne says, looking out the window, "oh, hey, it says we're passing...Barstow?"

"Yay! That means we're like, halfway to Las Vegas," Lizzy chirps, checking the clock on the dash, "we're making awesome time, it's only 7:30 AM. Do you have to pee?"

"We got off at a rest stop like an hour ago..."

"I know! But it's good to stay on top of it, especially on road trips."

"No, I'm good," Anne says.

"Okay," Lizzy says, drumming her hands against the wheel, cruising for a bit before she takes the '2 and 10' position again, "what were we talking about?"
"Junior high."

"Oh right…so the thing with junior high was the whole me-liking-girls thing."

"How did anyone--"

"Find out? I'm not sure. But my lab partner for this project was Kendra. And she was really, really popular. And we were working on it at my house, and she kissed me! And I was super stoked, because I had been wanting to kiss a girl forever, and she was so pretty…and so we sort of made that a regular thing, the kissing thing? Except I probably should've nipped it in the bud, because sometimes she was kind of weird about it."

"'Weird about it?'"

"Like, we'd be watching a movie at the theater, and we'd be making out, and she'd suddenly pull away and be like, 'no, I like BOYS', and I was like, okay, a) you kissed me first, and b) what the heck, I like boys, too, what's your point….I think probably what happened is someone saw us and told her. And she probably got scared and told them that I was like, some sort of predator or something and that it wasn't mutual."

"Oh, God…what happened?"

"I think I made up some medical condition and forged a Dr's note to get out of P.E…they were brutal in the locker room. Which, like, as if I would be staring! As if I ever did anything but stare at my locker when I was changing like everyone else. But, anyway. That followed me to high school, for sure."

Lizzy declares, mere minutes after her junior high story, that she does have to pee, after all, so they take Exit 181 and she uses the Sleep Inn on Historic Route 66. Anne decides to, too, since they're here, anyway, and fills her reusable water bottle up with ice-water from the lobby, that special kind that hotels have that always has some sort of cut up fruit inside, usually in a glass dispenser.

They debate waking Mary up. She's out like she's taken a handful of sleeping pills, but she didn't touch her mocha, so she's probably not going to have to go for a while.

"Okay," Anne says as she buckles up, and Lizzy starts the car, "so, for a more fun question: what's your favorite thing about college?"

They go straight on Main St, passing restaurants on their left, the town more or less a concrete wasteland, dirt roads surrounding them as they drive out.

"Well, that one's easy," Lizzy says brightly, pushing her turn signal and looking both ways before making a left on L Street, "probably that no one cares, or knows, like, about who you were."

Anne likes that, too.

"I know people think I'm like, this ditzy party girl or whatever," Lizzy says as she merges back onto I-15 North, "but that's better than being 'odd'. And at least people like to have fun with me instead of laughing as they watch me try to have fun by myself."

"What's your least favorite thing?" Anne asks.

"Oh, that's easy, too…it's like…don't judge me, though, okay?"
"I won't," Anne promises, taking a swig of her water. It tastes like oranges and crispness.

"It's just that people...well, boys, mainly," she corrects herself, "always tell me I'm pretty and then they expect me to be, like so grateful--"

"Yes! I hate that! It's like when men you don't know interrupt you when you're walking, on your way somewhere, to tell you to 'smile'. Like, who are you? And why are you telling me what to do and then expecting me to be happy and grateful for the attention?"

"Oh my God, YES!" Lizzy exclaims, literally bouncing in her seat, "exactly like that, I hate that too, but yeah, it's like...okay, I'm pretty. Who cares? Being that way hasn't ever gotten me anywhere I've liked very much," she says, frowning, contemplative, and Anne can't help but wonder where she's gone in that moment.

"Well, except for with this one," Lizzy says, rolling a shoulder backwards to Mary and smiling.

"That's not the only reason you got her," Anne says, half-joking, half-reassuring.

"No," Lizzy says, flicking her gaze to the Mojave Desert as they roll through it, "but I'm sure it didn't hurt."

"Oh, I LOVE this song," Lizzy says, turning up a track on her Michelle Branch disc.

Lizzy has one of those older disc changer things that Anne's not sure cars really have any more, where you can put like 8 different CD's in and it shuffles them automatically.

"I know you know this one!" Lizzy says, her right hand flipping open the center console and grabbing her lip balm while her left hand steers.

"I know this one," Anne confirms.

"Well, sing it with me!" Lizzy insists, sliding the balm over her mouth, "or I'm going to feel stupid."

"No, I'm okay...and I don't want to wake Mary up."

"Mary sleeps like she's in a coma and you know it," Lizzy says, pocketing the lip balm, "girl could sleep anywhere."

"I don't know..."

"Suit yourself," Lizzy says, shrugging a freckled shoulder and restarting the song.

Anne hums along to the intro, but sure enough they both roll down the windows and start singing loudly, in perfect disharmony on the chorus:

"if you want tooo/i can saaaave you/i can take you awaa-aay from here!/so lonely inside/so busy out there/and all you wanted was somebody who caa-ares..."

"Do you have a good relationship with your parents?" Anne asks as they drive through Halloran Springs.

"It's...okay," Lizzy says, "I don't hold a grudge or anything. It's more funny than anything, actually, because nothing rubbed off on me."
"What do you--"

"Well, maybe the weed habit," Lizzy says sheepishly, laughing at herself, a brilliant, sunny sound, "but otherwise…God, they would die if they knew I ordered double-doubles from In N' Out on the weekly, if they knew I drank soda and ate cola gummies…it just backfired, basically, most of their hippie stuff, I mean. I'm never eating quinoa or kale, ever again."

They reach Las Vegas by 10 AM, and Mary finally wakes up.

"We crossed the border, babe," Lizzy says, "you missed it."

"That's fine," she says blearily, she stretches her arms and accidentally hits the mocha in the drink holder in the back seat, then cups it with her hand and gulps it greedily, "food please," she says before curling up again.

So they stop at McDonald's, Mary sitting at the table and sucking on her mocha (still cold—they must've gotten extra ice) as she waits for her fries, Lizzy and Anne filling up their soda cups.

They all devour their food: egg mcmuffins, hash browns, coffee for Anne again, dollar sandwiches and fries.

It takes them about twenty minutes to finish everything. Lizzy takes their tray up and dumps it, and then they all see if they need to use the restroom one last time before hitting the road again.

"Man," Anne says as they drive past the Las Vegas Motor Speedway, "I hope she's not hypoglycemic or something."

Mary is in the backseat, conked out again, breathing heavily.

"Nah," Lizzy says, "probably just tired."

"Okay," Lizzy says, taking a sip of the large soda she bought at McDonald's (she had filled it with half Dr. Pepper and half strawberry Fanta, which surprised Anne by not being quite as disgusting as she'd thought it would be when she tried it), "I'm done talking about me…ask me other stuff."

"What kind of stuff?" Anne asks.

"I don't know. Quiz me. Surprise me. Ask me about…a person."

"Okay…"

Anne looks out the window, elbow on her armrest, hand cupping her chin. They're passing the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area, and it's beautiful: cliffs jut out in hues of red and purple. There's shrubs and dirt of course, like there has been for a good chunk of this route, but with the cliffs and the mountains in the background, they're simply decorative.

Dark clouds are starting to gather in the sky, and it makes Anne think of rain. And rain makes her think of rooftops, and rooftops make her think of…

"What do you know about Henry Tudor?" she asks, still looking out the window.

"Oh…” Lizzy trails off, a note of hesitancy in her voice, "I mean I don't really know him…that
"Aren't you two friends?" Anne presses, fiddling with the latch on the glove compartment, sliding her thumb over it, up and down.

"I mean…yeah. We are."

"It's fine," Anne says, leaning back in her seat and folding her hands in her lap, "forget it."

"No, it's okay…let's see," Lizzy says, shifting her hands' positions on the wheel slightly, "he's had a pretty easy life, I think, for the most part. Things come easily to him. So I think it's pretty hard for him when things…aren't easy for him. Harder than it might be on most people," she says with some significance, eyes sliding to Anne, then back to the road, "people that might deal with hardships more regularly."

"Right."

"I mean…I know he has his stuff. I think his dad's kind of hard on him," Lizzy says.

"Look, I…" Lizzy trails off, looks at Anne, and whispers, "Mary's sleeping, right?"

"If not she's doing a good job of faking it," Anne quips.

"Can you make sure?"

Anne turns around and traces the sole of her sister's bare foot. She twitches a little bit, and then starts snoring in earnest.

"I think we're good," Anne says dryly, "why?"

"She wouldn't want me to tell you this, but I just think you should know…he really likes you. Like, a lot."

"How do you know that?"

"It's just…there's something different. He's different around you, when he talks about you--"

"He talks about me?"

"Oh, no," Lizzy says, waves a hand, "like, in passing, but still. Henry…softens. Not that he's usually harsh or anything, but…you know what I mean."

"Maybe he just has a crush," she says flatly, watching the sky as more clouds gather, darker and thicker than the ones dusting the horizon.

"It seems like…it might be more. And I know he's engaged now," Lizzy says quickly, "and I'm not saying that's like, okay…but I think maybe he'd change it! For you."

"I doubt it," Anne says, observing the sky darken, wishing for rain.

"There might be more to the story, is all. Not that he's told me that, but, you know…rich people are weird. They have weird-- whatever, I don't know. I mean, Henry's definitely the only billionaire's kid I know, but--"

"Billionaire?!"
"Well, yeah," Lizzy says slowly, as if she's speaking to a child, "you didn't know that?"

"No!"

"No?"

"No, I mean, of course I knew he was rich, but I was thinking, like, millions…"

"Oh, wow. No, no, no," Lizzy says, whistling, "Henry Tudor Sr. is like one of the top ten richest men in the world…maybe fifteen, but probably within the top ten."

Anne is at a loss for words.

Billionaire?

"Are you telling me you haven't Internet stalked the boy you have a crush on? Do you know how to like people?"

"I…no, I haven't," Anne says, brow furrowing, she admits, "I have Internet stalked his fiancee, though."

"Oh, so you are a little normal. What've you found?"

"Nothing," she says sulkily, picking at a loose thread on the sleeve of her sweater, "she's perfect."

"Oh, come on…she can't be perfect."

"She's…short," Anne says with a grimace, "that's literally the only thing I can come up with that's even remotely close to being a flaw. She's beautiful, poised, does a lot of charity work, writes well-written opinion articles for the Huffington Post that rail against the injustices of the world…she's friends with the Pope, for God's sake. Like, friends with him. I can't compete with that--"

"Yeah," Lizzy quips, stretching an arm to the roof of the car and rolling her shoulders, cracking her neck, "because I know the last time I slept with a guy the first thing out of his mouth was, 'wait, how close are you with the Pope, though?'"

"She's brilliant," Anne continues, "I can't even hate her, I agree with everything she's written that I've read….she speaks five languages--"

"So do you!" Lizzy interjects.

"Well, yeah, but-- Lizzy. How do you know that?"

"Ummm," she says, cheeks coloring, she turns the volume on the radio up, "I don't know…pretty hurts, perfection is the disease of a nation, oooo," she sings along.

"Lizzy?"

"Ummm. Umm…Mary!" she blurts, smiling, "duh, Mary told me."

Anne stares at her, squinting her eyes, waiting for the real answer, since that doesn't ring true (a bunch of languages', Mary would say, if bragging about her sister, but not the exact number, she's not good at remembering exact numbers, she has to check Facebook to remember even her siblings' birthdays and even then she sometimes forgets if she's asked without her phone in her hand).

Lizzy folds, puts both hands at the top of the wheel and bangs her forehead against it, then goes back
to normal, says, "Aaaargh. Damn it."

"Lizzy?"

"Henry told me," she admits miserably, "okay?"

"Why did you try to--"

"He talks about you a lot, okay? I lied. He talks about you a lot, and also every single time he's drunk, and he goes on to me about it because he can't talk to his guy friends about it, because they'll give him a hard time. So I know everything about you! I know that you like caffe llave, whatever that is, that you use a French press, whatever that is, that you were Perseverance in the Masquerade--"

"Lizzy, wait, slow down--"

"--that you like Amelie, that you order weird pizza, that you like books, that you're allergic to smoke, does that mean he should quit smoking? No, he says, that would be crazy, but he would if you asked, hypothetically, apparently, and then that you're not allergic to smoke, you smoke, too, and you're friends with Tom Wyatt, do I think you two are dating? No, I do not, 'but are you sure, Lizzy'? No, Henry, I'm not sure, why don't you ask? 'I don't want to ask, can you ask'? No, I don't want to, I say. I know you like purple doc martens, poetry and Fitzgerald quotes. And then, oh boy, he connects the dots with someone, he's like, 'I heard you two kissed, what was it like kissing her?' And I'm like Henry, I don't want to fuel your weird, objectifying lesbian porno fantasies, fuck off, and he's like no, I don't even mean it like that, I was honestly just wondering if she's a good kisser, I'm curious, and I'm like yeah, I'm sure you are, perv, and he takes my shoulders in his hands, gives me this weird, intense, look, and says, seriously says, 'Lizzy, I'm not being a creep, I don't want you to go into details, I just wanted to know if she's a good kisser or not', and he's being so, so genuine that I'm like, 'yeah, she's a good kisser, if you need to know that badly,' and then he gets this dreamy, distant look in his face, says 'thank you' all sweetly and runs off!"

Lizzy takes a deep breath, checks over her shoulder to make sure Mary's still asleep, then checks Anne to see what her reaction is.

Anne is laughing, silently, wordlessly, her shoulders shaking.

"Well, I got that off my chest," Lizzy says, "I'm glad it's so amusing to you, Anne! It has been hell! He won't shut up!"

Anne's struggling to catch her breath, wheezing, and now Lizzy is laughing too, and the rain is pouring down, so hard that she pulls over to the side of the road so they don't water-plane all over the place.

So there they are, two girls on the side of the road in Utah, laughing hysterically, laughing so hard that tears are leaking from their eyes, one Boleyn girl laughing, the other Boleyn girl's girlfriend laughing with her, the other Boleyn girl sleeping until she starts, mumbles "wha's so funny?" and Lizzy and Anne shriek, say "nothing, oh my God, nothing."

And then of course Mary is petulant, pouting, "why won't you tell me? I hate inside jokes," so Lizzy crawls from the driver's seat and joins her in the back, says, "sorry, honey," still shaking with laughter, spoons her and laughs into Mary's shoulder until Mary eventually joins too, not having any idea what they're laughing at except for the concept of laughing itself.

And then another Michelle Branch song comes on, Anne and Lizzy freak out and scream, and Mary
exclaims "I remember this song! 2001, baby!" and then they are three girls singing *cause you're everywhere to me!* at the top of their lungs, free and young and happy and having the time of their lives.

Chapter End Notes

soooo probably not what most of you were expecting (backstory, anyone?) but i hope you liked it, anyway. and i didn't want lizzy to be a cipher. she's important, important to mary and so also important to anne :)

george is in the next chapter! promise.

all you wanted, michelle branch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cbo2n2MzxxE

pretty hurts (collab): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTPklw95Jk

everywhere, michelle branch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLCasyAh7ic
on a history book page

Chapter Summary

Each sister took after one parent. Mary has her mother's wheat-colored hair, the wide smile, the blue, clear, easily readable eyes; eyes that set people at ease. Anne has her father's dark hair, the knowing smirk, the dark brown, unfathomable, piercing eyes that convey an intensity that makes people nervous.

Chapter Notes

here's the song that comes onto shuffle when Anne plays her iPod:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ptritFluOs

yelp reviews of the place George is crashing: http://www.yelp.com/biz/capitol-view-on-14th-washington?sort_by=rating_asc

the tudor's los angeles residence:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Manor_(Los_Angeles)


how i imagine the boleyn residence, if you like visuals:
http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/138491311917/niklane-heritage-square-highland-park

Some history things at the end notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

December 12, 2016, Monday, 2:30 PM

By the time they hit the border of Maryland, Lizzy is so tired of driving, and tired in general, that she lets Anne drive. Brave of her, Anne thinks, given that she doesn't have a license or insurance (Washington D.C. has an amazing public transit system; Los Angeles Metro's not great, but it's improving and expanding).

Anne used to just get rides from Mary, before Mary drove her car to Whitehall her freshman year and sold it for living expenses.

Mary's license is expired, too, but she was probably the better option give her experience. Somehow they talked me into this, Anne thinks, flinching as a semi-truck passes her, God knows how.

So Mary's in the front passenger seat, while Lizzy sleeps in the back.

"I'm not sure we should pick George up," Mary says in a panicky voice.
"What are you talking about?" Anne asks irritably, trying to concentrate on driving.

"I'm looking at the Yelp reviews of the apartment building he's staying at…apparently a lot of people have gotten their stuff stolen!"

"Well, good thing we're not moving in," Anne says dryly.

Anne slows down before she merges onto the exit that says it'll lead her to a gas station.

Apparently the car behind her does not appreciate this, given that they blast their horn.

"Aren't you supposed to slow down when you merge?" Anne says, gripping the wheel tightly.

"Not for a mile!" Mary exclaims.

"I'm turning into the gas station! I have to slow down! You're supposed to slow down! I'm putting on my turn signal!" Anne shouts, "I am never driving again!" as she pulls into the gas station, which wakes Lizzy up.

Needless to say, Lizzy returns to the driver's seat after they gas up the car.

5:45 PM

It's snowing softly by the time they roll up to the address George texted Anne (2420 14th St NW, Unit #14).

As Lizzy pulls over to street-park, Anne scans the neighborhood.

It looks…well…'sketchy' would be a kind description, Anne thinks, observing that the apartment complex is covered in graffiti, the sidewalks covered with broken glass, used needles, miscellaneous trash and what looks like…Oh, God. Are those used condoms?!

"I think you guys should stay in the car," Anne says, unbuckling her seat belt.

"You shouldn't go in alone," Mary says.

"I'll be fine."

"Here," Lizzy says, opening the center console and handing Anne a small tube that looks like a lipstick.

"What's this for?" Anne asks, uncapping the 'lipstick' and finding that it has a spray nozzle, "is it a little perfume or…?"

"Oh! Cap it!" Lizzy exclaims with such urgency that it startles Anne and she puts the top on immediately.

"Sorry, it's just that that's a disguise…it's actually mace," Lizzy explains.

"Oh, wow. Why do you have--"

"Biking alone at 4 am! Remember?"

"Right," Anne says, pocketing it, "thanks."
"Have you called George?" Mary asks.
"I texted him, but no answer."
"Try calling, so that he knows we're here...maybe you don't have to leave the car," Mary says.
Anne searches her contacts for George's number and calls him, but it goes straight to voicemail.
"No answer...it's okay, he probably needs help with his stuff anyway."
"Okay, well...hurry back!" Mary calls.

Anne walks up the building entrance, pressing #14 to buzz herself in.

It buzzes, but nothing happens. She tries again, and nothing

Anne jumps around for a bit from foot to foot, nervously, until someone leaves the building and opens the door for her, so she darts in, grateful she wasn't outside in this area for longer than a few minutes.

She walks up the staircase to find Apartment #14. She remembers George told her it was on the second story.

There's 14, on the left. The paint on the door is chipped, the golden number sign dingy.

Anne knocks and waits.

George opens the door, leans against it as he smiles.

"Long time, no see, sis!"

Anne knows she should give some sort of response, but she's completely stunned by his appearance. He looks thinner than he did the last time she saw him, his face gaunt, covered in five o'clock shadow, bags under his eyes. The green sweater he's wearing hangs off his frame, the ends of the sleeves holey.

She knows it's him, of course, he has the square face and bright blue eyes he's always had, the thick head of dark hair, he always hovers over her by at least a head, even when his shoulders are hunched, even when he's holding on to a door like it's a life raft.

"Jesus, George," is all she can manage, "you look like you haven't eaten in weeks."

George scoffs, "you're not going to hug your brother?"

Honestly, she's afraid to, but she lets him pull her in for one, feeling how skinny he's become.

He invites her in, and he says, "I don't have much stuff, just a suitcase."

"Um," Anne says, taking the place in (it's a small studio, there's one tattered couch, a lot of dust on the ground, some prints on the walls, and an open kitchen with a sink full of dirty dishes), "we've kind of been on the road for a while, is it okay if I use your bathroom?"

"Oh, sure, sure only door down the hall to the left, can't miss it."
The apartment is freezing, her hands are instantly cold, and she winces when she realizes the hot water handle on the sink doesn't work when she tries to wash her hands.

"Did you guys forget to turn the heat on?" she calls out as she wipes her hands on a paper towel and...tosses it on the floor, since there's a pile already there (really? how hard is it to get a plastic bag from a grocery store, for God's sake).

"We don't have that," he says, lighting a cigarette and sitting on the couch when she walks out, "want a smoke?"

"No...what do you mean you don't have heat?"

"Friend can't afford it, neither can I," he says with a shrug, "we have electric, though, we just turn the oven on and leave the door open."

"That's a fire hazard!"

"Weeell," George says, "yeah...kind of."

"I buzzed #14 and you didn't answer. Were you out?"

"Oh, right," he says, snapping his fingers, "forgot to tell you, buzzer's broken."

"Thanks for the head's up," she says, "and you didn't answer when I called because...?"

"Couldn't pay my phone bill," he explains, "so I guess they finally cut off my service."

"Well, I know what I'm getting you for Christmas..."

Anne notices a small rollaway tucked under his feet.

"Is that it?"

"Hmm? Oh this," he says, pushing it out, "yeah, you know me...I'm a minimalist."

Well...there's something to be said for the ridiculousness of American consumerism, Anne thinks. The United States has something like 79% of the world's self-storage facilities. Still, Anne feels a little sad thinking that her brother's entire life can be fit into just one suitcase, but she chides herself for feeling that way...she's probably just being judgmental. Besides, there's probably something to it, some sort of freedom, she's sure it's very bohemian to be able to fit your life into one suitcase. She probably just doesn't 'get it.'

"So," George prompts as they make their way down the stairs, "how many boys did you have chasing after you this semester?"

"I don't have boys chasing after me," Anne says.

"I don't really believe that."

"Believe whatever you want," she says lightly, "I've been busy with school. My scholarship's pretty strict," Anne explains when George opens the door to the entrance for her and holds it.

"Well, if you ever fall behind on the requirements, it's not like dad can't cover you."

"Oh..." Anne trails off, "I guess you don't know."
"Know what?"

"I'll tell you later, George, okay?" she says as they walk down the sidewalk, she points to Lizzy's car.

Lizzy waves and unlocks the door when she sees them. Anne pops the trunk and George puts his suitcase in on top of all of the girls' luggage and closes it, then follows Anne and slides into the backseat of the Saturn.

Mary turns around from the front passenger seat and visibly startles when she sees George, her response almost verbatim to Anne's, she says, "God, George…have you been on some weird diet or something? You know you don't need to lose weight, right?"

"Thank you, darling," he says, taking her hand and kissing it, "you're too kind. It's all the rage: my weight loss secret is something the kids call 'cigarettes.'"

"George!" Mary scolds.

"It's an appetite suppressant," he says with a shrug, "keeps you on your feet…oh, hi, I'm sorry, I'm being rude," he continues, offering his hand to Lizzy, "I'm George, Mary and Anne's brother."

"I know!" she says brightly, taking his hand and shaking it, "I'm Mary's girlfriend, nice to meet you."

"Oh, yeah, well, it was nice of you to drive all this way--"

"Oh, no, I was going to New York, anyway. D.C.'s on the way."

"Well, it's sweet of you, anyway. Thanks for picking me up, hope it wasn't too much trouble."

"No trouble at all," she says, starting her car up, "can I get some directions to your house?"

Mary pulls it up on Google Maps and lets the GPS voice direct them out of Capitol neighborhood and towards Hever Road.

Once Lizzy's dropped them off, all the Boleyn siblings stand on the sidewalk in front of their house, suitcases on the ground. George looks at the light in the window nervously, and Mary is bouncing from foot to foot.

There's a sign outside their childhood home that's been there since any of them can remember. It says "Hever House, built in 1914". Their father used to host tours, make a little money off tourists that were on the waiting list for White House tours or killing time before it. They'd always come in at the worst times. Mary and Anne would be doing homework at the dining room table in their Catholic school uniforms, and the tourists would walk past and gawk, less mature boys would elbow each other, and the sisters would exchange borderline telepathic looks, gather their stuff, and head off to the library instead.

It's an off-white house with tall windows and lace doily curtains that their mother put up and their father never took down, though he always complained about them during her life. It has a wrap-around porch on the first story, a balcony on the second, and a brick walkway up to the entrance.

Anne always thought it looked elegant, loved living in a house with history, a house that had avoided renovations for the most part, but for some reason, at this moment, it looks small to her.

"So…what did you tell dad, exactly?" George asks
"Hmm?" Anne asks, checking her phone.

"You know, our father? How'd you get him to agree to me staying here?"

"Oh," Anne says breezily, taking a deep breath, "I didn't do that."

"What?!" George and Mary exclaim in unison.

"Oh, c'mon guys," Anne says, walking up the path to their front door, "like dad would really say yes over the phone. My 'doe eyes' don't work over the phone, if you recall," Anne teases, winking at George over her shoulder as she walks up the steps of their front porch to the door.

"No," Anne says, ringing the doorbell as her siblings catch up with her, "it'll be harder for him to say 'no' to me in person. That's why I'm going with the element of surprise."

"Anne…dear sister," George drawls, "you realize he can still say no, right?"

"I'll do my best, and hopefully he won't."

*Hever Road feels familiar*, Anne thinks as she waits for her father to answer the door. It should, since it's where she's spent the majority of her life, but for some reason it feels like she's been gone for five years rather than just five months. It's like university is the land of the fae and *this* is the real world.

Mary and Anne are standing together at the front door, but George is hanging behind, waiting on the bottom porch step.

After the shock of seeing George look so different from the last time she saw him, Anne is relieved to see her father still looks much the same: dark hair with waves of salt and pepper, some lines around his twinkling eyes, but all in all he is the picture of robust health.

"My girls!" Thomas Boleyn exclaims, laughing, as he pulls both Mary and Anne in for an embrace, "I'm so glad to see…"

Anne assumes that means he's seen George.

Their father lets go of them, then looks to Mary, then Anne, and asks lowly, "what is he doing here?"

"Well, Dad," Anne says, "George is in a bit of a spot, and he needs a place to stay, so I thought--"

"Absolutely not," he says firmly.

Anne starts at the harshness of his tone. Her father almost never interrupts her. In fact, during her childhood he talked over foreign dignitaries more often than he talked over his youngest daughter.

"But, Dad," Anne whispers, even though she knows her brother can probably hear her anyway, she thinks a quiet tone might convey more urgency, "if you had seen the place he was living…they didn't even have heat, when I used the bathroom I could see my breath, it was terrible!"

"Well, maybe he should get a better job."

"Don't have a job!" George calls out, "hi, dad. Happy holidays," he says, blowing air onto his hands and rubbing them together.

"That's surprising," Thomas says dryly, "but explain to me, Anne, why I should let him mooch and
stay at my home?"

"I won't mooch," George interjects eagerly, "I mean, I can't really pay anything right now, but I can do chores, I'll stay in my room, I won't bother--"

"Your room? Your room...let's see...I converted that into a study. Yes, when six months passed without so much as a phone call from my son, I guess I didn't figure you'd have any use for it."

"Right," George says, "well, that's fair. But I can sleep on the floor, or the couch--"

"I just don't think it's going to work. My daughters, however, are more than welcome to come in," Thomas says, nodding to them, "come, it's cold out outside."

Well, looks like it's time for Anne's Hail Mary. It's either going to work or it's going to backfire terribly: there is no in between. Anne knows this, so she steels herself before using it.

"Dad," she says, "you know mom would've wanted you to let him stay."

Her dad's face falls, and he looks away from her to Mary, who gives him a soft smile.

Good, Anne thinks; given that Mary is the Boleyn sibling that resembles their mother the most, that might just seal the deal.

Each sister took after one parent. Mary has her mother's wheat-colored hair, the wide smile, the blue, clear, easily readable eyes; eyes that set people at ease. Anne has her father's dark hair, the knowing smirk, the dark brown, unfathomable, piercing eyes that convey an intensity that often makes people nervous.

Mary possesses a soft, gentle prettiness, one people notice right away. Maybe Anne used to envy it, because she knew it was something she'll never have, that unmissable, modelesque quality. But Anne knows her beauty is something that can be discovered in layers, and maybe it's a blink-and-you'll-miss-it kind of beauty, but it's beauty all the same. Mary is pretty and that's something Anne will never manage, no matter how much makeup she puts on to soften her catlike eyes, her harshly angular cheekbones, her face will never by symmetrical, but Anne is striking and that's something Mary will never be able to manage, winged eyeliner or no.

So, Anne figures, it all comes out in the wash. She doesn't mind it so much anymore.

"I suppose...you can stay--"

"Yes!" George says, pumping his fist.

"But no more than a few weeks. I can't have someone live here and not pay rent, I have bills--"

"Totally fair! Totally fair," George says, coming up the steps, "I only need a place to stay till the end of December."

"No later than that," Thomas says firmly.

Hail 'Mary', indeed.

Once inside the house, Mary sidles up to her father and whispers to him, "Dad, I don't know if you saw, but--"

"Oh, Anne!" he says, completely ignoring her, "I almost forgot to tell you, you have mail-- quite a bit
of it. I left it for you on the dining room table…Mary, can I get your coat for you?"

"No, that's fine," she snaps, beelining for the table and picking up Anne's stack of mail, cutting right in front of Anne as she does so.

"Mary, what are you--"

"You know what?" Mary says, moving the envelopes on top and sliding them into a magazine within the stack, "why don't I put this upstairs for you?"

Thomas sits down at the dining room table, grabs his newspaper and scans it, observing this strange occurrence in beats in between the lines he reads.

"O-kay," Anne says, brow furrowing, "if you want, just put them on my bed, then, I guess?"

"You're being weird," George interjects.

"I'm not being weird!" Mary insists in a breathy voice, "I'm just going to put this away--"

"What is it?" George asks, tugging at the magazine and grinning.

"No, George, give it-- give it back!"

Anne watches as they almost tear the magazine in half, but George wrests it from her and ends up running up the stairs with it, Mary running up after him.

"Mature as ever," Thomas says, "Anne, would you like a section?"

They used to read the paper together every morning. Maybe he misses it, she thinks.

"Ah, no, Dad, thanks, I'm gonna…go see what that's all about."

Anne shoulders her duffel bag and makes her way up the stairs.

Once she makes it to the top of the stairs, she notices George and Mary whispering together intently.

"Anne!" Mary says, "look, I wanted to--"

"I cannot believe," George says to Anne in a hushed voice, stack of mail still in his hands, "that you got a sugar daddy to pay for college! I just wouldn't have expected it from--"

"What? George, honestly, what are you babbling about?!!" Anne snaps irritably.

She's exhausted from the journey and desperately in need of a shower, and she honestly just doesn't want to deal with his weirdness right now, and also Mary and George are blocking her bedroom door.

"No, I mean, it's impressive, really…I don't judge you, if that's what you're thinking," he says quickly, "I mean, I can't say I haven't thought of the idea myself a few times…"

"What on earth are you--"

"Well, what else?" he says smugly, opening Anne's door (rude, she thinks, but not really surprising--this sort of presumption is not really unusual for her brother), "Henry Tudor."

"What?!!" Anne exclaims, following him into her bedroom and dropping her duffel bag on the floor.
"I mean, he's old...he's like, sixty. Or something."

Mary is hovering behind her, "Anne, wait--"

Anne snatches her mail from George, frustrated, and he puts his hands up in a don't-shoot position.

"Wait, Anne, I need to tell you something," Mary insists in a panicked voice, watching helplessly as Anne opens the magazines and slides the envelopes she saw her older sister hide away out of it.

Henry Tudor

594 S Mapleton Drive

Holmby Hills, Los Angeles, CA, 90024

Anne Boleyn

1526 Hever Road

Washington, DC, 20009

"What?" Anne asks, eyes scanning the return address and hers, in disbelief, her hands start to tremble, and she takes a seat on her bed.

"God, you're like a parrot," George teases, "'what, what, whattt'-- Ow!" he yelps, when Mary punches him in the shoulder, he rubs it, "what the hell, Mary--"

"How did he get--"

"Look, Anne, I can explain..." Mary pleads, pushing George aside.

"How did he...how did he get my...oh my God, his dad, his dad must know--"

"His dad? Anne, you really went Anna Nicole Smith on this one, geez, I didn't even know Tudor's dad was alive, he must be ancient--"

"No!" Anne snaps, "these aren't from Henry Tudor the I, they're from his son, he goes to Whitehall with us, and---"

"Oooh, wow," George says appreciatively, "now, he's hot, honestly...good, because I know I said I wasn't judging you, but I was judging you a little bit."

It's definitely Henry's handwriting, Anne notes as she reads the addresses again and again, the letters starting to blur before her eyes, she recognizes it from tutoring; tutoring and the notes they passed during.

"I don't know, I don't know how else he could've gotten my address," Anne says, shaking her head, "I...there's...it had to have been his dad, I guess his dad knows everything, he's the smartphone CEO of the world or whatever, he probably has access to every smartphone, and I have a smartphone, or maybe he bribed someone from the registar's office, oh God--"

"No, no, Anne," Mary says, "I gave him your address, okay?"
"Why would you do--"

"He asked for it, before we found out about the engagement," Mary says, wringing her hands, "he said it was for something...romantic."

"Oh."

"But then, yeah, we all found out he was engaged and it was too late, I couldn't take it back from him, I couldn't un-give it to him, so--"

Anne's hands are still shaking, as she stammers, "oh, oh, okay, well--"

"Engaged? Oh my God," George says, "if college had been this juicy when I went I definitely would have stuck it out...I need, like, popcorn for this--"

"George! This isn't entertainment, it's Anne's life," Mary scolds.

"Oh, please. Tell me you wouldn't watch the Anne and Henry story if it was on TV--"

"Shut up!" Mary snaps, face turning red.

"No, no, it's fine," Anne says, turning the envelope over in her hands, "I would think this were very entertaining, I'm sure, if it weren't happening to me."

"Dinner's here!" Thomas yells.

"We should go downstairs," Anne says (her hands feel numb now, but at least they've stopped shaking), putting the envelope she's holding on the pile, "let's go."

"Anne," Mary says, "I'm sorry."

"It's fine. Let's go eat."

After a very awkward dinner, full of stilted conversations over containers of Thai takeout at the dining room table, Anne excuses herself. She lets her father know that she's exhausted from all the traveling, that she's probably going to go to sleep now, actually, and he nods his understanding and kisses her on the cheek.

Anne shuts her door behind her and goes to her bed, the comforting familiarity of her old Little Mermaid bedspread soothing her.

She looks at her pile of mail on the foot of the bed, feeling like it's mocking her, like a ticking time bomb.

She doesn't want to see what's inside, but she knows she's going to open them anyway. So she might as well do it now.

So Anne picks her purse up from the floor, rifles around for her iPod and portable speakers, and hooks them up, putting her music on shuffle.

She gets up, turns off the main light, then turns on her lamp, tugging at the wooden star on the end of the string.

Anne settles into bed, and picks up the envelope that's postmarked the earliest, ripping it carefully.
The song they played at her high school graduation is playing. She always thought it was stupid (she’s not sure why she even has it on her iPod, actually), but it doesn’t seem so stupid now.

    i said 'remember this moment/in the back of my mind/the time we stood with our shaking hands/the crowds in stands went wild/we were the kings and the queens/and they read off our names/the night you danced like you knew our lives would never be the same…

“And…Perseverance!”

“Gentleness! Nobleness! Youth! And…Amorous!”

“Who are you?” Henry asks, leading her down the length of the dance floor.

She dances another circle around him as she answers teasingly, “I’m Perseverance– remember?”

“And do you,” he asks, leading her to the left, then the right, “persevere?”

“Always,” she says, curtsying low to the floor.

Henry leans down, lifts her chin up gently. Her eyes meet his, matching his steady gaze, a challenge.

He lets go, then takes her hand to pull her up.

He dips her low; pulls her up to him again.

“And are you,” she counters, “amorous?”

At this point he holds her from behind, moving side to side. He keeps her there, a beat too long, to whisper to her:

    “Always.”

The music stops and the guests cheer.

Anne is still kneeling, breathless from the intensity and speed of the dance, still holding hands with Henry.

He’s staring at her as if she is the only thing in the world not spinning. It makes her feel strangely untethered, like maybe she's not really here at all…

No more memories, she scolds herself, unfolding the paper inside.

November 23, 2016, Wednesday

Anne--

I have to write this knowing that by the time your eyes reach the end of this letter, you will know surely what it is I feel for you (if I have not blown it already, that is, and told you like a fool by the time you read it).
I don't think I've written a letter since I asked Miranda Schaeffer, to be my valentine in the 4th grade (but then, she had nothing on you).

But here goes.

Confession #1: I think about you.

--Henry

Anne runs her index finger up and down the page, again and again, as if she's in a trance.

I think about you.

The necklace that was like a locket, only with an envelope at the end instead of a heart, an envelope that snapped open and shut like a real letter…the necklace she returned to him…

He sent her this after their first only (only, only, only, Anne scolds herself like a mantra, because 'first' implied that there would a second kiss, perhaps many more to come, and that was not the case, not the case at all) kiss.

He sent this letter after the party when they spoke on the balcony about things they had lost, things they missed:

"I miss my brother, George. But I don't think he'll be invited home, honestly. I'll probably try to meet up with him beforehand."

"Why do you miss him?"

"Because...he wrote to me. Actual letters, back when we were kids and at different summer camps. And then later, when I was in high school and he lived in Europe."

She remembers the easiness of telling him that, the confession rolling off her tongue, how he listened, really listened, listened intently, like what she had to say was important, like it mattered, like he didn't want to miss anything.

"Letters? As in, pen to paper, put it in an envelope letters?"

Anne remembers the incredulity that was in his voice.

"Yes! I miss them. I'm sad I missed the era where people had to make...a real effort to reach you. To say whatever it was they wanted to say, to share their thoughts. I don't know, I guess I miss the excitement of getting one in the mail, miss tearing the envelope. Getting a new text doesn't match it, somehow."

She had told him she missed letters.

And, apparently, he had taken note.

The next envelope has a different return address on it:

Henry Tudor
November 24, 2016, Thursday
You didn't think that was it, did you?
It's Thanksgiving. Again, I don't know when you'll read this.
Again, I can't help but write it.
You said you miss letters, the effort, the tearing of the envelope, that you wish more people wrote them.
I hope these make up for the previous lack.
Confession #2: I dream about you.
My first dream was the night after the Virtues' Masquerade.
I could see your face without the mask, but I wasn't able to recall it when I woke.
It drove me crazy.
As do you.

--Henry

you held your head like a hero/on a history book page/it was the end of a decade/but the start of an age…

Henry Tudor
441 E 87th St
New York, NY, 10128

Anne Boleyn
November 25, 2016, Friday

My father (who definitely celebrates Thanksgiving, unlike yours—any chance to eat a lot, any excuse to watch football) asked me if I was sick yesterday. I hardly ate a thing. I haven't been eating, haven't been sleeping much.

All I can think about is you— it's maddening, really.

I know the kiss was a stage direction, hardly anything at all to you, maybe, but I remember it and toss and turn at night. Wishing I could kiss you again, that it could be real.

And then my stomach is in knots, thinking of the letters I've already sent...the fact that it will be several weeks till you read them, that I have no idea how you'll react.

Every time I hand one over to our maid and ask her if she can drop it off at the post office for me, my hands tremble.

What an embarrassing thing to admit.

But thinking of your honesty and bravery makes me want to be brave, too, so...there it is.

Confession #3: I want you (more than I've ever wanted anyone).

--Henry

long live/the walls we crashed through/how the kingdom lights shined just for me and you/I was screaming long live/all the magic we made/and bring out all the pretenders... one day, we will be remembered

Chapter End Notes

The Boleyn address is completely fictional. The zip code is simply in a historical neighborhood in Washington DC, since they're supposed to have a historic house.

However, it was somewhat history inspired. Historically the Boleyn home was Hever Castle, so in this fic it's on "Hever Road".

The house number is 1526, because most historians agree that 1526-1527 is around the time Henry VIII started sending Anne Boleyn love letters, and...welll....

Sorry I'm evil! These are only the first three letters (there's a confession a letter), and I
promise to put them into the next chapter! They're already written but the rest of the chapter isn't. And this is where I wanted to enter it.

And I hope no one minds the flashbacks, I thought they helped with the story/tying everything together.

Hope you all like this chapter! Let me know if you have any questions.
I wanted to kiss you tonight (in case you had any doubts).

After reading the first three letters, Anne goes to her bathroom and takes a long, gratifying shower. She towels off, changes into a long t-shirt and sweats, then tries to go to bed.

She fails, because she can't stop thinking that there are more envelopes, and that they have words inside of them. His words. That he wrote for her.

Frustrated with herself, Anne kicks her blankets off, then turns her lamp back on, grabbing the opened letters she's left on her nightstand.

Anne puts all three letters back into their corresponding envelopes, neatly and carefully, then puts her slippers on before leaving her bedroom and making her way downstairs.

She rummages through the cupboard for the tea kettle, finds it, goes to the sink and fills it with water.

Anne opens the cupboard above the stove and pulls out a box of tea, finds a mug, takes a tea bag and puts it in, then waits.

The routine soothes her.

A watched pot never boils, so they say, so maybe if she just stands here and stares at it she'll never have to go upstairs and inevitably read the rest of the letters, inevitably shed tears over things that can't be, inevitably…

"What're you doing up?"

George appears in the doorway of the kitchen, rubbing his eyes.

"Couldn't sleep," she says simply, crossing her arms, "you?"
"You woke me up…what are you making?"

"Green tea," she answers.

"That won't help you sleep. It's got caffeine."

"Yeah, like twenty milligrams. Please."

"You would know that…addict."

"Coffee over cigarettes," she counters.

"True…"

Anne crosses the kitchen from where she's been leaning against the wall and grabs George's left arm, and yanks up the long sleeve of his sweater, tracing his veins with her fingers.

"What are you--"

"Looking for track marks," she says honestly, eyes roaming over his arm.

"Oh, geez, Anne, why would you think--"

"You're too thin," she says, a sob caught in her throat, "and you lived in that terrible neighborhood, so it's possible, and I don't know, I don't know what else to think--"

"Sister," he says, pulling his arm from her grip and taking her hand instead, "I promise you, nothing has passed through these veins but nicotine and caffeine in years. I haven't done so much as a bump of coke since college. Scout's honor," he says, raising his other hand.

"Boy Scouts don't do cocaine ever," Anne says, sniffing, "and you weren't even in Boy Scouts, anyway."

"Maybe not, but the sentiment's the same," he says, smiling, desperately trying to cheer her up, "you want to know why I've lost weight?"

Anne nods.

"Poverty. I can't afford to buy food. It's sad, but that's all, that's the only reason. I promise."

"Okay," she says, kissing his hand and letting go of it before padding over to turn the heat off the burner, tea kettle whistling, "I believe you."

"Good. Now…on to cheerier topics," he continues, watching her as she pours hot water into the mug, "you are the recipient of love letters."

"That's not cheery-- will you grab me some milk?"

George walks over to the fridge and grabs a half gallon, putting it on the island for her.

"How can it not be cheery?"

"Because he has a fiancee," she says, pouring the milk in and capping it.

"Okay, fair enough. But…you have letters."

"So?" she says, cupping the mug in her hands and blowing on it before taking a careful sip.
"Anne, this is 2016. Noah writing Allie letters was not even a big deal, compared to this."

"What?"

"The Notebook?! Honestly, I swear, sometimes it's like we're not even related."

"Oh…Ryan Gosling?"

"Yes, dreamy pre-nose-job Ryan Gosling."

"How's it not a big deal--"

"Because it was the 50s'! They didn't even have email! They barely had telephones. If you wanted to tell someone you liked them you had to write letters. If your beau went overseas, you wrote him letters. It was expected."

"I am not getting what you're throwing down here--"

"Lucas writing Brooke--"

"Who?" Anne asks.

"One Tree Hill, oh my GOD. Anyway…Lucas writing Brooke all those letters was a slightly bigger deal than the Notebook, because they had cell phones and emails and IM and shit in the early 2000s. But texting was archaic, there were character limits and no unlimited texting so you could get overages, AOL took fucking forever to dial up and…anyway. It was before your time," he says dramatically, running a hand through his thick hair, "I don't expect you to understand the struggle, but people still wrote letters, let's just say that."

"Okaaay…and?"

"But this is 2016! No one fucking writes letters anymore! The Internet is fast! Your text gets sent to someone in five seconds! No one gets overages except on data, wi-fi is everywhere, email is easy and super-fast, the US Postal Service is on the brink of bankruptcy and futility because no one even sends Christmas cards in the mail anymore! The only thing keeping it afloat is people ordering shit from Amazon alone in their room at midnight--"

"George!" Anne exclaims, drinking her tea, "the point?"

"The point, darling," he says, crossing his arms, "is that most people these days count themselves lucky if they get a 'you up?' text from the object of their affections. 'You up?' Two words. Typed out and sent in less than two seconds. While running on a treadmill, while fucking around on Facebook, while taking a shit--"

"George!"

"What? Anne, don't be naive, people stay on their phones when they defeca--"

"La, la, la!" Anne whisper-shouts (remembering that Mary and her father are probably asleep upstairs), putting her tea down on the counter and putting both hands over her ears.

"And you," he continues insistently, moving one of the hands from her ears, "got letters. Did you count how many?"

"No."
"Even one would've been a big deal. I counted them while Mary was about to murder me. You got nine."

"So…?" she trails off, picking her mug up and drinking her tea.

"So. Fiancée or not, that boy is obviously in love with you."

"You haven't even read them, how would you--"

"You want me to read them?"

"No!" Anne says emphatically.

"That's funny, because what I just heard," he says impishly, "is 'George, please tell me, in your expert opinion, if American royalty boy is in love with me--'"

"George, do not--"

"Well, dear sister, I'd be delighted!" he says before making a mad dash for the stairs.

"George," she hisses, leaving her tea behind, and racing after him, "you're going to wake up--"

He always was faster than her, she thinks as she bursts into her room, and sees him with one of the letters already in his hands.

Anne closes the door behind her and runs to him, trying to wrest the letter from his hand (she doesn't want it to rip, but God, this is none of his business!), but he darts around the room, reading aloud:

"'My stomach is in knots'…Christ, is he in 5th grade? This is hilarious--"

"George, give it back!"

Anne really wishes she was taller in this moment, because trying to jump to snatch the letter from his hand as he swats her like a fly is somewhat demeaning.

" 'Confession: I want you'," he reads dramatically, laughing, "this is best thing I've ever read, this should be in a museum, honestly…"

Anne twists his arm behind his back and he yelps, throwing the paper he had in his other hand like he's on fire, "Jesus, what is wrong with--"

"What is wrong with you?" Anne demands hotly, picking the paper up from her bed and folding it carefully.

"You like him!"

"Shut up."

"Okay, but, consider this," he continues as she pushes him towards the door, reaching behind him and pushing the doorknob open, "you really like him."

"Bye, George!" she says, all but shoving him out of her room and shutting the door behind him, twisting the lock shut in case he gets any ideas about teasing her further.

December 13, 2016, Tuesday, 1:00 AM
Anne settles back into bed, puts her iPod on shuffle again, and opens the next letter.

Anne Boleyn

1526 Hever Road

Washington, DC, 20009

November 28, 2016, Monday

You were working today.

I'm sorry Brandon dropped his coffee. I tried to clean it up with napkins, best I could.

I'm wasting stamps sending these by day, but it seems cheap to stuff a bunch of letters in one envelope.

I don't trust the mail service at Whitehall-- more lost packages than received ones, it seems --so I walked to the post office today.

It's good exercise.

I was asked for change five times, and someone offered me a modeling contract, on the walk there. That's Los Angeles for you, I guess.

Confession #4: I only go to the student café when I can see you through the window.

--Henry

PS: I think your uniform was created by a perv…that skirt…but it's awesome to see your legs. You dress so modestly otherwise. I think you have a bigger collection of turtlenecks than any girl I've ever met…no idea why you want to cover up that pretty neck of yours.

Or anything else, for that matter.

Anne remembers the day he's talking about.

She was still smarting from Brandon's reveal, so her heart had dropped when she saw both he and Brandon get in line behind the counter.

Henry had come up to the counter with a smirking Brandon.
"Shouldn't you be taking the day off? Are you feeling better?" Henry had asked, leaning over after Brandon ordered their coffees, voice lowered.

Anne hadn't known what he was talking about, but answered reflexively, "a little better, mainly it's just a sinus headache…thank you for the gift bag."

Brandon's eyebrows had shot up at that.

"Gift bag?" Brandon teased.

Henry's elfish ears had turned red at the tips, but he had ignored his friend, instead replied to her thanks, "you're welcome, try the Tylenol for the headache, it's extra strength," drumming his fingers on the counter and winking before pulling a fifty-dollar bill from his pocket and shoving it into the tip jar.

Anne's coworker told her she'd take over the register and asked her to clean the steamer.

So Anne was wiping it down with a view of the counter by the window that had the cream, sugars, napkins, and wooden stir sticks.

Henry was putting another cardboard sleeve over his cup whilst Brandon was ripping packets of sugar over his.

Anne hadn't been able to make much out, but she did hear 'gift bag…honestly' in Brandon's voice, did see Brandon elbow Henry before Henry jabbed him back, eliciting a yelp from Brandon, and then suddenly Brandon's coffee had ended up on the floor.

---

Henry Tudor
594 S Mapleton Dr
Holmby Hills, Los Angeles, CA 90024

Anne Boleyn
1526 Hever Road
Washington, DC, 20009

November 29, 2016, Tuesday

Tutoring today. I'm dropping this off before we start…did you know the post office opens at 8:00 AM? Amazingly early, no? Our tax dollars at work, I guess. It's wonderful

How am I supposed to concentrate on my present and past participles, the gender of adjectives, how to ask for directions to the train station, etc., when my tutor is goddamn stunning?

When she absolutely floors me?

You tell me. I haven't got a clue.
Confession #5: Your handwriting is messier than mine, even-- you know that, right?

Everything else about you is so well put-together that it’s almost comforting.

And I love deciphering it. Think I've gotten pretty good at it, actually.

You write with a slant, and it leaves ink stains on the side of your hands. I notice them, blue and black smudges there as you hand me my coffee, tuck your hair behind your ear, put your headphones in.

--Henry

"What can I say, I like inkstains."

Anne recalls a detail in that memory, zooming in as if she's watching it play out on a screen: the little smile that had tugged at his mouth when she said that while they were in the elevator together, a smile like a twitch, one she'd noticed despite herself out of the corner of her eye. He had covered his mouth with his hand right afterwards, as if trying to hide it.

She remembers because it had infuriated her at the time-- what was he smiling about? She wasn't being subtle about the fact that she was mad at him.

Well, now she knows.

Henry Tudor

594 S Mapleton Dr

Holmby Hills, Los Angeles, CA 90024

Anne Boleyn

1526 Hever Road

Washington, DC, 20009

November 30, 2016, Wednesday

I've made an awful mess of things, I suppose.

I hope you can forgive me, hope you can give me a chance to explain-- I know it's more than I deserve.

Confession #6: I wish you would

--Henry

i know everything you don't want me to...

Henry Tudor
December 4th, 2016, Sunday

I was going to walk straight back to my dorm after I left you, and I did. Now I'm writing this at my desk. I don't think I'll be able to sleep for a while, so I'm going to walk to the nearest letterbox off campus and drop this off.

Only Jen Parker could throw a party during finals week, and only she could get so many people to show up despite it…

Fair point with that song, I guess. Almost like you prepared it. With Wyatt…did you?

You have a pretty singing voice, at any rate.

Confession #7: I love that you told Buckingham off. Someone should've, a long time ago. And I agree with you.

--Henry

PS: I wanted to kiss you tonight (in case you had any doubts).

your mouth is poison, your mouth is wine…

Henry Tudor

594 S Mapleton Dr
Holmby Hills, Los Angeles, CA 90024

Anne Boleyn
1526 Hever Road
Washington, DC, 20009

December 5, 2016, Monday

Thank you for helping me study, despite everything.

I know I couldn't possibly have helped you as much as you helped me.

Confession #8: I've never felt this way about anyone before.
you think your dreams are the same as mine...

Henry Tudor

594 S Mapleton Dr

Holmby Hills, Los Angeles, CA 90024

Anne Boleyn

1526 Hever Road

Washington, DC, 20009

December 7, 2016, Wednesday

Why did you return my gift? Did you not like it?

Confession #9: I already miss you.

--Henry

i don't have a choice, but i still choose you


Elizabeth York, age 37, passed away last night on her birthday. The cause of death has not yet been confirmed, but it is known that it occurred shortly after childbirth.

It is hard to say what she will be most remembered for: her career as a model and starring role in the popular soap, "Pray to Venus"? Her marriage to Henry Tudor, CEO and founder of Red Dragon?

Or perhaps her parents; their marriage, after all, is still talked about to this day. It is the marriage that rocked the country: handsome, rich entrepreneur and then-Senator Edward York and the beautiful then-waitress, Elizabeth Woodville, five years his senior, caused quite the scandal. It sent the tabloids into a frenzy, stirred class tensions, and the disapproval of his family for this controversial match was well-known.

Perhaps she will be most remembered for her charity work. It was certainly notable, she was a patron of dozens of organizations and spoke out about a wide range of issues, from homelessness to child poverty, and used her fame to raise awareness for the issues' that were closest to her heart.

She is survived by her husband, Henry Tudor; her mother, Elizabeth Woodville; her sisters, Cecily, Mary, Margaret, Anne, Catherine, and Bridget York; and her [redacted] children: [redacted] Henry Tudor, Margaret Tudor, Marina Tudor, Elizabeth Tudor, and Katherine Tudor (born yesterday).
Henry Tudor broke down on the stand today.

A man notorious for his stoicism, rumors are flying that Henry Tudor crying during his testimony was merely a ploy to gain sympathies of the jury.

Nodlon Tower Hospital has characterized Tudor's sudden suit against the hospital on the grounds of 'negligence' he claims caused the death of his wife as 'ruthless'.

It was almost like a scene out of the movies: [redacted] and Henry Tudor II sat in the front row of the courtroom. The younger Henry ran to the witness stand his father stood behind, ignoring the Judge's calls for order in the court.

The female members of the jury's hands went to their hearts as the 12-year-old Tudor son hugged his father.

The Judge called for a recess, and cameras flashed during the emotionally wrought moment, pictured below:

*Henry Sr. and Jr. in a grief-filled embrace, tears flowing from both sides.*

---

"Anne?"

Thomas Boleyn knocks on Anne's bedroom door again, then opens it gently, cup of coffee in hand.

His youngest daughter is asleep on top of her covers, tablet hugged to her chest, a pile of papers on her nightstand.

Thomas puts the coffee next to the papers (he knows she'll want it as soon as she gets up, cold or not), and pulls the comforter over her, tucking her in.

He eases the tablet out of her grip, then, curiosity getting the better of him, unlocks it see what she fell asleep reading to.

There are two tabs open. Both are from tabloids, the sort Mary might read.

Anne has always said that she'll never read an unreliable news source, so it surprises him to see Star and New York Daily News on her browser.

He shakes his head, turns it to sleep mode, and puts it on her table.

---

From: Charles Brandon

To: Anna Seville

Sent December 13, 2016, 1:01 PM
I miss you.

From: Anna Seville

I miss your ass.

From: Brandon

That's sweet.

From: Anna

I try.

December 13, 2016, Tuesday, 1:38 PM

"Henry!"

Henry, rearranging books on his shelf, doesn't turn around or respond.

Margaret notes the head phones over his ears, the wire that travels down his back and ends in the back pocket of his jeans. She turns to her sisters, index finger over her lips, and tip-toes behind him, disconnecting the headphones and sliding his phone out of his pocket.

*That* gets his attention.

He spins around, throws his headphones off and onto his bed, and lunges after her, but she dances away quickly (*ballet's not useless after all, it seems*).

"Learn to knock," he snaps, "and give me my phone back, klepto!"

"This," Margaret says, passing her brother's phone over to Marina, "is an intervention."

"Margaret," he says evenly, "Marina. Elizabeth. I am *really* not in the mood."

"That's the point. You've been *in* a mood. Since we've gotten back. And you need to play table tennis with us, because we don't have enough players," Marina explains, darting away from him as he tries to reclaim his phone.

"Ask Kate," he says.

"Kate's playing the violin for Daddy," Elizabeth explains.

"Then *wait for her.*"

"No. And she's *only* seven, anyway" Elizabeth says solemnly, all of eleven years herself, "we don't want to hurt her."

"What are you doing, anyway, huh?" Margaret asks.

"Organizing my--"

"You know we have servants that do that, right?"

"Builds character. You could use some," he says snarkily.
"Why are you listening to emo music?" Marina asks, squinting at his phone.

"I'm not listening to--"

"Oh my God! This song's like a hundred years old," Marina squeals, giggling.

"Hardly, it's ten years old, at most, give me my--"

"Might as well be," Marina says, tossing the phone to Elizabeth. It arcs perfectly in the air, and she catches it, almost dropping it as she does so, then passes it to Margaret.

"Henry doesn't listen to-- oh my God, Henry," Margaret says, aghast, she puts a hand over her heart, "why are you listening to emo music?"

"Christ, I'm not listening to 'emo music', would you all just--"

Margaret holds his phone over her head and presses 'play', accusation in her eyes:

\[ \text{all of the things that i want to say/just aren't coming out right/I'm tripping on words/you got my head spinning/i don't know where to go from here} \]

Henry snatches his phone back from Margaret's hand and turns it off, pocketing it (front pocket this time, he makes sure of that)

"You are all literally the worst. Get out of my room," Henry says, "NOW."

"At least you weren't listening to Nickelback," Marina says with a shrug, tiptoeing backwards towards the door, "that's the only thing I can think of that's worse than Lifehouse…"

"I don't know if he can be helped, honestly," Margaret says, "he doesn't even really seem that ashamed."

"You listen to Taylor Swift!" he accuses, jabbing a finger at her.

"Et tu, Brute?" Margaret asks.

"Taylor Swift is pretty emo, Mar," Marina agrees.

"Taylor Swift's songs are wrought with emotion," Elizabeth chimes in, "so one might say, by the traditional definition of the word, that she's the most 'emo' musician of them all. It's maybe not your place to judge, Margaret."

"I hate this fucking family!" Margaret exclaims, storming out of Henry's room and slamming the door behind her.

Elizabeth and Marina look at each other.

"I guess we can just play against each other?" Marina asks her.

"I guess," Elizabeth says with a sigh.

Henry rolls his eyes, goes around them and throws the door open.

"Buh bye!" he says, waving to emphasize that it's time for their exit.

"Seriously, though, what's crawled up your ass?" Marina demands, hands on her hips, grey eyes
smoldering with heat, "you have been nothing but fucking miserable since--"

"Language," he warns, gesturing to Elizabeth, "please."

"No," Elizabeth says, "I agree, you've been 'fucking miserable'. I don't usually condone the use of such words, but there's really no other accurate way to describe it."

Henry sighs, then puts both hands on Elizabeth's shoulders, kneeling so that he's eye-level with her.

"You're absolutely right, I'm sorry. I'll try to be nicer. But right now I need to be alone."

"Why?" she asks, eyes wide, looking at him very directly in that way that only children can.

"Because," he says, tugging at one of her reddish-gold plaits, "I'm sad, okay?"

"But, why?"

"Someone…didn't want a present I got them," he finally decides on, "and it hurt my feelings. Is that a good enough answer for you?"

Elizabeth bites her lip, then looks up at the ceiling, then back to her older brother.

"Why didn't they want it?"

"They didn't tell me why, sweetie."

"Maybe you should ask them," she suggests.

"I don't think that's such a good idea, alright?"

"But…" Elizabeth trails off, then puts a small hand on his face, "if you don't ask, how will you know?"

"What?"

"If you don't ask a person about their reasons for doing things, you'll never know. And if you never know," she explains with a shrug, "then you'll never know what to do about it."

"Elizabeth," he says, kissing her on the forehead, "you're a smart one, did you know that?"

"Yes."

"No, that's fine, it's not like I'm smart or anything," Marina huffs, all but stamping her foot.

"You," Henry says, getting up to ruffle her hair, "are mouthy. Let's go play."
Amenities Available: Quiet Car, Café Car, Free Wi-fi

TOTAL: $284.98

Credit Card Used: Visa

Points Used: 2,385

Payment Approved: December 13, 2016, 7:08 PM

Thank you for choosing Amtrak. We hope you enjoy your travel.

Reminder: No checked baggage allowed on this train! You may only bring carry-on items onboard. Guidelines on [website].

Chapter End Notes

yeah so i kind of feel like i'm being evil again...sorry about that...i am a writer of the cliffhanger sort.

did everyone see the letters coming? petragem? i thought i was being super subtle with the foreshadowing in earlier chapters but i kind of had a feeling everyone saw them coming. oh well.

i almost made this fic epistolary (as in, only written in texts, emails, facebook messages, journal entries, and letters), just because i am so, so bad at setting the scene/writing description but i feel like i’m decent at writing dialogue. so i felt i needed to include the letters. letters and romantic. i hope everyone liked that addition to the story.

the soap elizabeth york starred in is called "pray to venus". the real elizabeth of york is often said to have written a poem that's first lines are: "my heart is set upon a lusty pin/i pray to venus for good countenance".

the lyrics "you only know what i want you to/i know everything you don't want me to/your mouth is poison, your mouth is wine/you think your dreams are the same as mine/i don't have a choice but i still choose you" are from the song "poison and wine", by the civil wars. no copyright infringement intended.

the lyrics "all of the things that i want to say/just aren't coming out right/i'm tripping on words/you got my head spinning/i don't know where to go from here" are from the song "you and me" by lifehouse, no copyright infringement intended.
"You know what?" he snaps, (where does she get off, exactly? swooping in like some sort of avenging angel, the snow falling in the background somehow lighting the scene for her fury? he doubts she's perfect), "I don't need this."

"Great! Then leave."

"No!"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

December 16, 2016, Friday, 3:04 PM

The Boleyns are all in their living room, a documentary on the Louvre playing on the TV.

Thomas Boleyn is sitting on his armchair, reading the newspaper, Anne is sitting on the floor, her back against the couch reading *Pride and Prejudice*, George is sitting on the couch on his laptop, and Mary is sitting next to George, a notebook and pen on her lap.

"Dad, can I change the channel?" Mary asks.

"To what?" Thomas asks, folding his section and turning to the next.

"Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders."

"I think this is a little more educational than a football game."

"Dad," Anne says, turning a page, "you're not even watching."

"And it's not a football game," Mary says irritably, "it's their own show."

"I didn't know cheerleaders had their own shows," Thomas says, bemused.

"Well, Dallas are the best, so they do. Can I put it on, please? I wanted to take notes, get some ideas for my dance team routines…"

"Fine," he says, sighing, he picks the remote up from his armrest, "here."

Mary leans over the table between the armchair and the couch and takes it from him, flipping from BBC to CMT and settling in on the couch, flipping her notebook open.

"Lord," Thomas says, sliding his reading glasses down the bridge of his nose, "what are they wearing?"

"I didn't talk during your thing," Mary points out.

"Dad," Anne says in a warning tone, "be nice."
"I'm being perfectly nice. Anyone with eyes would be wondering the same thing," Thomas says.

"They're wearing their uniforms, Dad, okay? That's what they're wearing. They're trademarked and everything. Anything else you need to know?" Mary asks, gritting her teeth as she tries to focus on the screen.

"Is that the sort of thing you wear, on your team?" he asks, either not picking up on or blatantly ignoring her sarcasm.

"It's…" she trails off, "it depends on the routine and the style of the song, I guess…usually they're a little more covered up than the Dallas Cowboy Uniforms, sure."

"Well, thank God for that. They," he says emphatically, nodding to the screen, "might as well be strippers. At least it'd be more honest."

Anne can feel the shift in her older sister, and she's can't even see her-- she's sitting in front of the couch, after all, and Mary is sitting behind her.

Anne closes her book and turns around to her side, away from the screen, and watches as Mary's head turns, slowly, towards her father, who's gone back to reading his paper, her eyes wild.


George takes a sharp intake of breath, biting his fist.

"I said they might as well be strippers, with their so-called 'uniforms'. Almost nothing is covered, they're obviously selling the idea of sex…"

"Excuse me?" Mary asks.

"It's not like what they're doing takes much talent. They're glorified models," he says in a clipped tone.

"They're-- they're what?"

"Glorified models."

"And that's what you think I am? A 'glorified model'?"

"You're not a cheerleader, still, are you? I thought you were just on a dance team-- Anne, didn't you tell me she's just on the dance team, now? Not both anymore, like she was in high school…"

"She is, but I think you need to--"

"And I think that's just fine," he says condescendingly, reaching over and patting Mary's hand, "just fine. But I don't want to boost the ratings for this…show. If you can call it that. Sorry," he says with a shrug.

Mary bites her lip and she nods, blue eyes filling with tears, "fine," she whispers, grabbing the remote, "I'll change it to your stupid documentary that I'm sure you've already seen."

"Really, Mary, there's no need to be so sensitive. It just doesn't seem right to me, is all. I'm sure they're grossly overpaid--"

"They're grossly underpaid, actually," Mary says, "considering the amount of hours they have to
practice each week--"

"--and we're supporting it by watching their insipid reality show."

"Great! Fine! Good!" she exclaims, snapping the elastic hair band off her wrist and pulling her hair up in a frenzy, her hands getting tangled as she tries to rope it off, "no, no it's good, I'm glad to know what you really think of me!"

"Mary," he says, "you're being a little dramatic, don't you think?"

"I mean, it's what I've always assumed you thought, anyway," she says, shrugging, getting up from the couch, "given that you never bothered to go to a single one of my competitions or games, I just haven't heard you say it in so many words--"

"Now, Mary," he tuts as she grabs her shoes from in front of the doorway and starts tying her lace-up boots, "you know I was very busy during your childhoods, I never managed to go to most of any of your events--"

"But you managed to go to Anne's Speech and Debate competitions! And George's! And George's soccer games, and Anne's recitals, and George's--"

"That's enough," he says, finally putting the paper down, "you're being--"

"And I don't think," she snaps, yanking her coat from the hook by the door and sliding it over her shoulders, "you ever told them that their extracurricular activities were, quote, a complete waste of time, UNQUOTE! Did he?" she asks, looking from one shocked sibling to the other, "no? I didn't think so; I figured you would've told me if he did, so, awesome, that's another thing I know for sure now!"

"It wasn't a complete waste of time, I never said that. You got a good amount of exercise, I know how important it is to girls to keep their figures--"

"Oh my GOD!" Mary shouts, hands fumbling over the buttons than run from the skirt of her coat to the collar, "why won't these close--"

"I simply said I thought there might be better uses of your time. That's all," he says, placating, opening his hands in the type of gesture a priest might use at the end of a sermon and then closing them.

"You thought it was frivolous," Mary says, buttoning her coat still, "you can at least admit that, Dad, can't you? I know that was one of the words you--"

"Yes, fine," he snaps, "I might have, yes."

"You know what, though," she says, grabbing her scarf off the other hook and wrapping it around her neck, "you were wrong. It wasn't a waste of time. Cheerleading and dance experience helped me. Dance is what's paying my scholarship. Dance is what is paying my way through college. Not you. So you don't get to talk down to me about it anymore!"

"Mary!" he exclaims, getting up from his chair, "that is quite enough, I will not--"

"I'm an adult now, so I don't have to put up with it. And if you're an adult, too, you'll admit you were wrong," she says, opening the front door, "but I doubt it."
The slam of the door reverberates behind her.

"Well," Thomas says, clearing his throat, "I'm sorry about--"

"Why would you say that?" Anne exclaims, shaking her head at her father, "why would you make some snarky comment about something she's been doing for years and years and not expect--"

"A Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader makes $50 a game," George reads from his laptop, "wow, they really are underpaid!"

"I'm going to my study," Thomas says, muttering, "hopefully she'll get over her temper tantrum, it's below freezing outside…"

"Anne says she has a scholarship too," George continues, "but you won't help Mary? Didn't she say something about you not paying?"

"Yes, well," Thomas says stiffly, "this is really none of your concern--"

"You pay for Anne's, though, right? Whatever her scholarship doesn't cover?"

Anne looks down at her lap, picks up her book, gets up and takes a seat on the armchair her father's left open.

Thomas grimaces, his gaze fixed on the window behind the couch, watching Mary as she walks down the sidewalk.

"Light of your life, little genius, darling of your heart, polyglot Anne?"

"It doesn't matter, George," she says quietly, turning a page.

"You have to be…you're paying for textbooks or the meal plan or something, right? You're paying for extra living expenses? You have to be."

His father's mouth is set in a firm line.

"No…I don't believe it. Is this true?" George asks, looking from his father to Anne incredulously.

A pin dropping would be deafening in this moment.

"Wow," George says after a beat, scratching the back of his neck, "hell of a way to treat the favorite."

---

From: Anne Boleyn

To: Mary Boleyn

Sent December 16, 2016, 3:19 PM

Where are you? I can walk with you.

From: Mary Boleyn

I just need to be alone right now, sorry.
Mary ducks her head, the harsh wind and snow smarting at her eyes (which had already been tearing up with no extra help from the elements, thank-you-very-much), and yanks the hood that's inside her jacket up and over her hair when she collides with someone else on the sidewalk.

"Ow!" she yelps (it feels like she just bonked foreheads with someone very bony), "watch where you're--"

"Mary?"

She winces, rubs her forehead, and looks up through her lashes at someone that's at least half a foot taller than her.

"Oh, God," she groans, "what are you doing here?"

Not the warmest of greetings, to be sure, Henry thinks, but he did just bonk her on the head, after all. The wind has chilled him through his winter coat. He had taken his hat off a few blocks ago (hat hair is not a good look for anyone), and his ears are stinging with chill so now, of course he regrets it; but it might have padded his forehead a little (in retrospect)…honestly she just came out of nowhere, jolted forward as she yanked her hood up, and he hadn't swerved in time, but then you don't walk down a sidewalk in the snow and expect someone to head-butt you out of nowhere, so… he's not really sure he should be blamed for this, at any rate.

"Who, me? I was just… in the neighborhood," Henry quips.

"No," Mary says flatly, crossing her arms, "you weren't."

"Well, I wanted to talk to--"

"I know who you want to talk to. Have you heard of cell phones?"

"Wow, Mary," he says dryly, wiping snow out of his eyes, checking out the house numbers to see how close he is to 1526 (he's been walking on Hever Road for about a mile now, a charming road, with Victorian style houses and lined with sycamore and oak trees, but it's hard to appreciate the road when it's this. fucking. cold.), "if I didn't know any better, I'd think you didn't want me here."

"She just doesn't need this right now, okay?" Mary says, cramming her hands in her pockets, her huffiness causing her breath to make shapes in the cold air.

"You're the one that gave me her address. What changed?"

"You know."

"No, I don't--"

"God!" she snaps, her cheeks flushed, "I am so tired of everyone treating me like I'm stupid! I'm not fucking stupid!"

"I don't think you are--"

"I know I'm not as smart as Anne, or whatever, but--"

"You could be more smart than she is, for all I know," Henry says with a shrug.

Mary gives him a scathing, 'please' sort of look.
"Alright, probably not, but not because you're dumb, just because most people aren't by default."

"You probably saw me," she continues, looking up at a streetlight, up at the sky and the snow, laughing as she does so, shaking her head, like she's talking to God, "you probably saw me for the first time and thought, 'Hey! This girl looks like she's dumb, I'm sure she'll want to sleep with me!'"

"No," he says, brow furrowing (because he really doesn't know what she's getting at, or where all this self-pity and self-deprecation is coming from…not that Henry knows her that well, but it doesn't really seem like her), "I saw you and thought 'that's the most beautiful girl in this room.'"

"Great," she says, still looking up at the sky, "super."

"But then, I hadn't seen your sister yet."

"Gee," she snaps, looking at him now, "thanks a lot."

"It's not a diss at you," he reassures, twirling his hat around in his hands, "you're very pretty, just…I could be in a room with her and Victoria's Secret models, and I'd think she was the most beautiful girl in the room. That's just how it is for me."

Mary purses her lips and squints at him.

"So you fucked me," she says bluntly, "and when you talked to me…you thought…?"

Are we still on this? Henry thinks, but he tries to rack his brain nevertheless (since she seems pretty determined for answers, determined in general, actually) going back a few months in memory…that warm August night feels distant right now, as the snow falls around them on the other side of the country, but he can remember. He can remember her, wearing the lace-up boots she's wearing now, looking incredible, doing his wink-and-leave signature move, having it work, not at all surprised when he saw his intended target walk up to him on the pathway in front of Beta Thau House…

"Mmm, let's see, well, first…'this girl is really hot and she's asking to hook up, and that's awesome?' And then, 'she's sweet and funny and seems pretty awesome, too'."

"Hmmm," she says.

"I don't know where all this is coming from, but I texted you more than you texted me, if you recall. It just didn't happen. I didn't think you were dumb. I don't think you're dumb."

"Right."

"You don't…like me, do you?"

Henry's not known for a small ego, but he thinks this possibility's unlikely. Still, she's talking about what he thought the first time he saw her and…it's weird.

"Like, as a person?" Mary asks, confused.

"No, like because we got together--"

"God, no!"

"Good, because--"

"I'm with someone, anyway," she says.
"Oh? Who?"

"None of your business."

"That's a bit of a mouthful, for a name."

"You know what?" Mary snaps, tugging on the ends of her scarf, "I'm not into this whole Prince Charming bit. And, actually, I think you should go."

"No."

His eyes are steely, the set of his jaw determined, the snow dusting his eyelashes not doing anything to soften his image.

And before today Mary might have backed down, but she just confronted her father for the first time ever, and he's always been this scary, awe-inspiring figure to her, ever since her childhood, so she's feeling brave. Henry may be rich, and he may be intimidating, and he might exude a kind of power and confidence rare in someone her age; but Anne is her sister and in her eyes, she's already let her down by not knowing about his situation earlier. She already let her tread into territory to get hurt, but Henry's the one that invited her in.

"Do you really think," she says, getting in his face, "I would've given you our address for your letters if I had known you were engaged?"

"I--"

"You lied to me! And you lied to her."

"Mary, I know you don't--"

"Your 'Victoria's Secret models' speech? Very sweet," she says scathingly, nodding to herself, "she might even melt if she heard it. But here's my question: what happens if Katherine--"

"You know her name?"

"Yeah," she says, voice dripping with sarcasm, "I know her name. Do you?"

"Of course," he snaps, "I'm going to try to--"

"You are NOT talking over me here, I am talking over you! This is my street, this is my city, this is my sister, and you are going to answer my fucking questions," she yells, pointing to herself emphatically on the last 'my'.

He blinks, slowly, his expression like he's just been slapped with the force of her words.

"In this hypothetical, dream room," she continues, tone calmer now, "with Anne and Victoria's Secret models, you say Anne's the most beautiful girl in the room, right?"

"Yes, of course--"

"Which means…you'd pick her? If you had to make a choice, between one of them and her?"

"Yes!"

"And that's sweet, like I said. But what happens if this room has models, Anne, and Katherine?"
"What?"

"Is Anne still the most beautiful girl in the room, and Katherine's…what, the second? Is Katherine the most beautiful, and Anne the second? Actually," she says, waving a hand, "let's disregard beauty for a second, I just want to know: who would you pick? Because now the 'models' are gone, in the equation, and it seems a little less sweet."

"I…I…wait," he says, closing his eyes as if in pain, rubbing his forehead with one of his hands, as if trying to relieve a headache, "wait a second--"

"Who do you pick? Anne or Katherine?"

He huffs, and she can see the white whirls of air that come out of his nose, he twirls his hat in his hands some more, but, ultimately, says nothing.

"Wrong answer," Mary says.

"I didn't say--"

"Exactly. Wrong answer."

"I'm trying to figure it out--"

"Trying and lying are not the same as knowing. And you should've 'figured it out' before you came here!"

"You know what?" he snaps, (where does she get off, exactly? swooping in like some sort of avenging angel, the snow falling in the background somehow lighting the scene for her fury? he doubts she's perfect), "I don't need this."

"Great! Then leave."

"No!"

Well, it seems they're at an impasse. She, arms crossed. Him, arms crossed. Chins jutted out, gazes determined.

"I just…"

Henry trails off, drops his arms, sighs.

"I just want to talk to her," he says, "really."

"Nine letters wasn't enough talking?" she asks, imitating shock, raising a perfectly arched eyebrow at him.

"No…I explained some things, but not everything. Not the things I know she's…wondering about."

"Fuck, it's freezing," she mutters, kick a twig on the sidewalk onto the grass, "will you tell her the truth?"

"Of course. What do you--"

"I mean it, Henry. If she has questions, will you answer them honestly? Even if the answer's 'I don't know'? Because she deserves that, at least."
"I know. And I will," he says emphatically, "I promise."

Mary studies him. He's earnest as hell, hands in pockets, eyes intent and serious on her.

He had been so excited to ask her if he could have Anne's address back in November, so bashful when he admitted that he liked her, so careful in mentioning it...she could tell he didn't want to hurt her feelings, or offend her. "We're friends, right? Is it weird, I feel bad asking, but I don't know how else to get it..."

And she had told him that it was a little weird, but not really a big deal. That she didn't carry a torch for him or anything like that.

Mary hadn't known for sure if Anne reciprocated at that point, but she had figured, hell, what's the harm? If her sister didn't like him back, Anne would have a nice Christmas present either way from him, probably (he hadn't specified letters, just said "something romantic" and that was where her mind went).

In the past, Mary had always gone for cockiness, boys that were a challenge...now she realizes it's because she didn't really want them in the first place; that she just wanted to prove to herself, or convince herself, that she did. Now, of course, she knows the 'chase and conquest' aspect of it all was her trying to cover up the inevitable feelings of disappointment she always had after sex with a feeling of victory, instead. I'm pretty enough that I got him, she'd think the morning after, time to be happy about that.

But Henry doesn't seem so cocky now. He seems fragile and desperate, and he came from New York to see Anne...Mary's conflicted, to say the least. For every good thing there's a bad thing to match it: his concern for Anne when she was sick (but he's engaged), him sending her boots when she broke hers defending herself (but he didn't tell Anne he was), that he helped her study for her history final (but he made her cry)...

"You promise you'll tell her the truth?" Mary reiterates, because she needs to make sure.

"Yes."

"Fine," she says, sighing, she turns around and begins walking in the direction of her house, "I don't approve, but fine. I won't body-block you or anything."

"'Body-block me?'" he asks, following her down the sidewalk.

"Mmhmm," she says.

"Like, from going inside the house?"

"Yeah."

"You think you could do that?"

"I know you're like, quarterback and all that shit," she says, "but I dance twenty hours a week. I think I could block you if I needed to."

They walk in silence, the sky a dusky gray above them.

The tension is palpable, but it's worth it to get to Anne's door. To Anne. As is the cold, as was the
train ride, as was the confrontation…it's worth it, he thinks, she's worth it.

"Have you been to D.C. before?" she asks, voice flat.

"Yeah, of course," he says, blowing warm air onto his hands.

Henry supposes that etiquette dictates that it's his turn to ask her some sort of small-talk-question, but he can't think of anything. They know what the weather is, they're walking through it. They know how much better it is in Los Angeles comparatively, they both go to school there. Mentioning it would feel disingenuous at best, smarmy at worst.

"How are you?" he asks, instead.

"Fan-fucking-tastic."

Well, then.

"Well," Mary says, nodding to the Boleyn home, "this is it."

"Great," Henry says, following her as she steps onto the grass of the front yard, "you have a really nice house."

"Where," she asks, turning around to face him, "do you think you're going?"

"...your front door?"

"Oh, no," she says, laughing, shaking her head, she pushes his shoulder till he walks backwards, "no, no, no, no, no..."

"Okay," he says irritably, "cut it out--"

"No, no, no, no," she shakes her head again, "you are not walking up with me."

"Excuse me?"

"I am going inside," Mary explains, smiling serenely, "and you are going to walk around the block a few times...I'd say, give me a fifteen minutes head start...and when you get back, you will have the pleasure of knocking on our door and meeting our father. Alone," she emphasizes with a wolfish smile, patting him on the chest and wrinkling her nose (a cute sight, she knows).

Henry gapes, stutters, "you can't be serious--"

"It's not personal," Mary says with a shrug, "it's so I know that a) you're not full of shit, b) how much you really want to talk to Anne, and that c) you really are planning on just talking to Anne."

"Right," he says dryly, "not personal at all."

"Oh!" she says, clapping her hands together, "almost forgot...make sure not to skimp on those fifteen minutes, either, or I'm going to let Daddy Dearest know you're engaged, and he will never let you inside to meet his favorite. So ponder that," she says, tapping her forehead, a 'think' gesture, "ponder that, Henry."

Mary opens the front door, closes it, and speed-walks to the kitchen, passing her father who's sitting downstairs and having what seems to be a very harsh, serious discussion with George.
"Mary," she hears her father say as she opens the fridge and pulls out a bottle of water.

"No," she says, but it gives her a jolt to say it (no' is a powerful word, if you think about it), walking past him, leaving the kitchen and making her way upstairs.

She walks to the hallway upstairs and sits, uncapping and drinking her water.

Mary has a decision to make: does she tell Anne now or wait till the last minute?

If she gives Anne more time to freak out, she figures, or, more like, if she gives her too much time to freak out, it could be bad. It may result in a panic attack.

And it will give Anne time to get ready, prepare, dread, pick the perfect outfit, agonize, etc…

So, she decides, she will rip off the band-aid. She will rip it off at the last minute, and not give Anne any extra time to pick the wound beforehand, because Anne is a wound-picker.

Mary is a band-aid ripper and Anne is a wound-picker; these are the basic dynamics of their relationship. And she shouldn't mess with that.

Anne opens her door as soon as she hears a knock, and is flooded with relief to see her sister on the other side.

Her cheeks are flushed with cold and there's a little dampness to her hair (melted snow, maybe?), she has more fly-aways than usual; like she usually gets when her hair's been wet.

"Mary," Anne says, "I'm so sorry, really--"

"Henry's here," Mary says, shortly.

"I just don't understand how this is how things--"

George's words are interrupted by a knocking on the door.

"Who is that?" Thomas asks, grateful for the interruption, "are you expecting someone?"

"No, why would I be expecting someone?"

Thomas opens the door to a young man wearing a royal blue knee-length coat and jeans. He's standing, quite politely, he notes, a respectful distance from the doorway.

The tips of his ears, his cheeks, and the end of his Greek nose are red. He's quite handsome, with the angular face and full lips of one of those billboard models, long lashes, clear skin and he looks...familiar, though he can't really recall where he knows him from; he gets the sense that this is someone important from the way the boy carries himself.

Good posture, he thinks, though standing up straight this boy is at least five inches taller than him, not a fact he's too fond of.

"What?" Anne asks, dumbly.

She could not be more stunned than if the words that just came out of her older sister's mouth were "Obama's here."
"Can I help you?" Anne's father inquires, after he's given him a once-over a few times.

Henry sees the face of a younger man, one that resembles the one that answered the door quite a bit, peek over Mr. Boleyn's shoulder.

"Oh holy sweet Jesus," the younger man says upon seeing Henry.

"George!"

"Um…" Henry says, somewhat thrown off by that exchange, he attempts to regain his composure, "yes, I'm here to see your daughter?"

"Which…one?" he asks slowly, almost-black eyes boring into him.

_Holy shit._

It takes every ounce of self-control Henry has not to squirm under the intensity of that gaze; but he manages to hold his ground.

"Well," Henry says, swallowing, tugging at the collar of his shirt, "I'm here to see Anne."

_That seems to only increase the intensity of the older man's stare, if anything._

"Really…" he says, "interesting," Mr. Boleyn somehow makes every syllable _really_ count on that last word, "interesting turn of events."

"Henry's here," Mary repeats, "I thought you would want to--"

"Henry who?" Anne asks in a high-pitched voice, nervously tugging at the collar of her hoodie.

"May I come in?" Henry asks.

"I suppose," Anne's father drawls.

But, rather than open the door all the way for him, he stays in exactly the same place he was when he answered it, his frame blocking the doorway, so that if Henry _wanted_ to walk in, he'd have to push past him.

"Um…"

"Oh, Jesus, Dad," he hears the younger man '(dad'? oh, right, _this must be George, her brother_) say before he pushes the door the rest of the way open for Henry himself, "let the poor boy in, it's colder than hell out there."

"Hell is hot," Anne's father says (in a voice that makes it sound like a threat), "and I was just about to George, honestly," he scoffs, moving and letting Henry walk into the foyer, "you do have a flair for the dramatic sometimes."

Mary gives her a 'really' look and says, "Tudor, of course. Do we know any other Henry's?"

"Well, Percy," Anne says, taking a seat on her bed, "and…and…Ford."
"Henry Ford?"

"Yes!"

"Henry Ford…who's dead?"

"Yes," Anne says, primly, folding her hands on her lap, "that one."

"Can I get your coat?" Anne's father asks.

"Oh, no, thank you," Henry says hurriedly, fingers reflexively closing over the gift box inside his pocket, "I'm fine."

"Sit, please," the older man offers, with a flourish the couch, while he takes the armchair of the living room, the one that directly faces their TV.

"Thank you, sir," Henry says, taking a seat (George occupies the couch cushion seat closer to his father, which should act as a buffer, thank God).

"Henry is…here?" Anne repeats, bunching her comforter in her hand, "Henry Tudor?"

"Or a very lifelike Henry Tudor hologram," Mary deadpans.

"Like," Anne says, face turning red, hand fluttering to her chest, "is he--"

"I ran into him on my walk-- literally. I'm sure he's downstairs by now."

"What?!" Anne shrieks, suddenly jumping off her bed and yanking the comforter off, "WHAT?!"

This Tudor billionaire kid is looking pretty pale right now, almost like he's on the verge of fainting. But then, George thinks, Thomas Boleyn tends to have that effect on people.

"I'm going to go make myself a drink," Thomas announces, slapping his thigh, before he gets up, "would you like anything?"

"I'm fine, thank you," Henry says.

"Beer?" Thomas presses.

"Don't say yes," George hisses under his breath.

"I wasn't-- sorry," Henry says in a normal tone of voice, shaking his head, "no, really, I'm fine."

Henry exhales as soon as Thomas leaves the room, deeply, as if he'd been holding his breath, then turns to face George.

"Why would I say yes?" he asks, corner of his mouth quirking up in amusement.

"You could be dumb, I don't know…what you are. So," George says, "I thought I'd try to rescue you, just in case."

"I could do with some of that," Henry admits, rubbing his hands together, "any advice?"

"Look at his nose when you're talking to him…he's like Medusa. You don't want to make real eye
contact. Always worked for me."

"Thanks," Henry says, "anything--"

"WHAT?! WHAT?!? WHAT?!?!?!"

George clears his throat, points upstairs, and says, "ah, that must've been our…cat."

Henry nods, as if this is extremely plausible, as if that was not the unmistakable, distinctive shriek of George's younger sister.

Chapter End Notes

aaaaah! cliffhanger again. sorry. didn't even mean to do it, honestly, it just became longer than i was expecting.

i went into mary's backstory a little bit, since no one seemed to mind when i went there with lizzy.

and i have some of the scenes written for the next one already, so i'll try to upload it ASAP.

did you guys like the letters thing or no? i didn't get as many comments on the last two chapters as i usually do. wondering if some of you are getting frustrated with the pace, or...idk. i am getting quite a bit of kudos, so that's always a nice pick-me-up
stillness

Chapter Summary

"What? Maybe he'll buy us boats or planes...maybe even guest houses," George says, enjoying antagonizing his father immensely.

Chapter Notes

it's not playing during the scene or anything, but i recommend listening to this cover while reading the henry/anne scene:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGg7iyz2u1c
or this one:
http://peachh-pie.tumblr.com/post/113486515363/most-everyone-has-heard-halseys-song-ghost-but

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Anne's father comes back from the kitchen, takes a seat in his armchair again, crystal glass of what looks to be scotch in hand.

He swirls it around, smells it, but doesn't drink.

Instead he levels Henry with a stare and begins to tap against his glass with his fingernails.

*Tap...tap...tap...tap...*

The slow tapping is the only sound in the room, as Henry tries to pretend that it isn't, tries to pretend the older man isn't staring at him, his gaze fixed on the clock above the mantle on the fireplace even as he feels his eyes boring into him.

It's a test and he knows it, the Boleyn patriarch trying to psych him out, so he's not going to say a word until he's spoken to.

"I can't be here for this," Mary says, crossing her arms, "sorry."

"What do you mean?" Anne asks, folding every single letter and putting it back into the drawer on her study desk, throwing the envelopes on top, and closing it hurriedly.

"I mean I don't support it. I think you should tell him to leave, actually."

"Why?" Anne asks, getting down on the floor and shoving the Little Mermaid bedspread, now all crumpled up on the floor, under her bed, all the way to the back until it's out of sight.
"He told me he just wanted to talk to you, but really…what could he tell you that you don't already know?"

"Well, I don't know," Anne says, pushing her chair into the desk, "but I'd like to find out."

"Look, Anne, I just…don't see how this can end well. And I don't want to see you get hurt, and you already have been…"

"Fine, Mary," Anne says, "go, then."

"I'll be in my room," Mary says, with a wounded expression, "get me when he leaves, I guess."

"Fine," Anne says, turning around and walking over the her window, back to her sister, observing the snow gather in clumps on the grass below, "I will."

Anne waits until she hears the door click shut behind her to give in to the feeling she's been pushing down since Mary warned her of Henry's arrival.

The feeling being: that she's folding up into herself, that she's a CD that keeps skipping a track, a song on repeat, getting caught on the same word, the same beat, over and over again. That she's a button hanging by a thread from a coat, hoping the next gust of wind doesn't make her fall…

Considering the impossibility of the situation before her, Anne takes a seat on the floor, then lies down on her back, looking up at the glow-in-the-dark star constellations still on her ceiling from the 3rd grade.

"Forgive the tension, please," George says, finally, throwing Henry a verbal life raft, "there have been a lot of hashtag awkward family moments today."

Henry shakes his head, shrugs, smiles, and waves a hand, hoping this conveys "oh, no, I don't sense that at all, really, everything is fine" without him actually speaking those words.

"I don't feel tense," Thomas says finally, taking a careful sip of his drink, "George, could you do me a favor?"

"Sure," George says easily.

"Switch places with the boy…I have some questions for him. I like to be able to look at people directly when I'm speaking to them," he continues with a chilling smile.

"Sorry," George whispers as he gets up and trades seats with Henry.

Anne's father shifts in his seat, looking at Henry directly as soon as he's settled in to reclaim George's old place on the couch.

"What's your GPA?"

"Dad…"

"No, it's fine," Henry says to George, then turning his head back to Mr. Boleyn, he answers, "3.5, as of now, sir."

"As of now?" he drawls, "what does that mean?"

"Well, finals grades aren't posted till next Monday. When they are, I'll know what it is for sure."
"Mmhmm. And beforehand?"

"Sir?"

"What was your GPA at before finals?"

"3.5."

"Then I hope you did well."

"As do I," Henry says, resisting the urge to fidget, tug at this collar, tap his hand against his knee, anything, really, to distract himself from the scrutiny of this man.

Steadiness is a much-admired trait among older men. Or, at least, *this* type of older man: the head of the family, the patriarch, with a deep timbre to their voice and a certain seriousness to their presence. Henry knows this from his father, who loses his temper rarely (though he often has cause to), raises his voice even less often, but still commands a large number of people, and does so well.

Stoicism and stillness are valued, as they demonstrate maturity and self-control.

Of course, Henry doesn't think about this much. He fidgets his way almost all the way out of his seat in class sometimes, and he's never embarrassed by it.

But he's thinking about it now, as he keeps mentally checking that he's not slouching, as he tries to keep his face in a neutral expression or easy smile, as he tries to appear unaffected by this inquiry rather than intimidated by it.

"And how many languages do you speak?" Mr. Boleyn asks, swirling his drink in his hand again, Henry's gaze flits to it, distracted by the flashiness of the amber-gold liquid as it catches the light.

"I…took Spanish in high school. I'm taking French at the moment, but I only just finished French I, so--"

"Are you fluent?"

"In…?" Henry asks.

It's hot in the living room, and he feels his cheeks warm. Henry knows he still can't risk taking his coat off, and what might be found in the pocket, but he figures he can at least risk losing his scarf, so he tugs it loose from around his neck while he waits for an answer to his question.

"Spanish."

"Well, I'm pretty good, I--"

"If you were stranded in the middle of Mexico, and your phone had died, would you be able to ask for directions easily? And then be able to follow them, back to wherever it was you needed to go? Without getting lost?"

"No," Henry admits, "probably not."

"Then you're not fluent," Anne's father informs him, picking the remote up from the arm of his chair and flicking the power on to the TV, he flips through the channels before settling on a black and white movie.

Henry prays for a reprieve, but he doubts one is coming.
"Anne speaks five," he continues, confirming Henry's doubts but no longer bothering to look at the boy that showed up on his doorstep while he speaks to him, "did you know that?"

"I did, she told me. She's pretty smart, I--"

"'Pretty smart?'" he snaps, "is that what you just said?"

George tenses, his hand gripping the bottom of his seat cushion, throwing Henry a look that seems to say 'God help you'.

"I'm sorry," Henry says, "did I say something to offend--"

"Anne is brilliant; brilliant and dedicated to her learning. She takes after me in that way," Mr. Boleyn says, boastfully, "she was a National Merit Scholar, she was Valedictorian, she's won Speech & Debate awards, essay competitions…"

Anne's father jabs a finger towards the wall with the fireplace, still holding his scotch in his other hand, he points to the large picture frame filled with newspaper clippings and certificates above it and says, "Those are only her top recognitions: awards, newspaper articles where she's mentioned, honors she's received…there are more, but I couldn't find a large enough frame."

"I'm sure you're," Mr. Boleyn emphasizes the last word scathingly, draining his drink and pointedly slamming it into the coaster on the table next to him, "'pretty smart'. Anne is something more."

*Well, I fucked that up quickly,* Henry thinks as he nods dumbly.

George feels so much second-hand-embarrassment at this moment that he winces, and he's not even the one that put his foot in his mouth, so he can't *imagine* how Henry feels.

"What are your intentions?" Thomas asks, taking his glasses off and setting them on his knee.

"Jesus, Dad," George says, "what do you think this is, we're not in a movie set in the 1800s--"

Thomas raises a hand to his son, holding him off, never taking his eyes off Henry as he does so.

*Well, I tried.*

"At the moment," Henry says slowly, carefully, "I would just like to speak with her."

"And in the future?" Thomas prompts.

"In the future," Henry says, trying to swallow his pride and bring forth his bravery, "I would like to date her."

"Would you?" Mr. Boleyn says, cocking his head to the side.

"I would like that very much…sir."

"Well!" George exclaims, laughing nervously, he pats Henry on the knee once, awkwardly, "well, I don't think she even knows you're here, yet, so I'm going to…tell her…make sure she's not sleeping or something, ha-ha!"

"She's too good for you," Thomas says, expression fierce.
"Oh," Henry says easily, "I don't doubt it. But I would still like to, all the same. Sir."

"I'mma go," George blurts out, voice breaking, all but leaping from the couch, "I'm gonna go do, the thing, so...don't kill each other, please," he mutters under his breath as he walks up the stairs.

Anne hears someone knock on the door and feels like her heart's about to stop.

_I'm not ready, I'm not ready, I'm not ready..._

She goes up to her door, presses her ear against it and calls out, "who is it?"

"George."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

George's younger sister all but yanks him inside her room once she opens the door, slamming it behind her.

"Okay," he says, dusting himself off, "first of all, chill-"

"I don't know what to do!" she says, eyes panicked, she bites her fist, "I've done nothing! I haven't gotten ready! I don't even know what to do first--"

"Do you know what 'chill' means?" he asks, watching her, bemused, as she starts to pace around the room.

"I don't--oh my God!" she exclaims, catching her reflection in the mirror above the vanity.

Anne rushes over to her bed and sits on it, pulling her sweatshirt up and over her head.

George takes a seat at her vanity.

"Oh my GOD," she repeats, yanking her sweatpants down her legs and trying to kick them off, "he's always doing this to me--"

"Doing what?" George asks, pushing different makeup selections around on her vanity.

"Dropping by unannounced! When I look like shit!"

"Okay, relax, I'll find you something," he says, leaving the vanity and walking over to her closet, he rummages through for a few seconds, finds something reasonably cute and says, "here."

He shows her his choice, displaying it over his arm while he holds the hanger. It's a simple, scoop-neck black dress, fitted at the waist with a tiered skirt, covered in a pattern of pink and yellow wildflowers.

"I don't know, George," she says, standing in an oversize t-shirt and boy shorts, hands on her hips, mouth twisted to the side "it's awfully short, and--"

"And your legs are awfully long," he finishes, sliding the dress off the hanger and handing it to her, "so it'll look amazing, you're welcome."
"I don't know…"

"I know it's not the nun get-up you usually wear, but--"

"I do not dress like a nun," she insists, walking across the room and opening the door to her bathroom (to change, George assumes).

"Whatever, I'm burning all of your turtlenecks the second you leave the house! This isn't the '90s, Anne!"

"What?" Anne calls.

"Nothing," he trills.

Anne comes out in the dress, sighs and says, "I don't think this is a good idea, I haven't shaved my legs and--"

"I see nothing," George says, leaning down and squinting at her calves, "how long has it been?"

"Three days."

"Oh, please. It's fine."

"But I can feel it," she says, taking a seat on the end of her bed and running her hands over her legs, "and they don't feel smooth; I feel stubble."

"I'm sorry, were you planning on letting him touch your legs?" George quips.

"No!" she gasps, indignant and scandalized.

"Then it's fine. You do, however, need lip gloss, moisturizer, and mascara, which you have," he says, handing the items he just listed off to her (he grabbed them from her vanity while she was getting dressed), "so put them on, quickly, wear your black flats, and-- oh, for God's sake," he snaps, "that's how you're going to wear your hair?"

"What's wrong with-- hey!" Anne exclaims as he pulls the elastic out of her hair and finger-combs it down, swishing it around her shoulders.

"I'll take my sweet time coming downstairs to tell him you're ready, alright?" he says, putting both hands on her shoulders, "but I can't take forever."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," he says, gently as possible, "that you kind of already have. The poor boy was still getting the third degree from Dad when I came up."

"Oh, God," Anne groans, rubbing her temples.

"Chin up, kid," he says, patting her knee, "you have a beautiful boy waiting for you downstairs. Most people can't say that."

"Wait, George," she calls when he goes for the door.

"Yeees?" he asks, turning back around to her.

"What…should I be doing?"
"Doing?"

"When he comes in, what should I be doing? Looking out the window, or…?"

George scratches his chin as he ponders this.

"Well, you can't just look like you're waiting for him."

"Obviously," she says, dabbing the lip gloss onto her mouth.

"Oh!" he exclaims, snapping his fingers, "be reading a magazine. It's cool, but plausible."

"Magazine," she mumbles, making wide eyes in the mirror as she starts to put on her mascara, "got it, thanks."

Henry knocks on the door with a floral "A" decal on it (a pretty good tip-off, he figures), then unbuttons and shrugs his coat off his shoulders in relief (Anne's father had cranked up the heat while George was upstairs, smugly asked Henry again if he could take his coat for him, and he had had to refuse, again).

"Come in!"

He takes a deep breath, and reaches for the doorknob, but his hand slips off (nerves causing clumsiness and probably also perspiration). So he wipes his jeans on his hands, then wipes the sweat beaded on his upper lip off with the sleeve of his sweater.

Ready.

He opens the door.

Takes in the bed, a Queen size, covered in nothing but dark blue sheets. The picture windows, draped in yellow curtains, snow falling outside them, grey light shining through, making a square on the oak floor. Her walls, a light lavender color, covered in movie posters (Roman Holiday, Amelie, War and Peace, Casablanca, To Catch a Thief, Rear Window, Sabrina). Shelves, overflowing with books, stacks of books in towers on the floor.

Then he takes in the back of her head, her black hair, long and tangled, a perfect storm, trailing over the back of an office chair at the desk by the window.

Anne spins around in the chair, eyes trained on a page, an open magazine in her lap.

She looks up with a stunned expression, and languidly blinks, as if just waking up, as if trying to make out something hazy that's very far away, but still in her line of sight.

"Hello?" she says, softly.

It seems that time away has made her even lovelier. She's not prettier in memories (he had hoped for that, it might make talking to her easier, if he had just built her up in his head), in fact his memories don't even do her justice.

It's been twelve long days since he's been in the same room with her (he had ordered a delivery for her gift, same as he had for the shoes last month). Twelve days since this feeling, like he's drawn to her, a magnet, tugged by an invisible string; this feeling that he has to be closer to her, that he doesn't have a choice in the matter.
Anne tilts her head to the side, hair falling over her shoulder as she does, exposing her neck, unsmiling (though not frowning), as if she's trying to solve a puzzle.

They haven't been alone together before like this, not really, not outside of school, anyway. Or… they've been alone together, but usually with an excuse (studying), or else not really alone (at a party, or on campus, where anyone could come by).

He only wants to tell her things that are true and good, avoid telling her the things that are terrible but true, but he knows it won't be possible; not today. Not with his promise to her sister, and not with his promise to himself. He wants to look at her before anything changes, before he says anything that could possibly hurt her.

So he takes the chance to drink her in (who knows when or if he'll get the chance again?).

The details: a gold chain that falls over her collarbones, trailing down to the 'B' initial, over the expanse of her clavicle. Beauty marks that dot her jawline and the small expanse of her chest that's exposed, her arms. The taut muscles in her crossed legs.

The full picture: pale skin that glows like the moon at three am, eyes dark as night and bright as stars, the sensual, full mouth, the proud little chin, aquiline nose, severely sharp cheekbones, somewhat softened by the waves that curl around her face.

She has a default severity to her expression, a sharp little face in general, so she usually looks serious. But when she smiles or laughs, it's transformative, and dimples peek out.

Her long neck, the small curves of her body: small bust sliding into a smaller waist, narrow hips, then impossibly, impossibly long legs (how anyone this petite has such long legs must be some sort of scientific marvel, he thinks) that end in black velvet flats, with little bows.

"Hi," he says, swallowing the lump in his throat.

"Do you want to put your coat down?"

"Oh, um," he fumbles with it, almost dropping it, "where?"

"On my bed is fine," she says, so he tosses it there, then, left with nothing to do with his hands, he puts them in his pockets.

"How did you get here?" she asks.

"I took the train," he says.

There's nowhere for him to sit.

Well, there's the bed, but he's not stupid and that might have connotations she's not comfortable with, so he keeps standing.

"You took the train?" she asks, teasingly, a corner of her mouth quirking up, eyebrows raised.

"Yes."

"From…New York to here?" she asks, closing her magazine and playing with the dog-ear on the cover, smiling a little.

"Yes."
"You took the train?" Anne asks again, laughing.

"Yes! It's less time than driving, after all."

"Which ones?"

"Amtrak and then the Metro, the Red line, from--"

"Union to Farragut?"

"Yes. It was very fast. The last part, anyway."

"Four stops, eight minutes," she says, nodding, "we have a good transit system in D.C. It's something I missed."

____________________

You're something I missed.

Anne puts her magazine (an old copy of the New Yorker that was luckily on top of one of her stacks of books) down on the desk, searching for words, wanting to keep the train of conversation going, keep it light for as long as possible.

She doesn't want to hear things she…doesn't want to hear, she'd rather keep looking at him, rather make small talk that can be background noise while she imagines what it'd be like to trace the calluses on his hands, the curves of his mouth, trail a hand over the broad expanse of his chest, his shoulders…both of which are straining against the soft-looking royal blue of his sweater.

"Weren't you worried people would recognize you?" she asks.

"Ah…no," he says, "I mean, I wore sunglasses, and a hat. Besides, it's not like I'm famous."

"You're a little famous," Anne says, squeezing a tiny space between her thumb and forefinger.

"Oh?"

"I mean, I didn't really realize that, at first," she admits, chin in hand, "because my source of news is typically NPR and Wall Street Journal and the New York Times and…in retrospect, I guess I have heard and read about your dad, but not about you. But Mary's the one that reads tabloids and gossip magazines, and her primary source of information is E! News, and you're…in those. Sometimes."

"Right," he says, laughing a little bit, ducking his head, "sometimes."

____________________

"Do you want to sit?" she asks, gesturing to her bed.

"Sure," he says, surprised at the offer, "wow," he remarks, nodding to the window, "it's really coming down, huh?"

Anne spins in her chair to face the window, where the flurry of snow falling is so thick it's almost a total sheet of white.

"It is," she agrees, turning back to him, "good thing you didn't drive. No traffic, no 'bad-bad-weather drivers'…"

"Yes, good thing."
They sit for a while in silence. She plays with the end of her skirt, crosses and re-crosses her legs. He leans forward, folds his hands, leaving them in between his knees.

"So," he says finally, "you're probably wondering why I'm here."

"A little, yeah," she says, giggling.

"Did you get my letters?" Henry asks.

"Yes," she says, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear, "I did."

"Right…" he trails off, then reaches over for his coat, pulling it onto his lap, he begins to feel around the pockets.

"First, though," he says, pulling out the gift-wrapped box, "this is for you."

"I…I returned that, Henry," she says, squirming in her chair.

"I know. Why did you?"

"It's just…too much. It's too much for me," she says, shrugging.

"Says who?"

"Says me, I don't think…it's not…something you should give someone when you have a fiancée," Anne says, biting her lip.

Well, he knew that word was going to come up eventually, but it still smarts a bit: his reality, his…'wife-to-be'.

Katherine was his girlfriend, for a little bit, before he proposed. Fiancée is a much heavier title. Girlfriend is so much easier to say, such an easier thing to end, really. He wishes he could rewind back to that, but everything’s set in motion and it's just too late. Too late to reverse anything.

"I give my sisters jewelry for gifts," Henry says with a shrug.

"And I'm sure they love that…but," Anne says, putting a hand to her chest, "I'm not your sister."

"I hope not," he deadpans, running his thumb over the box, "or this would be awkward."

Anne laughs, covering her mouth with her hand.

"Please," he says, laughing with her, holding the box out, "please, take it. I had it made for you. I'm sure it'll look great on you."

"I'm sure it would, it's beautiful, I've seen it," Anne says with a sigh, "and I'm sorry, maybe you can return it, I'm sure it was very expensive, and--"

"It was, but that's not…why I want you to wear it."

It would be so easy to get swept away by the gentleness of his voice on those words, to be lost in the captivating, stormy color of his eyes, ride away on those steely blue waves and ride out, and out, and not think about any consequences at all…

So that's why she needs to anchor herself. Against…him.
"Right," she says, clearing her throat, she rolls her chair back a little bit, figuring a little more distance between them won't hurt (but it does, it does, she thinks as she notes the hurt expression on his face as she backs away, and worse than that is that it smarts her, too), "well, I'm sure 'expensive' doesn't mean a great deal to you, so I could see--"

"You mean…a great deal to me," Henry says, hope shining from his eyes, piercing her through, and seeing his hope hurts because it's something she doesn't dare have.

But he still does. For her. For…whatever reason.

"You can't take it?" he asks, fiddling with the string on the outside of the wrapping paper, "even as a Christmas present? Between friends?"

Friends…she's not really sure how he can call them that with a straight face.

Friends who were unexpectedly given a stage direction to do a kiss would just do it, no problem, and laugh it off later. Friends do not send nine letters, over the course of three weeks, without breathing so much as a word about them, not letters that say "I want you", not letters that say "I wanted to kiss you tonight", and certainly not letters that say "I've never felt this way about anyone before". They do not fight in the rain, they do not stand close enough to kiss while staring at each other's mouths (so obviously wanting to close the distance between them), they do not run away crying when they're informed that the other friend is engaged, and has been, for some time…

"I don't know, Henry…"

Thomas Boleyn has been pacing back and forth, circling around the kitchen and back to the living room, for the past fifteen minutes or so.

He'll go to the staircase, with momentum, like he's about to walk up them, then stops, scoffs or sighs, and circles back.

George is flipping through a National Geographic magazine (the only magazine he could find downstairs that wasn't in French, and of course it's a boring one…George likes elephants as much as the next guy, they're like, cute and whatever, but does he want to read a 10,000 word article about them? No, he does not. He makes a note to write the editor a suggestion to appeal to the Millennial crowd: a magazine that's similar to National Geographic, but all pictures, with a 150 character limit) while this occurs.

It's amusing, at first, but when his father begins to talk he realizes any ensuing conversation is simply going to result in a downward spiral.

"I do not like him. Do you think he got that?" Thomas asks.

"Yeah, I think you pretty much hit him over the head with that one."

"Little smarmy, pretentious…'sir' this, 'sir' that. What was that?"

"I think that was him trying to be polite, Dad."

"He wouldn't have had to call me 'sir' if he had bothered to learn my name…notice how he didn't introduce himself?"

"You didn't introduce yourself either, if you recall," George points out.
"I don't even know his name! This little punk--"

"He was wearing, like, a $2,000 coat, that might not be the most fitting description--"

"--is up there with my daughter, and I don't even know his name."

"Well, it's Henry Tudor, if that makes you feel any better."

"I know that name…where do I know that name from?"

"Red Dragon, if I had to hazard a guess."

"What, do his parents work there or something?"

"Own."

"What?"

"His dad owns the company."

"Oh, Jesus Christ, that's the last thing I need…"

"What? Maybe he'll buy us boats or planes…maybe even guest houses," George says, enjoying antagonizing his father immensely.

"Oh, stop that. This is very, very bad…even smart girls can be wooed by wealth…swept away…it changes everything."

"I don't really think Anne is like that, do you?"

"No, of course not," his father mutters under his breath, "but still…money can be very influential to young girls."

"Especially if their father won't help them pay for college?"

"What?"

"Nothing," George says, unable to hide his smirk, "just an observation."

"I should go up there," Thomas says, "I should go up there right now."

"Do what you want, it's your house."

"But then she'll think I don't trust her…"

"Then don't," George says, rolling his eyes.

"But of course I trust her…I don't trust him, she would realize that, wouldn't she?"

"Whatever you think best."

"Oh, for God's sake, George," he snaps, "the one time I need you to have an opinion and you're a placating church mouse. Have some input, you've certainly never had any problems with that before."

"I'm worried that if I give you my opinion, you'll kick me out."
"I won't kick you out."

"Promise?"

"Yes!"

"Pinky promise?" George asks, batting his eyelashes, extending his pinky finger.

"You can't be serious."

George shrugs, flips a page (now it's an article about monkeys...monkeys are not cuter than elephants, National Geographic is honestly so annoying, this one doesn't even have fold-out maps, which are at least somewhat interesting), and says, "Suit yourself."

His father sighs dramatically, but links his pinky with his son's, looking terribly pained as he does so.

"My two cents? Pay for her school," George says, simply, "and Mary's too, for that matter. Don't make them pay for my mistakes. Or at least supplement what their scholarships don't cover. Do that, and maybe neither of them will find the need to entertain rich suitors."

And with that, George gets up and leaves, closes the front door behind him, and steps out onto the front porch. He attempts to light a cigarette in the wind, cupping a hand over it, because even his tolerance for rambling has its limits.

"Can I at least see how it looks on you?" Henry asks.

Anne knows that this is where she should shake her head, left to right. She knows that if she does, it'll be the last time she has to, that he'll put the box back in his pocket and they'll end up talking about something else.

But instead she nods, up and down.

"Can I see it first? Or, again?" she asks.

"Of course," he says, passing her the box.

She unties the string around it, rips the gift wrapping, and pops the lid open.

Anne stands up and walks to the other side of the room, then back again to the window, as she examines it carefully.

It's the same, of course, as it was the first time she opened it (the only difference was that it was in a gift bag, filled with tissue paper, that she had to sign for it): a white gold necklace on a delicate chain, the tiniest clasp, so pale it's almost silver, ending with a golden small envelope.

"How did you choose this?" she asks, feeling the smoothness of the envelope trinket.

"Well...for letters, which you said you missed. So you could always have one close to you. And then...sapphires for your birth month, and because you said you'd never want or buy diamonds, because of labor practices associated with them."

"I did?"
"Yes…you wrote it. On Facebook."

"You looked it up," she says, smiling.

"I looked it up," he admits, getting up from his seat on her bed and standing as well, "and I looked up the…purple doc martens. In case you had any doubts."

He seems to have a fondness for that phrase, Anne thinks.

"PS: I wanted to kiss you tonight (in case you had any doubts)."

"I figured," she says, lifting the necklace out of the box, she attempts to open the clasp, struggling. It's impossibly small, and she cut her fingernails short yesterday.

"Need some help?" he asks.

"I guess…I don't have any nails," she explains, holding up her right hand.

The distance between them is short, so he bridges it, lifts the necklace from where it's hanging from her fingers with a gentle, careful touch, slowly (trying to prevent it from tangling or trying to touch my hand? Anne wonders). He opens the clasp easily, on the first try, holds the necklace by both ends.

"Turn around," he says, with a nod, and she does (and it's a little easier than facing him, she must admit, although knowing he's right behind her is a different kind of rush).

"Um," he says with a laugh, "can you lift your--"

"Oh!"

Anne fists her long, thick hair with one hand and twists it over her shoulder, holding onto it as he clasps the necklace from the back.

It feels cool against her skin, and she's still holding her hair when he traces his index down the length of her neck, down from the nape of it to the end of it, with agonizing slowness. Anne tightens her grip on her hair, still grasping it as she sighs.

"No idea why you want to cover up that pretty neck of yours."

He traces it again, this time from the bottom of her neck to the nape of it before she remembers herself.

"We have to stop doing things like this," she says, suddenly aware, heat crawling up her neck as she spins around to face him.

His gaze falls to her chest, and she's about to be offended when she realizes he's just looking at the necklace, then back up at her.

"It's perfect on you," he says, "I knew it would be."

"Henry!" Anne says, "did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, you said, 'we have to stop--'"

"Yes! We can't do things like that anymore," Anne says, deciding on a present tense to make it more clear, both for herself and for him…because really, "we have to stop" implies future, and "we can't"
is firmer, anyway.

No one does things they "have to do", no one does things they're "supposed" to do, but if you can't, you can't. If you can, you can. It's far more definitive.

"Things like what?" he asks, picture of wide-eyed innocence; hands tucked away in the pockets of his jeans like they hadn't just been caressing her neck moments ago.

"Like…like…" she struggles to find the right word for it, and settles on one of Anna's, "have 'moments'."

"'Moments'?"

"You touched my neck!"

"Did I? Huh. I didn't realize."

"Sit, please," Anne says, gesturing to the office-chair by her desk, and he does, leans back into it, levels her with a challenging stare.

"Tell me about her," she says, taking a seat on her bed, smoothing her skirt over her legs, which draws his attention to them once again.

"Katherine?"

"Yes."

Henry shrugs a single shoulder.

"What do you want to know?" he asks.

Thomas Boleyn knocks, once, on Anne's door, panics when there's not an immediate answer, and opens it, imagining the worst.

But all he sees is the Tudor boy, seated on the chair by her desk, a respectable distance from his daughter, who's sitting atop her bed.

There are roses blooming across her face, and while Thomas doesn't love that, nor what it implies, it's not the thing that startles him most about this picture.

"Dad?"

What startles him is not that they're kissing, or even sitting too close (given that they're doing neither) but that there's a different necklace around her neck, hanging above the "B" necklace she's always worn, ever since he gave it her for her eleventh birthday. What startles him is that the quality is unmissable even from across the room at the doorway, that it is likely at least ten times more than what he paid for her gift seven years ago.

It was her trademark, and she had always been proud to wear it, always answered the question from cashiers, other students, and dinner party guests alike the same way ("What does it stand for?"): "Boleyn, of course," with a laugh, a laugh that said "what else?" and pitied those that did not have such a fashionable signature.

There's a symbolism to it he doesn't like: one above the other.
And then, more so, what startles him is how the boy looks at her. Not lasciviously, as Thomas had expected, but with a radiance that transcends. He looks at her as if there is no earthly thing that could ever stop him from doing so.

Everything is much, much worse than what he had been expecting, all around.

"I didn't want to be a bad host," Thomas says, clearing his throat, he holds out the two water bottles he grabbed from the fridge downstairs, "here."

She walks over to him, thanks him and tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek.

"Anything you need?" she asks with a smile, tilting her head to the side.

He had, truthfully, been planning on making some pointed comment about how dinner would be ready soon, but oh, what a shame, there really was only enough for four, if that…another one about how they hadn't been expecting company, after all.

But at the moment that seems a sad, futile attempt that he'd rather not embarrass himself with.

"No," Thomas says, "carry on."

Chapter End Notes

aaaaaaaaaah! *covers face with hands*

ok so...this ended up being really long and yet it still somehow ended with them only beginning to talk about Katherine and that situation.

the discussion will continue next chapter, promise!
[And] he does, he does have good memories: waiting at the airport for her, roses in hand, and her running off the plane and jumping into his arms, him spinning her around and laughing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I met Katherine when I was thirteen. She was in the States over the summer with her parents, and her parents knew my father," Henry begins.

"Is that when…?" Anne trails off, leaving him space to fill in the blanks.

"Oh, God, no," Henry says, "she was sixteen, then. We barely spoke. Spanish was her native, she didn't become fluent in English until later. Arthur spoke fluent Spanish, so they spoke with each other, mainly. They did volunteer work together. The age difference between us was pretty prominent then," he says, laughing, "I was gangly and awkward and short and she was…well, short, too, but poised, articulate…a lot more mature. She was regal, almost, though back then I just thought she was full of herself."

"Oh. You didn't…have a crush on her, or anything?" Anne says, not really sure why she's asking. It's not really important, if a 13-year-old Henry had a crush on Katherine, is it? But for some reason it matters to her.

"Hmm…"

To his credit, he looks up, worries his mouth, as if actually honestly considering this.

"No," he says finally, "no, not really. Not at the time. I thought she was pretty, of course, but…I had other girls I was interested in at the time. She wasn't really on my radar."

"'Girls'? I thought you were gangly and awkward," Anne teases, not really able to imagine it.

"Oh, I was, definitely…but I was developing my game. Slowly but surely," he says with an easy, confident smile.

"Well, then…you wouldn't have given me the time of day, I'm sure."

"I'm pretty sure it would've been the other way around, actually," Henry teases.

"I didn't exactly have boys breaking down my door."

"No, I'm sure they didn't…not with your father guarding it," Henry says.

"Oh, God…I'm sorry about that," Anne says, squeezing her eyes shut, "George told me he was grilling you…how embarrassing."
"Embarrassing? Only for me…I didn't know you were a literal genius."

"What?"

"Oh," Henry says, with picture-perfect wide-eyed innocence, "he showed me 'the frame'."

"Oh, my God," she groans, putting her face in her hands, "I'm so sorry."

"Your poor siblings."

"What do you mean?"

"Having to measure up to…impossible standards. Must be tough. I know the feeling," he says quietly, closing his hand into a fist and then opening it, a flower blooming, expression becoming lost and vague.

"What? To--"

"Arthur. He was perfect," he says with a nod.

"No one's perfect," Anne says, a cliché, maybe, which she normally hates, but Anne's been sensitive to the word ever since her blow-out fight with Mary ("we can't all be perfect like you!").

"Normally I'd agree, but he was the exception. Endlessly patient and bright, never a harsh word for anyone…and so kind. That's why it was so..." he trails off, shakes his head, "so...not what you were asking about."

"It's okay," Anne says, hating that she's brought up hard memories for him.

Who wants to be reminded of the people they miss? Anne hates it, herself. Because you rarely need the reminder...you're thinking of them all the time, anyway. It's probably why she and Mary so rarely talk about their mother; because it hurts and they know they're both remembering anyway.

And she checks herself: she's been flirting, she knows it. And she should be kind of ashamed of herself for doing so, doing so during this line of questioning (about Katherine, his fiancee, his fiancee: Katherine, get it together), but somehow she's not.

Somehow she feels like she can't help the lilt of her voice, the tilt of her head. Feels that flirting is, at this point, her default setting with him, that the witty, teasing remarks are falling out of her mouth before they even run through her mind.

"So when did it begin, then?" Anne asks, attempting to get back on track.

"The summer before I came to Whitehall, when I was 18, is when we started dating. But I had gotten to know her better before then. She came over every summer after the first one. And her English improved, and I was learning Spanish, though it was so atrocious she usually just told me to stop talking," he says with a laugh, "but...anyway, that meant we started talking more. She was probably just humoring me, at least at first."

"And how did..." Anne trails off.

Honestly, she's not sure she wants to know the answer. The beginning. All of her questions aren't really about her wanting to know the answer; they're more about her being honest with herself and accepting that these are things she needs to know.

Talking about the beginning of his current relationship with the 'regal' Katherine, the Katherine that
posts pictures of herself and friends, her siblings, her on yachts, her in beautiful, designer dresses and heels, her holding *baby sloths* at conservations, her at Oxford, her and her parents (beautiful as she is, of course--Ferdinand and Isabella, mother like daughter especially: with the same hair, a shade that falls somewhere in between strawberry blonde and auburn, of petite stature, father tall with dark hair, thick beard and eyebrows interspersed with pieces of grey), makes it real. And talking about their beginning; probably means the end of theirs, hers and Henry’s, that is (their *non-relationship,* really, their agonizing almost-almost-almost’s, close enough to touch, feel the breath of the other, but far away enough to never close the gap between them. save for a stage kiss, save for a brush of his hands against hers, save for him cradling her face in his hands, the occasional hug, sitting on his lap, briefly, with the intent of regaining her phone and also torture, a little bit, she admits that to herself as she tallies up all the times they've touched, or come close to doing so and still: still it is not enough, it may never be).

"How did it happen?" she asks, finally, "you asked her out, or…?"

"No, actually," Henry answers, remembering, "nothing so formal as that. It was more like it was… suggested by our parents."

"Suggested?"

"Well, not even suggested so much as implied," he explains, "our parents would leave us alone, drop hints about how we seemed to be growing fond of each other, things like that. I thought maybe they just approved, because we ran in the same sort of circles, that sort of thing. Later I learned there was a bit more to it than that, but…at the time, I didn't know."

"Didn't know…?"

"Let's go in order," Henry says, turning his head to the left, he watches the snow falling through the window (it reminds him of the fake snow at the Virtues' Masquerade, spinning around them as they…spun around, how he ruffled his hair in frustration in the mirror of the men's room after seeing her run into Percy's arms. Then that reminds him of how he woke up with it on his pillow the next morning, how Lizzy had teased him as she lay next to him, said 'wow, you have big dandruff flakes, Henry!' and he had said 'it's the fucking fake snow, it's like glitter from a strip club, it just keeps appearing'), "or it might start to get confusing."

'Get confusing'…please.

As if he wasn't terribly confused already.

As if the whole *thing* hadn't been.

He truly hadn't known why he was so upset, the night of the Masquerade, and Lizzy had helped him work through it (after the 'fucking snow' comment that morning she had said, 'alright, you're in a shit mood again, I get it, but *don't* talk to me like that' and he had apologized and she had asked 'what *happened* last night? when you found me in the hallway? you were so sad."

Henry had explained that he truly hadn't understood why he was bothered by what had happened. Usually, when he wanted to get a girl, he really didn't have to do much. If she was taken or uninterested, he shrugged it off so easily, a roll of the shoulders, on to the next.

'By *getting girls*,' Lizzy had inquired, running her fingers through the deep tangles in her long, golden hair, 'do you mean sleeping with them?'
'Yeah.'

'Well, maybe you wanted to do more than sleep with her,' Lizzy had suggested.

'More than…what more is there?'

'I don't know…talk to her, get to know her.'

'I don't think so.'

'Okay,' she had said skeptically, with a shrug of a slender, freckled shoulder, 'to me it sounds like you have a crush.'

'A crush?' he had scoffed, indignant.

'Yes, a crush…you've heard of those, haven't you?'

'Yes…but I," Henry had said confidently, "don't get those."

'Sure. Well, if you want, you can tell me her Virtue name…I didn't see who you were dancing with, but I'm sure I can find out for you.'

'I don't need you to find out for me.'

'Suit yourself.'

'Because I don't have one. So I,' he said, grabbing his phone off his nightstand with a flourish, 'don't care.'

'Whatever,' Lizzy trilled.

And then, later on, because he was an idiot, and had no dignity, apparently:

**From: Henry Tudor**

**To: Lizzy Blount**

**Sent November 5, 2016, Saturday, 1:10 PM**

I changed my mind.

**From: Lizzy**

Hi, Henry. How are you? I'm fine, thanks for asking.

**From: Henry**

Hi, sorry. I'm fine, thanks.

**From: Lizzy**

Changed your mind about what?

**From: Henry**
I want to know her name.

**From: Lizzy**

Masquerade girl?

**From: Henry**

Yes.

**From: Lizzy**

But, Henry…why do you want that? ;-)

**From: Henry**

Just curiosity getting the better of me, I guess.

**From: Lizzy**

Could it be…because…you have…a… crush??

**From: Henry**

No, because I don’t.

**From: Lizzy**

Fascinating.

**From: Henry**

Stop.

**From: Lizzy**

Gripping stuff, here.

**From: Henry**

She played Perseverance. Do you remember who that was?

**From: Lizzy**

I'll tell you…IF you admit you have a crush.

**From: Henry**

I'm not going to because I don't.

**From: Lizzy**

Ok, then. I guess you'll probably figure it out…eventually.

**From: Henry**
Lizzy!!! Please?

Lizzy:
Mmmmm….let me think…no (: 

Henry:
Whatever. I don't need this.

Lizzy:
You're the one that texted me, friend.

Henry:
I can't believe you're not telling me out of spite.

Lizzy:
Not out of spite. Just waiting for you to admit it.

Henry:
I'm not going to lie just to play into your little power-trip.

Lizzy:
Henry Tudor has a crush. Lol.

Henry:

Lizzy:
You want to hold her hand, you want to take her on a date…

Henry:
Stop it! I do not!

Lizzy:
You dork…you've probably already dreamt about her…

Henry:
No I haven't, don't be ridiculous.

Lizzy:
So defensive…wonder why…

Henry:
Whatever. You probably don't even know who she is, anyway.

Lizzy:
Oh, yeah I do. Because I remember Jen yelled at 'Perseverance' for running to meet her gentleman when she was 'supposed' to wait for you to rescue her.

Henry:
Then, tell me, please.

Lizzy:
No, this is WAY too fun.

Henry:
You're mean.

Lizzy:
Ask yourself why you care so much and get back to me when you figure it out! :-)

From: Henry Tudor
To: Jennifer Parker
Sent November 7, 2016, Monday, 2:33 PM

Hi, Jen. How are you?

From: Jennifer Parker
Fine. What's up, Tudor?

From: Henry
Oh, come on. Aren't we on first-name basis?

From: Jen
No, not really.

From: Henry
Well, I've always thought you were great.

From: Jen
Yeah…you haven't, though.

From: Henry
Anyway…so, it's the funniest story, really, you're gonna laugh, but I was wondering if you could help me with something?
From: Jen

Maybe. What is it?

Henry:

Well, I was dancing with my assigned partner at the Masque and when she left I noticed that one of her earrings had fallen on the ground.

Jen:

Ok.

Henry:

So, I picked it up and I tried to find her, couldn't find her, but then I had to leave, so… anyway, never got her real name, still have this earring, and I should probably give it back.

Jen:

How very Cinderella. Who was your partner?

Henry:

Perseverance.

Jen:

I see.

Henry:

Right, so do you know who it is? Because I feel bad about it…if you had her number, even, that would probably work, too.

Jen:

You know, I do know who that is…and wow, I do have her number!

Henry:

Great, awesome.

Jen:

Yeah…not giving it you, though.

Henry:

What? Why?

Jen:

Well, 1.) You're full of shit.
Henry:

I beg your pardon?!

Jen:

None of the Virtuous Ladies were allowed to wear earrings. Necklaces, yes, earrings, no. So, had you said she lost her necklace, I might have given you the benefit of the doubt.

Henry:

What do you mean, 'allowed'?

Jen:

Too distracting. Simplicity is key in uniforms. I checked every Lady thoroughly before we took our places.

Henry:

Well, okay, so I want her number, why do you care? Jealous?

Jen:

Nope! 2.) She's taken, and I know how you are. :)

Henry:

Well, that's offensive.

Jen:

Thanks for the laugh, Tudor! This was fun.

"Anyway, neither of us really asked the other out. We started spending more time together, though, and feelings evolved and...one day she asked 'am I your girlfriend', and I said yes. It felt right," Henry says, hands in his lap.

"So you have...good memories of her," Anne says.

It's not really a question, but it's true, so he nods.

Because he promised he'd be honest, and he does, he does have good memories: waiting at the airport for her, roses in hand, and her running off the plane and jumping into his arms, him spinning her around and laughing. Lying in a hammock together, him playing with her hair. How she raced him, at running, at swimming, at horseback riding, and always, always won. Picnics and long walks in parks, holding hands, fingers intertwined. Her laugh, the warmth of her voice, her accent, the way her freckles stood out against the little white dresses she wore, the way she could calm him with a steady look.

But then, of course, there are not so good memories associated with Katherine, too. There's him, bending on one knee with the ring his father bought for him, but not really wanting to. And her reaction to it, underwhelmed at best: a vague contentment on her face, but not really any joy
(perhaps it's hyped up in movies, but when people are proposed to, aren't they thrilled? if they're not, isn't that considered a bad sign?) as she accepted.

Then there's his father, who simply said, "it's time." Who said, "do this for me." Who said, "it's more a favor to me than a desire for you, I know." Who said, "you don't have to get married right away, just once you've graduated."

How his father's reasoning for doing so, once listed out to Henry in detached, calculated way, left Henry feeling cold. Cold and empty and ashamed.

And the fact, of course, that Henry had agreed to do it. Had, ultimately, succumbed to the pressure. Because he was weak, and not brave, not like his brother. Because he couldn't stand up to him; never could, buried so deeply was the fear that he would be disowned like the last son that had dared to disagree, dared to challenge the great Henry Tudor the I.

The way Henry had tried to convince himself that it was something he wanted, probably something he would've ended up doing himself, anyway, though maybe later on, and why delay the inevitable. Why not set in motion, even if you're doing so earlier than you'd like to, than you might have otherwise?

It was fine, he had told himself. She loved him, he loved her, she was beautiful and brilliant, a good match, and that was enough (despite a deep, persistent feeling that whispered to him, it is not enough, whispered something is missing, whispered there's something she's not telling you, a certain distance at which she keeps you, that you won't ever really be able to cross).

And he had been able to convince himself of that, for a while. That everything was fine, rolling along smoothly, that he was on his way, on the right path.

Until she came along. Anne was there, and with her everything that had once been in order inside his mind was set in utter disarray.

So then, of course, there's that uncomfortable truth (and maybe he'll tell her, and maybe he won't): that although he has more memories and more time spent with Katherine, his memories with Anne are the ones that burn brightest.

That memories with the girl he met forty-seven days ago refuse to be willed away. He can't erase them, can't push them to the back of his mind, not with sex, not with distractions, not with booze, and he's tried. They play in his mind, always, on a loop.

They won't go away, while his memories with Katherine, someone he's known years and years, someone he's made important promises to, flicker in and out, but rarely. They're interspersed with the other ones, but dim, and he has to summon them. He has to try to remember. He has to want to, has to make a real effort to recall them.

Henry had to push to bring them forward, and managed to, but just barely. Henry tried to push away memories of his incredibly frustrating French tutor, but couldn't even manage that.

He couldn't even escape her while asleep. He became off-kilter in her presence.

"Then why are you here?" Anne asks.

If you have good memories of her, isn't that it? Isn't that what you want? Isn't that the destination at the end of your road?
"I never...explained, I still haven't totally," Henry says, eyes downcast, eyelashes casting shadows on his cheeks, rolling his hat back and forth in between his hands, "there's just-- oh, God," he says, rubbing his forehead, "it's hard to explain, because I know you'll judge it."

"How do you know I will if you haven't told me yet?"

"Because it's-- my father asked me to, alright," he says, hanging his head.

"Asked you to..."

"Marry her. Or, propose to her, and marry her at a set date. His set date, of course," he says bitterly, brow creased.

"Are you telling me," Anne says, skeptical, "that this is an arranged marriage?"

"Not exactly, more like--"

"In a First World country. That is...not in India. Among people that have all the choices, and all the wealth in the world."

"No," he says, worrying his bottom lip, "that's not what I'm-- would you just give me a chance to explain, please?"

Anne can't fathom this. It sounds more like an excuse than anything else, and she's about ready to ask him to leave, because how dare he waste her time with all this earnestness, if he's just going to remain engaged (which, really, is the feeling she's getting from this) but then Lizzy's words come back to her...

"There might be more to the story, is all. Not that he's told me that, but, you know... rich people are weird. They have weird-- whatever, I don't know."

...and they make her hesitate.

"Okay," she says, swallowing a lump in her throat, "explain."

"My father makes alliances with other companies all the time. There's a certain...formula to it, but he tends to push it the extra step. He never trusts anyone, see. Always wants to be a few steps ahead in the chess game."

"What kind of extra steps?" Anne asks.

While Henry ponders this, Anne works on smoothing out a wrinkle in her blue sheets.

"Usually he'll try to find some dirty little secret on the company. He calls it insurance, or leverage. It's a card he can play, basically, in case they decide to sue him, or break the partnership, or turn against him, somehow."

"What does this have to do with--"

"The Aragons own almost every Latin American television network. They have total say in what sort of ads are run, they have apps they're work-shopping, some that are in beta version...my father has a good relationship with them, but he wants an exclusive one. And there are other competitors of course, but if he could get it...it would be his 'crowning glory'," Henry says with some distaste, making air quotes on the last phrase.

"And he knows their secrets already?"
"No, not at all. And he hates it. That's where I come in."

"To…get their secrets?"

"No," he says, shaking his head with a rueful smile, he opens his hands in a 'ta-da' gesture, "I create the insurance."

"I don't understand," Anne says, wondering what piece of this she's missing, "I mean, I get that this sort of thing would boost his revenue, but how--"

"It’s brilliant, really. Why would they pick anyone else to ally with when their daughter is married to his son?"

"He calls a marriage…insurance?"

"And engagement is the place holder for that insurance."

Anne considers this… "to have and to hold" is being reduced to a transaction. A collateral. A veil being lifted over Katherine's lovely face, while a handshake goes on in the background, while papers other than a marriage certificate are being signed.

"The way he explains it," Henry continues, "is that we won't get screwed over. They wouldn't screw us over, because we'd be family. To do so would just be screwing themselves over. They screw us, they screw Katherine, they screw their future grandchildren."

"Does Katherine know?" she asks.

"We've never talked about it. But I'm sure she does. Her parents involve her in all their bigger business decisions. And it's mutually beneficial. They get the same insurance. Red Dragon won't screw them over either, because to do so would be screwing over me, by extension."

"Mutually beneficial and…mutually assured destruction?"

"That's a mouthful…but, yeah. More or less," Henry says.

"Do you love her?"

"Yes."

His answer doesn't hurt half as much as she expects it to. And she has no right to feel betrayed by it, really. He already omitted this truth and apologized for it. It's done, she thinks as she takes in his steadiness, his hands folded again in between his knees, shoulders slightly hunched, it's done, she thinks, but still she asks, "What do you love about her?"

"She's…brilliant, beautiful, determined. Held together no matter what. Kind…her faith in God can make the most headstrong of atheists pause and consider their beliefs," he says, "which is a wonder to see, no matter what side of the table you sit on for that debate."

"And she loves you?"

"I'm sorry, are you-- are you braiding your hair right now?"

She is, actually-- a tiny one that takes careful concentration, requires separating three small strands, somehow looping them together, and then onto three more strands.
"Yes," she says.

"Why?"

"Because I don't want to look at you right now--"

"Why?"

"Because," she says, voice raw, "I'm afraid to."

"Look up."

Anne closes her eyes. Hears steps, feels the weight settle next to her on the bed, hears the squeak of the mattress.

"Why are you afraid?" he whispers, and she can feel his breath against her ear.

"Just tell me," she says.

"You have to look."

Their shoulders brush, and he says, again, "Anne, look up."

She opens her eyes, up into his, a blue that seems to be darkening by the second (the longer she looks into them, the more it feels like she's darkening, too).

"She says she loves me," Henry says, "and I believe her. I want to be someone that believes people when they say they love me, I don't...I don't want to be like my father. He never believes anyone loves him, not really, always tries to test them...he did that to my mom. She had six children, just to prove that she did. He wanted a 'little dynasty'," he says with a measure of disgust, shaking his head, "was obsessed over 'continuing the legacy', always talked about it...I don't want to be like him."

Outside, the wind howls, and it shakes the window, whistling against the glass.

"Then why do you have to do what he says?" Anne asks.

"Because, if I don't he could--"

The overhead light flickers, once, buzzes, flickers again, and then there's a bigger buzz before Anne's bedroom is submerged into darkness and quiet, wind beating against the window still.

"Well, I think your power's out," Henry quips.

"Cute," Anne says, stretching her arm, she tries to get up and feel for the office chair, "I hadn't realized how late it was...we need light, where's your phone?"

"It's in my coat somewhere, I think. Where's your phone?" he counters.

"In my bathroom, charging....or, well, it's not charging anymore, obviously."

"Well, can't you go get--"

"No, because I'll knock into one of my book stacks, I keep them very organized, I don't want to mess up--"

"Yes, it's so organized to leave books on the floor--"
"A lot of bookstores have books on the floor! It's a perfectly good system, thank you--"

"Well, I wouldn't know that, since I'm not a nerd that spends my free time in bookstores--"

"Have you found it yet?" Anne asks, glaring at him, though she doesn't know why-- it's not as if he can see her doing it, even the streetlights are out.

"I'm trying!" he snaps, "I've already checked all the pockets, I don't know--"

"Maybe we should go downstairs--"

"What, and trip? Great idea--"

"I can't believe no one's come to check if we're okay yet! I know we have lanterns and flashlights, just not where--"

"Fuck, I think it fell out of my coat or something…"

Anne rolls her eyes and feels her way to the bed, touching the edge of the mattress before getting on top of it, runs her hands over it, searching, fumbling, hoping to hit something rectangular eventually.

"Ow!" he yelps.

"Oh, sorry!"

"You elbowed me!"

"I said I was sorry--"

"I probably have a black eye--"

"Oh, please--"

"Are you-- are you trying to crawl OVER me?!"

"Trying to feel my way here, same as you--"

The lights flicker back on, the sudden brightness making Anne squint and wince.

Somehow they've ended up side to side on the bed, facing each other, somewhat tangled up, his coat somewhere to the left of her elbow, her hand on his shoulder.

She withdraws her hand, makes a fist that she holds close to her chest.

"You don't have a black eye," she says.

"I might have been exaggerating," he says softly, and swallows audibly (she's close enough to him to hear it, close enough to see his Adam's apple as it moves).

The lights die again, but neither of them are searching for his phone anymore.

Closeness is easier to handle in the dark, she thinks, it doesn't feel wrong (*not at all*).

He cups a hand over her neck and her breath hitches.

"I want to read you," he says.
Henry traces her jaw line, begins at the straight vertical part that starts right behind her earlobe, down to the edge of where her chin starts. He cups his hand and brushes it against the edge, softly, the faintest touch, really, a flap of a butterfly's wings (but it leaves her burning, nonetheless).

"In Braille?" Anne teases, and is rewarded for the comment by a sharp exhale, as if he's been holding his breath.

"If you don't kiss me right now, I'll be mad," she informs him.

"And if I do?"

"...I'll be mad."

"Seems fair," he says.

"Hey losers," George yells before he opens Anne's door, "if you're naked…don't be."

"What the fuck?!" Anne snaps, shielding her eyes as he shines the flashlight from his phone over the bed.

"We need help finding the generator," George says, "it's somewhere in the garage."

"Knock next time," Anne says, getting up from bed, dusting off her dress, "God."

"Can you shine the light on the floor, I can't find my phone," Henry says.

George does, the light trailing over their feet before it lights on the shiny back of a cell phone.

"That it?"

"Yeah," Henry says, crouching down to pick it up, "thanks."

"Great. Chop, chop then, lovebirds," George says, "follow me and let's find this thing-- I am very scared of the dark."

Chapter End Notes

so. i ended up adding past text messages, to supplement the memories. because who doesn't enjoy henry being a smitten dork over anne? i know i do.
happy again

Chapter Summary

She goes in cycles of sadness and happiness, but her happiness contains edges. It involves her talking a mile a minute, buying mountains of clothes, laughing at everything (even at the most inappropriate of times). It involves Margaret drinking like the Prohibition starts tomorrow, staying up for nights on end dancing, painting, or writing, but going out running at 4 AM despite all this.

Chapter Notes

song for the last scene of the chapter with mary boleyn:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IhiDr6e-_8

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1526 Hever Road, Washington, D.C.

George, aided with the assistance of light from the lantern he found in a box near the trash can, starts rummaging through cardboard boxes (more of them emptier than they have any right to be, George thinks, why on earth does Dad keep stacks of boxes with nothing in them?), along with Anne, Henry, and Mary.

"This is just Christmas lights," Mary says, trying to free her hands from the tangled wires, "where's Dad, anyway?"

"Sulking and reading in candlelight like this doesn't bother him, of course," George says, kicking a box that's fallen from a stack in frustration.

"Helpful," Anne says, rolling her eyes.

The overhead light in the garage flickers back on, humming as it does so, and then stays steadily bright.

"Helpful indeed…apparently, I kick a box and the gods answer," George says, getting on his knees on the concrete floor, he breaks apart the empty cardboard box he just kicked, and flattens it, "no need to thank me."

"We should keep looking," Mary says, breathing into her hands and rubbing them together, "the power will probably die again, it's still super windy outside--"

"No, it's okay, Mary," George says, patting her on the shoulder, "I fixed it, didn't you see? It's back on. Because of me. We're good."

"It's cold," Anne says, "why don't we take the lantern just in case and go back inside?"

"We?" Mary asks, gaze traveling to Anne, then to Henry, standing a step behind her.
"Yes," Anne says, "what's the issue? There are four of us here."

"Excuse me," Mary says flatly, "this isn't your house, Tudor."

"Thank you, I'm aware," Henry says, "excuse me for waiting to make sure you guys weren't stuck in a storm without electric."

"Excuse me," Mary retorts, "but I don't really remember asking you to!"

_How do I always find myself in these situations without popcorn, George thinks, I really need to work on being more prepared._

"I'll leave once I order a cab," Henry says, "relax."

"You relax," Mary snaps, "I'm relaxed right now."

"I don't think you'll be leaving," George says with a grimace.

"What?" Mary asks, turning her attention and her glare to George, crossing her arms as she does so.

"It's just...radio said there's a storm advisory? No one's supposed to leave their house, much less travel," George informs her.

"Which he won't be doing," Mary speaks slowly, as if trying to communicate with a child, "since this isn't his house."

"Okay, don't be a brat, you know what I mean," George says.

"You're crazy," Mary says, oblivious to Anne and Henry standing in the background, looking miffed at being treated as if they aren't here during this conversation, "if you think dad's letting him spend the night here, then you are literally bat-shit--"

"Insane? Think that'd be more apt to describe you at the moment, wouldn't you say?"

"I will bet you fifteen dollars right now that dad won't let him."

"And what? Make him walk to a hotel and get frostbite?"

"Yeah! He would!"

"You're fucking on," George says, shaking her hand, "easiest fifteen bucks I've ever made."

"Give me fifteen dollars for having to listen to that," Anne snaps, purposefully hitting George with her shoulder and she storms out of the garage, "God."

---

"Do you want the boy to freeze--"

"Obviously he's overstayed his welcome, I'm sure you don't even--"

"Storm advisory, Dad, if he dies--"

"He won't die, George, you're so dramatic--"

"You'll feel so guilty if he dies, don't let Mary--"

"He has pockets deeper than the Atlantic, I'm sure he can find--"
"I'm sure all the hotels are booked! It's the holidays--"

"It's the *Tudor name*--"

"SHUT UP!" Thomas Boleyn yells, dropping the lasagna pan (which, luckily, had been cooked for the most part when the power died, then to completion since it's turned back on) onto the marble island with a clang, "both of you, shut UP!"

To their credit, Thomas thinks, they do, both George and Mary stop talking over each other as he massages his temples and groans.

"Get the boy," he says, throwing a used pan filled with butter and herbs into the sink, with another satisfying clang, "bring him in here."

"Dad wants you," George says to Henry, currently sitting on their floor in the living room and typing furiously on George's laptop, worrying his bottom lip.

"What," Henry says, not bothering to look up, "wants me what? Tied up for the firing squad?"

"Henry!" Anne scolds from her spot on the floor in front of the fireplace, blanket over her legs, warming her hands.

"In the kitchen," George says, "firing squad not included. I don't think, anyway."

"Great," Henry says, "fantastic, let me…"

He sets the laptop down on the floor and gets up, walks into the kitchen with George as his escort.

George takes a seat at the round table near one of the kitchen windows. He's already poured himself a bowl of popcorn (*I mean, it's only right*) that's waiting for him there, in anticipation of this event.

"Yes, sir?" Henry asks, chin up.

"Did you drive?" Thomas asks, making squares the lasagna with a metal spatula, jabbing it harder than is strictly necessary, probably, George thinks, as the action is making rather loud scraping sounds.

"No, I took the train."

"Hm. I didn't think people like you took the train."

"What is *that* supposed to mean?"

"Don't you have a private jet, car service, your own car, all at your disposal?"

"I have all those things," Henry says, eyes smoldering, "but I don't take the jet to a place that takes three hours by train."

"Hm. How *noble* and *green* of you."

"I didn't say it was," he says evenly, "sir."

"Do you have a place to stay?"

"I'm looking for a hotel right now--"
"Local news channel says no one is supposed to leave their residence," Thomas says, pulling plates out of the cupboard above the coffeemaker and setting them on the stove, "and while this isn't your residence, it's where your body happens to be located. So you'll have to stay the night. The weather is supposed to clear by tomorrow."

"Are you sure? I don't want to put you out--"

"Yes, well," Thomas says, turning his back to Henry as he turns the faucet on the sink, filled with the dirty dishes, with hot water, steaming as it pours, making condensation against the window above it, "we all have to do things we don't want, sometimes, don't we?"

_The shade! The burn! The innuendo, the trademark Boleyn snark_, George thinks as he shoves popcorn into his mouth, watching Henry's jaw twitch, pleased that he's fifteen dollars richer now.

"You'll sleep downstairs," Thomas continues as he takes a glass from the cupboard and fills it with water, "you are not to go upstairs, for any reason. You have no reason to. There's a bathroom here, downstairs."

"But, Dad," George interjects, "there's no shower down here."

"Fine. You may use the bathroom upstairs, tomorrow morning, provided that we are all here, downstairs. Am I being clear?"

"Very clear, sir."

"Wonderful. Rest assured, if you decide to ignore anything I've just laid out, you are gone. You can sleep outside and turn blue, for all I care," Thomas says with a smile as he leans against the counter and drinks his water.

"Well, we don't want that," George says solemnly, resting his chin in his hands.

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_441 E 87th St, Upper East Side, New York_

"Mar?"

Marina knocks on her older sister's bedroom door, a few more taps, but no answer.

She tries for the doorknob, and it's unlocked. Somehow this worries her more than if it'd been locked. That would, at least, be normal. Margaret always locks her door, always makes a big deal about it, makes the same "stay the hell out of my room" speeches that Henry does.

This means she didn't care enough to lock it, and that feels significant to Marina, somehow.

Marina opens the door.

It's dark in the room, save for a lamp that's turned on by the nightstand. The velvet, burgundy curtains that adorn the tall windows are closed shut.

There's a huge pile of blankets on the bed in the center of the room, the one with a canopy over it, but no Margaret.

"Margaret, where--"

"Mmmm."
Marina follows the sound, walks over to the side of the bed with the nightstand, and sees a mass of auburn curls on the pillow, her sister under them, eyes open, covered in a mountain of blankets all the way up to her nose.

"What's wrong?" Marina asks gently, pulling one of the blankets down (Margaret doesn't resist) over her face, "are you sick? You've been in here all day."

"Not sick."

"Then what's wrong?"

"Everything is terrible," Margaret croaks, and Marina notes that her lips are dry and cracked, leaves her bed and searches through Margaret's pink mini-fridge, in between the cloth mannequin that has a dress over it, and a bookshelf, pulls out a mini Evian and gives the bottle to Margaret, but she doesn't touch it, just leaves it by the nightstand.

"You have to drink water, Margaret," Marina snaps, "no wonder you feel awful."

Margaret shrugs-- or it looks like a shrug, most of her is still under covers, and she hasn't even bothered to sit up for this conversation.

Shaking her head, Marina climbs up onto the bed and uncaps the water and puts it to her sister's mouth. She drinks, greedily, but ends up sputtering and coughing some of it out (probably because she still hasn't bothered to sit up, Marina notes with some annoyance), and wipes the back of her hand with her mouth.

"Do you think he's dead?" Margaret asks, quietly.

"Do I think who's dead?" Marina asks, panicked.

"Arthur…do you think--"

"Oh, no," Marina says with a sigh, relieved, she strokes Margaret's hair, tucking a loose curl behind her ear, "no, no, of course he's not. We would know, don't you think? A gut feeling of some sort?"

"I don't know," Margaret says, finally sitting up against her numerous pillows, revealing a peach satin nightgown, her hair fuzzy and the victim of static at the ends, caught as it is against the lace the borders the top, pulling the blankets to her waist, "would we? How would we know if he had? Dad doesn't know where he is--"

"I'm sure he knows, he knows everything, he just won't tell us--"

"He doesn't call, he doesn't write…it's not like him. It's just not," Margaret says, pulling open a drawer on the nightstand, she removes something from it.

It's a lighter and a pack of Gauloises, blue, the cancer warning written in French. Margaret takes one out, places it in her plump and pretty mouth, and lights it.

"You'll set off the smoke detector--"

"No I won't. I disabled it," Margaret informs her sister, taking a deep drag.

"Margaret!"

"What?"
She taps the ashes into a cup on the nightstand, and Marina startles when she recognizes the cup, the tiny roses painted onto the white background with excruciating detail, the gold paint on the handle...

"What are you doing?"

"Smoking."

"That is Mom's china," Marina says, taking it away, she dumps the ashes into a trash bin, "what's wrong with you?!"

"Like I give a shit," Margaret says, "and I doubt she does…she's dead."

"I'm rinsing this out--"

"Sometimes I wish I was dead," Margaret says, blowing a perfect ring of smoke, absently, in the same tone one would use to say "lovely weather today, isn't it?"

"Don't say that, Margaret, never say that!"

Margaret shrugs.

"Don't worry," she says, "I'm just feeling a bit blue, I guess…you know me. I'll be happy again in no time."

Marina nods, but this doesn't reassure her. Because the thing is, Margaret is probably right: she will be happy again. She goes in cycles of sadness and happiness, but her happiness contains edges. It involves her talking a mile a minute, buying mountains of clothes, laughing at everything (even at the most inappropriate of times). It involves Margaret drinking like the Prohibition starts tomorrow, staying up for nights on end dancing, painting, or writing, but going out running at 4 AM despite all this.

When Margaret is happy, it makes Marina nervous. She's not even sure if it should be called happiness, really, but she doesn't know what else to call it-- she's up like a soaring kite, cheerful like a game-show host, she's smiling, smiling, smiling, so it has to be happiness, right?

What else could it be?

1526 Hever Road, Washington, D.C.

"What are you doing?" Henry asks.

Anne, hair tied in a ponytail, is standing by the sink, her back to him.

"Washing the dishes," she answers, "what does it look like I'm doing?"

"By hand?" he asks, leaving the doorway of the kitchen and walking towards her, "your dishwasher's there."

"It's on the fritz from the power outage, so Dad said not to use it," Anne explains, shaking a plate as water droplets fly before placing it in the rack.

"Then I'll help," Henry says, pushing up the sleeves of his sweater, "I had dinner too, after all."

And an awkward dinner it had been. Anne's father wasn't there, he had left to go eat in his study, but Mary had been, and her iciness was palpable. George had obviously done his best to smooth it over,
showed Henry his various Twitter accounts (almost all of them had made Henry laugh) on his phone, asked him if he knew much about coding (he didn't), explained what he was learning about it and how he had learned (a few classes, but self-taught, for the most part...he seemed to know a lot for being that way, but Henry assumed that was the Boleyn smarts).

Still, even as Anne tried to prompt conversation from her sister, Mary's chilly demeanor remained the same. She hadn't spoken a word the entire meal, and had glared at Henry over every bite of food.

Henry couldn't really imagine that being out fifteen dollars from a bet bothered her *that* much. Maybe it was more of a pride thing (*or*, he admitted to himself begrudgingly, *maybe it's more of a 'me' thing*).

"You're the guest, you shouldn't," Anne says with a smile.

"Not an invited one. I think that changes the Miss Manners rules, don't you?"

"Have you ever washed a dish?" she asks skeptically, a single eyebrow raised.

"I'm sure I can figure it out," he says impishly, reaching over the sink, he eases the slick coffee mug and sponge from her hands, winking at her as he does so.

"Fine," Anne says, crossing her arms, she walks backwards till she's in front of the drying rack, giving him his space, "let's see how you do, then."

He smirks, uses the scratchy end of the sponge to scrape off the dried milk and coffee residue at the bottom, but it doesn't seem to be working. Henry empties the mug of the water, squeezes a generous portion of soap from the clear dishwashing liquid bottle, and fills it with water again, only to find an avalanche of soap bubbles cascading down his hands, filling the bottom of the sink with suds.

"What the hell?"

"A little goes a long way," Anne says, "you only need to use a drop."

"I can see that."

"Want me to help you--"

"No," he insists, "I have it under control, thanks."

"Right."

Henry continues to scrub, but the soap makes his hands slippery, and the mug ends up falling in the sink.

"Fuck!"

Anne giggles, grabs the small hand towel that was hanging from a ring near the drying rack and says, "Switch with me."

"What?"

"There are two sinks, switch with me," she says, pushing on his shoulder with the palm of her hand to emphasize her request.

He does, moving over to the sink closest to the drying rack and cupboards, as she moves over to his previous spot, like some sort of dance.
"I'll wash," she says, standing on her tip-toes and swinging the hand towel over his shoulder, "and you can dry. Try not to break anything."

"I'm not going to 'break anything'," he quotes her in a high pitched tone, pulling the hand towel from over his shoulder and using it to hit hers.

"Ah!" she protests.

She flicks a piece of soap foam at him, and it lands on his nose.

"You. Did. Not."

"Mm-hmm," she says, nodding, "I think I did! It's a good look for you."

"Is it?" he asks, scooping a hand into the soapy dishwater in her sink, "are you sure about that?"

"Henry, don't--"

He smooths a handful of soap foam over her hair.

"It was looking a little dirty, anyway," he says, "that should help. You're welcome."

"Just curious, do you want to be ended?" Anne asks, nodding, she grabs another hand towel from a rung on the island and uses it to dry her hair, "Because it seems like you want to be ended."

"Seems like someone can dish it out but can't take it."

"No," she says morosely, before going back to the sink and start washing a dish, "I guess not."

"Anne," Henry says, "I'm sorry."

She gives a sad little nod, rinses the plate after cleaning it, then turns to him, pouting.

"It was only a joke--what?!" he yells as she laughs, because it's just as he's trying to apologize that she's poured a plate full of water onto his sweater, and it's cold, and it soaks him through to the skin.

"This," he snaps, pulling the sweater over his head and revealing the t-shirt underneath, "is cashmere. Do you know what water does," he asks, balling the sweater up in his hands, "to cashmere, Boleyn?"

"Nothing good, I imagine," she says with faux concern, biting her lip, eyes wide.

"It shrinks."

"Oh," Anne says with a smirk, clearly enjoying the innuendo, "well, that's the opposite of what we usually want, isn't it?"

Henry laughs, eyes darkening, and licks his lips once, and only once, while he shakes the sweater out and says, "I'm hanging this so it's not completely ruined. Where's your laundry room?"

"I'll hang it for you," she says, holding a hand out.

"I don't trust you."

"Fine," she says, rolling her eyes, "follow me, then."
"Why's he here?"

Thomas Boleyn looks up from the outline on his future article (about the Treaty of Versailles, a passion project he's been putting off for while) to his eldest daughter, standing in his doorway, wearing a plaid pajama set.

"It's a storm, Mary," he sighs, impatiently, taking his glasses off, "I don't like it, either, but what would you have me do? It's not as if I can control the weather."

She nods, her brow furrowed, and says, "Right, of course. What can you do?"

Mary knocks on the frame of his door three times, ducking her head, and turns.

"I'm sorry," Thomas says.

Mary pauses, looks up at him, clearly stunned, her dark blue eyes shining bright, rosebud mouth slightly agape in wonder.

"I'm sorry if," he clears his throat, takes a cloth and starts to clean the lenses of his glasses, "I ever gave you the impression that I somehow…admired you less. Than your siblings."

"What other impression did you expect me to get? You never came to any of my--"

"It was hard for me," he admits, "to be around you…after. You look so much like her. It was hard for me."

"What, and that's my fault?"

"No, of course not, Mary," Thomas says, sighing again, he sets his glasses down (it's not like he's reading anymore, after all, and he's farsighted), rubbing his temples, "I'm not trying to make excuses, I just thought you deserved to know why--"

"You just expect me, to like, fall at your feet and forgive you, like everything's okay now--"

"Mary, I promise you, I don't expect--"

"But I can't, because it's not, it's not okay, and you haven't even apologized for what I've asked you to apologize for!"

"What are you talking about--"

"It hurts!" she bursts out, hands over her heart, she shakes her head, "oh my God, Daddy, it hurts so much…"

"Mary…"

She uses the back of her hands to wipe the tears that are falling down her cheeks, still shaking her head.

"It hurts," she says, "it hurts when you diminish what I do like you did…what I have to do…because of the situation you put me in. Because you wouldn't pay for college, or even help, I had to get a scholarship, and I wanted to do dance anyway, but it's what I'm good at, I couldn't have gotten an academic one, you know that, you have to know that by now--"

"Oh," he tuts, squirming in his seat, uncomfortable, "Mary, I'm sure you could--"
"I couldn't! Oh my God, no I couldn't have, and you still don't get it, you think that, I was, like, lazy or something, you still don't get that if I could have I would have gotten better grades, I would've done anything," she says, voice completely breaking, shoulders shaking as she crosses her arms around herself, defensively, "I would have done anything for your approval; I would've if I could've, Daddy, please believe that--"

"Mary--"

"It hurts. It hurts me. It's not fair, and it hurts, it hurts when you or Anne say, oh, she's so sweet, she never gets mad, and I do, I do get mad, I'm just always so afraid to show it," Mary says, shaking her head, "that I never do, and that's what you expect, so…I know you don't like emotions, because of what happened to Mom, I know they make you afraid, and I understand, I understand, I--"

"I'm not 'afraid of emotions', Mary, honestly, what a thing to say!"

"Dad," she says, staring at him, dark blues boring into him, "please. When I cried at Mom's funeral, you told me to 'stop making a scene."

"I did?"

"Yes! You think I would forget something like that?"

"I…then I apologize, that wasn't an appropriate thing to say. I prefer to grieve in private, but that doesn't mean that I should've--"

"Wasn't an appropriate thing to say? I was eleven."

"And I said I was," Thomas says, choking back a sob, he rubs his forehead with one hand, holding his head up as his elbow rests against the desk, "sorry."

He's closed his eyes on the last word, but he hears the chair opposite to him roll, squeak against the floor, feels his daughter take his hand in hers, feels her thumb, cool and soft, roll over his knuckles.

"It was very hard for me," he says, "I'm sure I was much harsher to you than I should've been, I don't doubt it, but people always blame…the husbands in these kinds of deaths, and I already felt as if everyone was looking, and--"

"No one blamed you, Dad, I promise," Mary says in a voice full of tears, "no one blamed you any more than they blamed us, which was not at all--"

"No one blamed you, Dad, I promise," Mary says in a voice full of tears, "no one blamed you any more than they blamed us, which was not at all--"

"It's not the children's responsibility to look for warning signs, it's the spouse's, Mary," he says, patting her hand, "that's just the way it is."

"No one knew she was unhappy, Daddy. No one knew she had stopped taking her-- her meds, none of us knew. No one blamed you, we didn't blame you, I don't blame you, I never did, not even for a second," she promises, taking his hand in hers and kissing it, tenderly, a tear rolling down her nose and onto his hand as she does.

He doesn't believe what she says, that he bears no blame, but it's comforting that she cares enough to say it, nonetheless.

They sit for a moment in silence, holding hands, before he tries to right himself.

"Thank you," he says, voice hoarse, "that's…alright," he says, laughing, grabbing a tissue from the
box and blowing his nose, "Lord, I'm a mess."

"You're fine," she says, smiling sweetly.

"That's quite enough of that, I think," he says, and she giggles, so he continues, "What say you and I give that Tudor boy a run for his money, hmm?"

"What do you mean?" she asks, eyes sparkling in mirth.

"I have a few ideas," he says, nodding to the door, "come, let's go."

Chapter End Notes

so this was a pretty heavy chapter. just some things i'd like to add, they're a bit personal, so if that makes you uncomfortable i'd skip ahead:

margaret is undiagnosed bipolar. elizabeth boleyn was bipolar. i feel that i have the authority to write my characters this way, because i myself am bipolar. i have experienced both what it is like to be off meds and undiagnosed, and what it is like to be on meds.

i didn't want anyone to assume i was sensationalizing mental illness, or glamorizing it in any way. so i wanted to add that explanation, in case anyone felt that way.

there's this lovely aesthetic post for henry's character that my friend on tumblr made, if you would like to check it out: http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/139074405082/sckestkids-whitehall-university-aesthetics-a
Oh. Apparently that was thought aloud.

"the past is just a prologue. it all starts from here." - gossip girl

Anne opens the back door of the house, empty recycling bin in hand, closing it behind her.

She's still holding the bin, humming to herself, when she passes the living room.

Where Henry and her father are shaking hands, staring at each other as if this is a wrestling match rather than a handshake or introduction

Over the years George and Anne have developed a sort of sibling quasi-telepathy. It hasn't faded in the years they've been apart, it seems, because as Anne's dark brown eyes widen and she gestures to this handshake/hyper masculinity display with the blue bin in her left hand, he knows what she means is what the fuck is going on here or, alternatively, how long has this been going on?

He tries to give her a nonverbal answer best he can, shrugging while he sits on the couch and also shaking his head slowly, something he hopes conveys I haven't clue one…and you don't want to know.

Mary, sitting next to him with a copy of the French Glamour magazine, giggles as she pretends to read an article about color palettes to match your skin tone, when she's really paying as much attention to this display as her brother is. She seemed to be expecting it, actually…she had practically pranced down the stairs with her father and all but sashayed over to the couch next to George, an eat-shit smile on her pretty face.

"Good handshake, great handshake, let's go," Thomas says, withdrawing his hand, he walks briskly over the coat hanger by the front door.

"Dad," Anne says, "what are you--"

Thomas whistles as he takes Henry's coat from the hook, patting through the pockets, until he pulls out a black leather wallet.

"Dad," Anne says again, ditching the recycling bin, which lands on the wood floor with a thud, in front of the TV, "you can't just go through his stuff--"

"He's staying in my house, so I absolutely can, thank you," Thomas says, flipping through cards in plastic sheets as Henry watches, stunned.
"You're 25 and still enrolled as an undergrad?" Thomas inquires, holding out a white, laminated card.

"No," Henry says, shortly, crossing his arms.

"Well," he drawls, flipping the card over in his hand, Thomas pulls his reading glasses from his pocket and examines it more closely, squinting, "this doesn't say you're Henry Tudor. It says you're Leif Erikson. And that you're 25. Why would that be?"

Henry's face is stony, jaw set, red blooms over his cheeks. George can't hear anything to suggest it, but something about the way the muscles in his face spasm seem to suggest that he's probably gritting his teeth-- George knows the look, as it's a bad habit he used to have himself, caught several times in family photos.

"Gee, Dad," Mary says, flipping a page in her magazine, "I'd hazard a guess that it's a fake ID."

"Interesting theory. Thoughts, Henry?" Thomas asks, placing the card back in the wallet, he puts it back in the pocket and pulls something else out (God help him, George thinks, the poor bastard could have loads of incriminating items in his coat, who knows with rich kids…George is already on the edge of his seat but if his father pulls out a bag of coke next he is going to lose his shit, he's already a breath away from pulling his hair out in second-hand embarrassment).

"What's this?" he asks, holding up a pack of Marlboro Lights-- shiny gold and white cardboard, he holds the box up like it's evidence at a trial, which, George supposes, this is, of sorts.

Henry remains silent, stoic. Exercising his Fifth Amendment right is probably the right move to make, given that there's not much he can say to defend himself-- nothing George can think of, anyway.

"Do you smoke?"

"I…" Henry's gaze travels to the floor, he looks back up, making eye contact with Anne, whose cheeks are reddening, standing next to her father, hand on his elbow as if she could hold him back, Henry mumbles, "sometimes, socially."

"No one smokes in my house."

"I wouldn't have--"

"No one smokes on my porch, either, if that's what you were thinking."

"No, I wouldn't--"

"Actually, these aren't allowed in here at all," Thomas says, tilting his head to the side, "so I'll get rid of them for you."

"You can't get rid of his stuff, Dad," Anne insists, trying to wrest the pack from his hands, "that's not--"

"I can," he says, nodding.

"It's not fair-- George smokes, too!"

"What the hell, Anne?" George says, throwing his hands up.

"Do you?" his father asks him.
"No," George says, "of course I don't--"

Thomas returns to the coat rack, removes Henry's, then George's coat, fishing around in the pockets, he pulls out a pack of Parliaments.

*Goddamn it.*

"I'll take the trash out," Thomas says with a smile, "I *think* it'll be full after these two."

---

George and Henry stand together under a large umbrella, five blocks down from the Hever House, smoking cigarettes.

Anne, feeling guilty about throwing her brother under the bus (George assumes-- *I mean, she* better), had offered them a pack she said was hidden under her floorboards. She had warned it might be stale, but addicts go for anything, even Salem Light Menthols (held in a girly, pretty pale green package with a golden strip, they taste like cough drops, to George, but nicotine is nicotine, after all, and with the closest gas station over a mile away in the snow, he's not about to be picky).

Thomas Boleyn has since turned in, of course (they're not *idiots*, after all), and if he wakes to his son and Henry Tudor walking into his front door…well, they'll have to make something up. But George has packs of mints and gum in his coat pocket, just in case.

Snow falls against the umbrella in soft pats when Henry's phone goes off.

"Here," he says, passing the handle to George, taking another drag from the cigarette between fingerless gloves as he answers it.

George holds it over them, grateful the wind has subsided somewhat, at least-- it can be hell to keep these things lit otherwise.

"Hello?" Henry says, brow furrowing.

"Yes sir," he says, taking another drag and rolling his eyes, "well, you said to only email you for the next few days since…yes. Well, they're not alone, Esperanza's with them, isn't she? Yes, I did. Yes, *I did.* Check your email."

George finishes his cigarette, puts it out on the sidewalk, holding the umbrella up high with one hand as he rolls his foot over it, kicking it into the grass.

"Well, you didn't say that, did you? You said for any reason-- well, now I know leaving the state doesn't count, thanks. No, sir. I took the Amtrak. *Because,* Henry says, putting his own out, placing the phone on speaker while he does and shouting, "the car service gives me no new information, *does it?* Amtrak has an app, and is working on its appeal to the youth market-- trains are throwback, unique, *scenic*--"

"They're trying for *hipster* appeal?" George hears the voice on the other end, deep and rich and filled with disdain.

"Yes," Henry says, pressing a button on his screen and putting it back up to his ear, "as usual, they're trying for hipster appeal. They're terribly annoying, but they throw money around like nobody's business-- well, I'm…"

Henry trails off, his gaze sliding over to George.
"I'm making a business connection. Big social media presence, I was lucky to score a meeting at all, so of course I had to come right away; I do apologize for the lack of notice... yes, the weather's bad, though, so I'm landlocked for the night. Should be back tomorrow, I'll leave morning or early afternoon...it's a flex ticket, so whenever. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Well, send my love to them. Yes. Good night," he says, ending the call and sliding his phone back into his jacket pocket.

"Who was that?" George asks, passing the umbrella back to him (it's heavy, industrial, and George hasn't hit a gym in approximately a year or so).

"My father," Henry says, gaze distant, fixed on the house in front of them, its wraparound porch, eyes flicking to the small stained glass window above, fractured in pieces of purple and gold, a red rose in the center of it.

"Your father," George says incredulously, "you call your father 'sir'?"

"'Course...what do you call yours?"

"Um...’Dad’?"

"Interesting. You need a job," Henry says, abruptly, taking the umbrella above their heads and pulling it shut (it's stopped snowing since George asked him who he was talking to), "yes?"

"Yeah? Is it so obvious?"

Henry gestures to, well, all of George, basically, from his coat with holes adorning the sleeves to his jeans with ripped kneecaps, ending with his paint-splattered combat boots.

"Ouch," George says, beginning the walk back home, "but, fair enough."

"There's an opening in Los Angeles. A social media internship. It pays, though not well...I could probably arrange a Skype interview for you. You have that?"

"I...I do, but...I'm probably not the most qualified--"

"Well, I wouldn't open with that. But what makes you think so?" Henry inquires, voice lilting upwards on the last words.

"I don't even have an Associate's degree, for one, much less a Bachelor's."

"You're funny, you have popular Twitter accounts, and those accounts have strong ties to the LGBT community, from what I've seen. And that's mainly what they're looking for, with this. I'll put a good word in of course, but," he says with a shrug, "it shouldn't be a problem."

"Really? Are you sure?" George asks.

Typically George's motto is that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is. But this is a billionaire's son that's most likely in love with his sister, so...he allows himself to feel a little bit of hope at this prospect.

"It matters less nowadays. It's probably actually harder to garner a popular social media presence than it is obtain a degree. Because it can't be paid for, really."

"I see. Thank you for this," George says, "honestly, I've been a long time looking."

"Don't mention it," Henry says as they walk up the pathway through the front yard of the Hever House, he turns on his heel, facing George and says, "um, actually, literally...could you not?
Mention it?"

George tilts his head to the side, watching as Henry scratches the nape of his neck, his face twisted in consternation.

"To Anne?" Henry elaborates, putting his hands in his pockets, "could you not to mention it to Anne?"

"Uh…sure," he says, slowly, "why not, though?"

"Just…promise. Please?"

Well, shit.

George isn't sure how his sister's managed to resist Henry's advances thus far (Has she, though? He makes a mental note to ask.) because with those shining blue eyes, those long, fluttering lashes, that shy little smile…he's almost tempted to kiss him himself.

"Okay," he says with a shrug, "but why?"

He's endlessly inquisitive, a trait that has annoyed almost everyone since George started kindergarten, but it's not really something he can help. Or, at this point, something he wants to help.

Henry worries his bottom lip, kicks a rock on the path onto the grass.

"I don't…I don't want it to affect any of her choices."

"I see," George says, unable to keep a note of shock from his voice.

He'd figured the primary reason for Henry's career help was to tell Anne about it, to impress her. He really doesn't know George from Adam…could he just genuinely want to help him? Is such a thing possible, that someone who has everything doles out generosity with no ulterior motive?

Probably not, he thinks as he walks up the steps of the porch, but color me surprised, nevertheless.

Anne's routine before going to bed that night begins as it usually does. She puts calming music on, and brushes her hair with a silver brush, counting out a hundred strokes.

She washes her face clean of makeup, then lathers her arms, face, and neck with her favorite lotion, scented with honey, peaches and jasmine.

However, she doesn't usually shave her legs before bed (George's earlier words echo through her mind: and are you planning on letting him touch your legs?). Nor does she usually wear a bra to bed. Or dab her mouth with lip gloss.

She puts on her cutest pajamas: black, silky yoga pants that end in a lace trim at the bottoms, and a cotton black cami, and a soft, black capped-short-sleeve, button-down tee layered over that.

Anne settles into bed, pulls her covers up over her chest, and turns to turn her lamp off.

And lies there.

And lies there.

Her hand strays past her hips and is just about to cup her mound when she withdraws it, frustrated,
bites her fist instead before pulling the covers off and getting out of bed, pushing her feet into the black silk slippers on the throw rug by her bedside.

Of course she can't sleep, she reasons with herself, turning her lamp back on, she walks over the mirror and smooths a hand over her hair, she's thirsty. She forgot to bring a glass of water up to her bedroom. She always has one with her before she falls asleep, ever since she was nine years old. It's comforting.

Anne turns the light on above the stove, and it casts a soft glow in the kitchen.

She pads over to the cupboard, opens it, reaches in and pulls out a tall glass. Goes to the sink, and fills it to the top with water.

Takes a sip, and sets it down on the island.

Her hands feel restless, itchy, like they need to do something, so she pulls a sheet from the paper towel roll holder next to the stovetop, wets it in the sink, and wipes at the stovetop, catching crumbs as she does.

"Sorry-- do you want me to go?"

Anne looks over her shoulder to Henry, standing in the doorway, eyes bleary, face cleanly shaved, one of her brother's old t-shirts on (a band tee from his grunge phase, it's black, *Nirvana* written across the front in white block letters), and his sweatpants, too, she supposes, since he didn't come with any.

"No, you're fine," she says, rubbing a spot that's already clean on the stove, almost hurting her wrist with the force.

He walks in, past her, asks, "glasses…?" and she tosses the used paper towel into the trash that's under the counter by the cupboard, opens it and pulls one out for him, passing it to him.

"Thank you," he says as he fills it.

He leans against the counter near the sink and drinks.

Anne stays leaning against the counter with the stovetop, arms crossed, facing him.

"Hey," he says, smiling, setting the glass down.

"Hey," she responds, equally soft, her arms have goosebumps (heat rises and now she's downstairs, maybe that's it, she thinks), so she crosses her arms, and rubs them, and thinks, *why me?*

"Why you?" Henry asks, brow furrowed.

*Oh*. Apparently that was thought aloud.

"Yeah," she continues, because, *oh well*, "I mean…you have plenty of girls in your phone, I'm sure. Why me? Why my house? Why…I'm sure there are a lot of girls that would be fine with dating you, for a college experience. Even if they knew you'd marry someone else in the end."

"I've already…” he laughs, shakes his head, and takes another drink of water, "I've already answered this. Please don't make me say it again."

Anne notices that his coppery gold hair is longer now, thick, as he runs his a hand through it, loose,
almost curly, that it was tight to his head before and that must've been product (he must've snuck a shower in and washed his hair, despite her father's warning, and ...well, now that's a distracting thought, and she shakes her head, as if that would rid her of the visual).

"I feel like my letters have made anything I say at this point, redundant. Except the things that were too embarrassing to write, that is," he explains, sticking his hands in the pockets of his grey sweats.

"What's too embarrassing?"
He clears his throat, and walks towards her.
"You," he says, taking her hand and kissing it, "burn so bright...to me. Did you know that?"

She shakes her head, slowly, transfixed by the dark blue of his eyes, how they contrast the golden hue of his cheeks, the smoothness of them, she wants to rub a hand against them to feel the lack of stubble there but doesn't, stares instead, and imagines doing it.

"I don't think of anyone else," he continues, "all I can seem to think about is what I've seen...what I haven't seen, what I'd like to see."

"What you'd like to see," she echoes, "what do you mean?"

The clock on the wall behind him, an analog, reads 1:00 AM. A completely irrelevant detail, maybe, but one she notes anyway, in the back of her mind she thinks maybe she'll want to remember the time, store it away for later.

He hasn't let go of her hand yet, turns and backs up to the counter with the stovetop, rests his back against it and shifts her, till her back's against his chest, snakes one arm around her waist.

She can feel the warmth of his chest, it blooms against the previous chill on her back, erasing it entirely.

Anne doesn't stop him, can't even pretend that she wants to, melts when he lifts her hair from her back and drapes it all over her right shoulder, exposing her neck.

She feels his hand, warm, slide up her arm, dip under the cap of her shirt, feels two of his fingers tug her bra strap, then slide it down her shoulder. He leaves it there, hanging on the side.

"Guess," he whispers, hand cupping her shoulder, thumb brushing her shoulder blade.

Henry pushes the strap back up under the short, capped sleeve, clears his throat, withdraws his arm from her waist, slowly, gently, and she turns to face him but backs up into the island, rests her back against it.

Anne hates, and hates and hates as the realization that she wanted him to leave his hands there, wanted his hands to write a story against her body(rather than just whisper a prologue), settles around her.

He wants to play that game? Well, Anne can play, too, and better.

*Let him suffer,* she thinks, scanning his face, the *infuriating* soft, sweet smile on his lips, the *infuriating* dip of his head, as if he were *bashful* or some ridiculous thing. He says he's suffering but how much can he be, really? When he's made no mention of ending the engagement, or even about attempting to, for that matter, when he didn't even bother telling her about it in the first place…
He doesn't get to play the noble one, pretend to be pure with these stupidly chaste touches, tease her and then let her almost stumble out of his embrace.

Forget cradling her face, forget tracing it with his hands, forget lifting her hair and sliding his fingers down her neck, forget holding her hand, forget touching her hair…

He wants to up the ante? That's just fine by her. Consider it upped.

Because it's not fair, it's not fair to make her feel this way, knowing how conflicted she is.

It's. Not. Fair.

So it's her turn to be unfair.

Anne unbuttons the top button of her outer shirt, slowly, gaze locked on him.

"Anne, what--"

She puts a finger to her lips in the 'shush' gesture, shakes her head, loosening another button with her other hand.

Of course, she's wearing cami underneath, but Henry doesn't know that. And she knows he doesn't know.

But a camisole's certainly more revealing, tighter than the shirt she was wearing over it, hugging her curves, and he doesn't exactly look disappointed when she finishes unbuttoning. "Reverent" might be a more fitting description, actually, but Anne's gaze is fixed on a spot above his shoulder, not quite brave enough to meet his, so she doesn't know that.

"You said you wanted to see…so, see," she whispers, rolling the sleeves off her shoulders, she places the shirt on the island and strides over to him.

"What do you think? You like what you see?" she inquires, tilting her head to the side.

"You're…" he extends an arm, rubs his hand up and down her arm, "you're freezing--"

"Yeah? Keep me warm, then," she says, placing a hand against the plane of his chest, she can feel the beat of his heart.

He doesn't look at her but at the floor.

Anne withdraws her hand. This isn't nearly as easy as she thought it would be, but she hasn't lost yet.

"What, suddenly you're shy now? You certainly weren't shy before."

He looks up, pained expression on his face, the tips of his ears turning red.

She takes his hand, gently, and pulls him along behind her. Luckily he follows without protest, perhaps thinking that she'll be gentle now, but this is only subterfuge, point A to point B.

Point B is the wall with the window, the space in between the table and the dishwasher, a compact one, but one certainly big enough for two.

She lets go of his hand and leans against the wall, this space, and he takes the farthest seat possible from her, closer to the doorway than the wall with the window.
"Or maybe," she continues as he remains frustratingly silent, "you expect me to be shy."

"Tell me, Henry," Anne says, smoothing a hand over her hip, "what exactly is it," then the small of her waist, "that you think," then over her chest, "I have to be shy about?"

"Enlighten me," she says, dragging her hand back down to her hip, then letting it fall to her side with a shrug.

"Your dad's upstairs," he points out, voice low, a warning.

"Didn't seem to bother you before," she counters, batting her eyelashes.

He is clutching the end of the table, as if it's the only thing that's keeping him in his seat.

"Gosh," Anne says, yawning, she drags a hand across her stomach, tucks two fingers into the front of her cami, and pulls it downwards, then stretches the bottom of it, too, so that the top of it is farther down her cleavage, "y'know, the thing about touching yourself," she continues, cupping her neck in one hand, then tracing her collarbone from left to right with the other, "is that it can get boring--because you always know what's coming," she brushes the cotton of the camisole, right where the underwire of her bra is, above her rib cage, "though, in a pinch, if no one's willing, it'll do--"

And then Henry is there, suddenly (finally, she thinks), some blur of movement she missed, somehow, hands flat against the wall, breathing heavily, eyes fervent, and says, "I don't like this."

"Then do something about it."

"Anne," he says (begs, really, she notices with some satisfaction), brushing his nose against hers, then, lowly, as he brushes his hand against her ribcage, "tell me to stop."

"Please tell me to stop," he says, voice hoarse as he traces a circle on her bare skin, on what she exposed of her décolletage in her 'adjusting' display.

Anne juts her chin out.

"No," she says emphatically, and the second the word has left her lips his are on hers, gentle, soft, and pliant, yielding as she slides her tongue into his mouth, his hands find their way to her hair and he pulls it, and she bites him, hard, in payback.

"You do," she whispers against his mouth as his hands grip her hips, he pulls her closer to him, then turns so his back's resting against the round table, and then she's with him there, "you do think I have something to be shy about, you didn't even say anything--"

Henry kisses her neck, all the way down to her collarbone, hand cupping her bare left shoulder, other hand tangled in her hair as she says, "you were disappointed, you'd rather I stayed covered up--"

"You're," he interrupts, cradling her face in his hands, thumb on each cheek, then kisses her, slow and soft and open, pulls away and continues, "fucking," bites one of her earlobes, "gorgeous," he says as he slides a hand up under her camisole, her stomach cool and smooth under his palm, "shut the fuck up."

"You shut the fuck up," she hisses, tugging the end of his borrowed shirt, she slides a hand up there, touches his abs, hot under her skin, like he's burning, a contrast to the iciness of her own hand, shaking with nerves.
"How about you both shut the fuck up," George whisper-shouts from the doorway of the kitchen, peeking his head in. "some of us are trying to sleep around--"

George's sentence is interrupted by a tangle of wires hitting his shoulder. He catches it before it falls, just barely-- they're headphones.

"Keep them," Henry says, eyes bright and wild, before he dips his head again and kisses Anne again, his hand on the small of her back.

"Good man, good man," George says, untangling the headphones in his hands, he sticks the end into his phone and turns around, "carry on, then."

"I'm gonna fall," Anne says when he nuzzles the sensitive bit of skin behind her ear, "Henry, we have to sit down, I'm gonna--"

Henry lets go of her shoulders and leads her to the chair, flipping it so that it's facing the wall, and helps her into it. He moves the other one against the wall, and sits on that one.

"We should talk," he says, breath ragged, he cups a hand around his neck.

"Mm-hmm," she says, tugging the top of her leotard-thing (he should know the name, he has sisters, after all, but it's not really at the top of the list of things he's concerned with at the moment) upwards.

"Yes," he says, closing his eyes, "well--"

It's not like it's possible, but he swears, he swears, one second she was on her chair, and the next she's straddling him on his, one hand braced against the wall, one against his shoulder, and she kisses him hungrily, and he pulls away and groans no, buries his face into her neck because she smells, so, so good, like fruit and earthiness mixed with some undeniable essence of her, and she says yes and kisses him again, closed-mouthed and with only the slightest of pressures as she squeezes his shoulder in one hand, gently tracing his bottom lip with her tongue, and really, who is he to argue?

His hands are on her waist and she's just pulled away from the kiss to take a breath when she hears the top stair squeak.

"Oh my God," she whispers, and gets off him as quickly as possible, "oh my God, go back to wherever you were sleeping--"

"What?" he says, blinking owlishly, dazed.

"Go!" she hisses, running as quickly and silently as possible as she grabs her shirt off the island, "I'm going to the garage, you have to go back to the couch or wherever you were sleeping!"

Now, Henry has certainly had his fair share of uncomfortable boners in his time: there was always the unexpected lights-out checks at boarding school (which always came at the worst possible times, honestly), the occasional pool party during his preteen years, the rare one during class.

But, this particular occasion: him on his side, on the couch, facing the wall, while the father of the girl that caused it walks by and then putters around in the kitchen for an agonizing amount of time, probably takes the cake.

It's definitely up there, at any rate.
'Up there', he thinks silently snickering, then thinking, *God, why are you like this?*

Anne waits twenty minutes inside the garage before she ventures out, then goes upstairs, shutting her bedroom door gently behind her before she slides down it, sitting on the floor.

*Congrats,* she thinks, filled to the brim with self-loathing, *you played yourself.*

Anne wonders, as she lies in her bed later that night, sleep eluding her, how far she *would've* gone, exactly, had she not heard someone coming downstairs.

She's ashamed to say that she's not really sure.

She touches herself as she imagines how far it could've gone, though, and somehow she's not ashamed of that.

Chapter End Notes

well...ask and ye shall receive.

sorry it's been so long since an update. honestly, i have a job that's pretty time-consuming right now, and i'm going to be starting school pretty soon, so i'm not sure how often i'll be able to update. probably not as often as i have been, unfortunately.

i have a oneshot for henry/anne that's in a different modern verse (first chapter is unapologetic smut, jsyk) if anyone wants something to tide them over till the next one:

http://archiveofourown.org/works/6074823/chapters/13923135
Chapter Summary

Under different circumstances, on different porches, on different streets, she's sure girls are pierced straight through with joy upon hearing these very same words from the boys they want.

But these are not those.

Chapter Notes

December 17, 2016, Saturday, 10:15 AM

Henry stands on the front porch, bundled up in his coat and scarf, wearing the newly clean clothes (washed and dried this morning while he was still in the borrowed ones from George), waiting for…

Who knows?

He hadn't announced his departure, had simply picked up his clothes from the dryer, taken the cashmere sweater he had hung last evening after his and Anne's water-fight from its hanger, and went upstairs to the bathroom to change while the Boleyn family was still at the dining room table, remnants of breakfast spread across it.

The sky is a crisp grey, sunlight peeking through, like a halo, through the clouds. It warmed up considerably since last night, the snow is melted in small white lakes, tufts of grass peeking through.

Henry watches his breath as it leaves his mouth, appearing like a mist of spilled ink in the cold air. It reminds him of smoke, makes him crave a cigarette, but he has none to light up even if he was stupid enough to do so after Thomas Boleyn's speech.

He shouldn't wait anymore, so he pulls out his phone, taps the Uber app, and requests a ride to Union Station. The estimated wait time is longer than usual, over twenty minutes, perhaps on account of the road conditions.

The door opens, and he looks over to Anne, wrapped in a grey coat, faux fur trimming the hood, cheeks rosy, eyes bright and smiling (she smiles at him and Henry feels like the world's fallen off its axis, when he holds her face or hands, traces her neck, time slows to honey, when they kissed he felt the glaciers melt, standing next to her is like standing next to a precipice-- how is he supposed to go on like this? who could be expected-- how do people deal with this every day, he wonders).

"I thought maybe you were too uncomfortable to say goodbye," she says, closing the door, "I mean, I probably would be, if--"

"Be with me."

His words are short, a burst of bravery, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on her, trying to gauge her reaction.
His request knocks the wind out of her. Anne feels like a kid that's been nailed in the stomach by an errant soccer ball during a game.

Or, no, that's not even accurate.

Because while it's a shock to be hit while playing, running up and down the length of a field, it's somewhat expected.

What Anne feels is more akin to a kid on the sidelines, an innocent bystander, someone that didn't even know being hit was possible; someone that hadn't even known there had been a game going on, all along.

That sort of breathlessness, that level of shock.

Under different circumstances, on different porches, on different streets, she's sure girls are pierced straight through with joy upon hearing these very same words from the boys they want.

But these are not those.

"Be with you?" she asks, weighing each word carefully (because each word is heavy, after all).

"Yes," Henry says, head held high, tone confident.

"While you're engaged?"

"...yes," he says, with some hesitancy, less confident now.

"No!"

"Okay…mixed signals, much?" he asks, with a short bark of laughter, running one gloved hand over the hat atop his head.

"Yeah, because you don't give any of those," she counters.

"I fail to see how I have. Tell me."

Anne shakes her head, regretting the idea of a private goodbye, of any goodbye. She stares out at her front yard, at the salted pavement of the sidewalks.

"Are there…any other reasons?" he asks, tilting his head to the side.

"Other reasons?"

She wants to leave, but can't seem to make her feet move…a frustratingly familiar feeling.

It's like wherever he is, there she is, grounded, roots in. It's always felt painful to move away from him (though it wasn't a feeling she recognized, at first), like yanking a magnet in the opposite direction of which it's pulled.

Even way back, there was this tug. She ran into Percy's arms but felt lost, out of sorts. While Percy held her, she remembered the intent gaze of Amorous, and felt like something was fading that she didn't want to fade, almost as if something destined was being denied.

Walking away from him on the rooftop was painful, watching him walk away from her after he held her face in his hands in reverence in front of the Hugo fountain was doubly so.
"Other reasons like…?" she trails off, legs shaking, and takes a seat on the wooden bench in front of their living room window (the curtains are closed, but she feels like they may as well be on a television screen).

"I think," Henry says, walking over from the railing to the right of the front door and leaning against the railing that faces the bench, "that you're afraid."

"Afraid? You think I'm afraid?" she asks, brow furrowed, trying to breathe warmth into her hands against her fingerless gloves.

"I do."

Anne laughs, a laugh that sounds like it's a giggle caught in a sob.

"Yes," she says, "what do I have to be afraid of? Let's see…" she bites her lip, and taps her index against her chin, like a philosopher in a quandary, "well, first, there's me, signing a contract for heartbreak in two or three years, or whenever the wedding is--"

"Anne--"

She holds a hand up, palm outward, and looks at him. Carefully, she tries to observe him in an objective, calculating way, as a scientist might, rather than an emotional one.

It's-- she can't think of the word for it…he looks…helpless? Defenseless, maybe. It's more than his guard being down, it's an expression of total surrender. And it's so, so hard not to surrender back when faced with it, but she knows she can't, so she soldiers on:

"So, you got me, Henry, I'm afraid. I'm afraid because I know how to read to the end of something. And that's the end."

"I see. Anything else?" he asks with a shrug.

"Anything else? Sure, sure, lot's else: there's what happens-- what I've seen happen-- to the girls you date, of course, and that's just for starters--"

"No, it's different with you, I told you that, you would be the only one--"

"Oh my God," she says, laughing, rubbing her temples as if working out thick knots, "no, I wouldn't--"

"There wouldn't be anyone else, I swear, I wouldn't even think of anyone else, I--I already don't," he whispers, the last part, smiles, softly, and shrugs, "it wouldn't even be hard."

"Okay, fine, theoretically, there wouldn't be anyone else. You mean…what? No one else…besides Katherine?"

"Yes."

"Lucky me. Well, 'Beta Whore', is already taken," she says, clapping her hands together, "and Lizzy's already had stuff thrown at her, so I wonder what's left for me--"

"Anne, what are you--"

"And let's not forget, Andrea Hastings gets to follow you around like a puppy at parties, and around campus, so, hey, maybe I'll get that privilege in a year or so--"
"Anne!"

"What?" she snaps.

"That wouldn't be you," he says, fiercely, face flushed.

"Maybe not, but…you've let it happen before. What's to say you wouldn't let it happen to me?"

"What do you mean, I've let it happen before?"

"When people started calling Mary--"

"I told you I didn't start that," Henry says, desperation mounting (this is going downhill, and fast, and he wants to save it, so, so badly), "I never, ever--"

"I know you didn't start it!" she yells, tugging at her hair, grimacing, "God, of course I know that, but did you know it was happening? Did you do as much to stop it as you could have?"

"I…"

"Or did you just not pay much attention to it?"

He's at a loss, and while he fails to answer, Anne says, voice scarcely a whisper, nodding to herself, "Yeah, that's what I figured."

Henry was different back then, at the start of this school year. Even he can feel the ways he's changed since he danced with Perseverance, the ways he's changed since his first tutoring session.

He was selfish (still is, knows he's being selfish by asking her to be with him at all, under these circumstances, but he's trying to be less so, and that's the difference), only concerned with the next girl, the next grade, the next game, consumed with the balancing act that was the life of a Tudor. He was always, always trying to dodge any thought of his future or his father by any means necessary, never slowing down.

His late grandmother, Margaret Beaufort, had always said that the devil made work for idle hands. Henry had never been too terribly fond of her, but that saying stuck with him: except that he stayed busy to escape his mind, not the devil (but then again, maybe they're one and the same).

So no, she's right, as usual, he hadn't, of course, paid much attention to what was happening with Mary at all. He'd been friendly to her, but hadn't been concerned. He thought it was unfair, vaguely, told his friends to knock it off if the name was uttered in his presence, but no more than that. Henry had figured that if she had wanted to hook up with a known douchebag like Valois, that, well…that was kind of her problem.

"Tell me: did anyone call you names after you slept with my sister?"

"No," he says, shortly.

"Anyone throw condoms at you lately?"

"No."

He had, however, defended Mary more vehemently, once he had discovered the identity of Perseverance, and he's about to tell her so when she continues:
"And then there's your choice in friends."

"My choice in friends?"

"Yes."

"What's wrong with my friends? They're a little colorful, sure, but--" 

"They react poorly to rejection. Let's just leave it at that. And one of them… implied the Mary thing."

"What? Who implied, how did they imply--"

"They said they saw you give her cash," she says coolly, her brown eyes darker (maybe it's the shade she's sitting in, or a trick of the sun that reflects against the window, but he swears he sees her eyes flash, but just as quickly it's gone and she's looking at her lap, mouth twisted into a wry smile).

"Yeah, to pay her back for coffee--"

"And conveniently, coincidentally," Anne says scornfully, quirking a single eyebrow upwards, "left that part out,"

"…Brandon," he says, with disbelief, but…it couldn't possibly be anyone else. No one else was there, no else saw him do so. It's not like he told anyone such an insignificant detail, that a girl that he'd slept with had bought them coffee, that he had paid her back for doing so…

"He hasn't apologized for either thing--"

"Either thing?"

"Does it really surprise you that someone vindictive enough to casually mention such a thing in front of someone like Francis Valois also called me names when I told him 'no'?" she asks, crossing her arms, "Because it shouldn't."

_________________________

"I didn't--"

"He hasn't apologized for either," Anne repeats though she recalls that Brandon apologized for the thing she hasn't informed Henry about, because…

Well, she knows she could. It would drive the "your choice in friends" point home, but…she hesitates. She's never been a tattletale and she doesn't want to start.

Was the way Brandon told her about Henry's relationship status vicious? Yes, of course it was, but when she had reflected upon it after his apology, she'd realized that the things Brandon had done before it bothered her more. It was a shitty way to tell her, but it would've actually been noble; had he gently broke the news to her, that is.

She deserved to know, and Henry didn't want her to. Wasn't going to tell her, admitted that, in fact, so it's good, in the end, that Brandon did.

"Which seems to suggest," she says, smoothing her hands over her denim-clad knees, "that he doesn't think he's done anything wrong. That, to me, is almost more grievous than doing those things in the first place."

_________________________

Everything clicks into place for Henry, finally.
Brandon informs him of so many conquests, even those that end up being a swing and a miss, that they all sort of blur together in his mind.

It's not that he hasn't noticed Brandon's casual antagonism towards Anne-- he's not stupid -- but more that he hadn't thought it was specifically motivated. Brandon is casually antagonistic to almost everyone he's not friends with: he's kind of a dick that way.

So, while Henry had recalled the fountain-pushing once Anne had told him her name, that part of Brandon's text (she was a bitch to me at the party) hadn't quite stuck, though he remembers it now. It had, in fact, been thoroughly eclipsed in his mind by the other Boleyn girl sticking it to Valois and the girl-on-girl kiss.

Then, further than that, her 'being a bitch' hadn't connected for him, at the time, to Brandon's admission after that Beta Thau party in August:

"I may have called her a tease."

Meaning he had touched her, she had stopped him, and…if he admitted to that, he's sure Brandon didn't just leave it at that, he doesn't handle rejection with grace, despite Henry trying to school him otherwise.

No wonder she had been cold, distant, then confrontational when they officially met, when she had learned his name-- it wasn't just the Mary thing. It was more. That makes more sense now, too.

Anne must have reciprocated at first, or Brandon wouldn't have called her anything, Henry knows this, but can't come to terms with it.

Brandon and Anne kissed, at the very least. Brandon's signature move, he knows, is swift: he lifts the girl of interest onto some surface, will hike her skirt up if she has one. Henry pictures it: Brandon's hands on her waist, then sliding up her legs…

The knowledge of it sets him on edge, anger and jealousy come to the surface, sweeping over him until he's almost dizzy with both: anger that it happened, that he spoke to her in such a way, jealousy burning the picture in his mind.

Suddenly he hates the person he's called his best friend for over a year.

"I…didn't know," he says, lamely, the burning swiftly taking over, as if the butterflies in his stomach have turned into a dragon in his chest.

"Well, now you do," she says, tilting her head to the side.

"I'm sorry."

"It wasn't you who did it. Just the company you keep," she says, nodding to something in the distance, "is that you?"

Henry turns to the direction she's looking: it's the car he ordered. It's pulled up at the worst possible time, of course.

He waves at the driver and gives a thumbs up, then turns back to Anne: still sitting on the bench, chin up, haughty and proud, face steely, jaw set in a grim line of determination.

The train ticket burns a hole in his pocket. He doesn't want to leave it like this, but knows he's overstayed his welcome, can see the curtains slide open on the front windows, Boleyn patriarch
standing there, arms crossed.

"I have to go," Henry says, "I won't...bother you, anymore."

"What does that mean?"

"It means...I'm not going to kiss you again."

"Okay," she says with a shrug, "that's fair."

"The next time we kiss, it'll be your idea."

"You think I'll kiss you?" she scoffs, pulling on the faux fur trim around her neck, a flush creeping upwards.

"We'll see, won't we?"

And with that he leaves, trailing a single finger along the railing of the porch and down the steps, striding down the sidewalk that cuts through the grass of the front yard and leads to the curb, the car he ordered idling there, the exhaust creating clouds of smoke in the air.

He holds the door handle, but thinks better of it; lets go of it, turns around, and calls out, "Goodbye, Anne," before he opens the back door and slides in.

She waves, once.

"Union Station, right?" asks the driver, tapping the screen of her phone before setting it onto a plastic stand attached to her dashboard.

"Yes," he says, "please."

He doesn't look back.

"She was looking at you."

"Hmmm?" Henry murmurs, staring at the necklace he tried (and failed, again) to give her in the open velvet box, his hand clenched around it.

"The girl on the porch?" Melissa, his driver, who introduced herself, says as she leans against the wheel, inching forward along with the traffic, "She was looking at you...I saw her watching us leave as I drove, in the rearview mirror, until she disappeared from view. I thought you might want to know that."

"Thank you," he says, quietly, before shutting the box closed, "but I don't think it matters."

---

From: 326-65

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 18, 2016, Sunday, 9:04 PM

Anne, you have 1 new message and 6 new notifications on Facebook: [link]
From: Kathryn Howard

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 18, 2016, Sunday, 8:11 PM

Hello!

Sorry for being, like, totally lame, and sorry to bother you but my name is Kathryn (I go by Kitty, usually, but you can call me whatever) and I've been working on this family tree extra credit project while I've been on break from school.

I'm in the 7th grade, btw.

Anyway, I was working on it and I found out that my father's sister's name is Elizabeth Howard? It took forever to find that out because he mainly just has a LOT of brothers.

Or was Elizabeth Howard, I also found out that she married Thomas Boleyn so she's Elizabeth Boleyn now, I guess?

I found out because I searched her name. Thomas Boleyn (my…uncle in law?) did a lecture at UCLA for International Relations over a decade ago and there was an article about it and a photo taken with him and Elizabeth that was captioned, and so were you! You were very little, though.

And you're her daughter, so I think that makes us…cousins! Crazy, right? I honestly had no idea I had ANY cousins.

I looked up your profile and you seem really nice, and pretty, and cool, and smart (I can't BELIEVE I'm related to someone who goes to Whitehall, omg, I could never dream of going there in a million years, I'm not smart at ALL), and idk…I just thought I'd say hi, I guess?

Sorry, it's all very new to me, I've never done a family tree before!

I go to Lambeth Junior High in LA and I pass Whitehall every day on the school bus and it's just so crazy to think that every day I was passing by my cousin and never knew!

I'm sure you're super busy on your break and I kind of doubt you'll even respond, but I would be so mad at myself if I didn't at least say hi or try to leave a message.

From: Anne Boleyn

To: Kathryn Howard

Sent December 18, 2016, Sunday, 10:39 PM

Hi!!!
You don't bother me at all! It's so cool to learn that.

Regretfully I don't really know my mother's side of the family very well, I never even knew I had a maternal uncle... I just grilled my dad about it and he was reticent at first but apparently there was some family scandal he wouldn't get into? Dumb, but he confirmed that yes, Edmund Howard is the name of my uncle.

So that's your father, right? Edmund Howard?

How old are you? Twelve or thirteen?

You might be excited to learn that I'm not your only paternal cousin: I have an older sister, Mary, that's a sophomore at Whitehall, and an older brother, George.

Would you like to meet up some time? I would love to meet you if you ever have any free time after school, I've walked past Lambeth before, it's pretty close to Whitehall. We could meet at a Starbucks or something, my treat :D

---

From: Kathryn Howard

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 18, 2016, Sunday, 11:00 PM

I'm thirteen! I hate it, I wish I was older. For example:

They don't even have *Vogue* or *Elle* at our school library-- only *Girl's Life* and *Christian Teen*. Not even *Teen Vogue*. Apparently some parent complained about it being too racy.

I'm not sure how I'm supposed to keep up with fashion trends under these conditions, because *Girl's Life* is NOT on the up and up. And I'm not even going to dignify *Christian Teen* with a comment.

Yes, my dad's name is Edmund Howard.

I think the 'scandal' is that my mom and dad are in prison.

And on that note, I don't really think I can meet up after school because my foster parents are really, really strict about stuff like that.

Is she as pretty as you?? I am freaking out rn. You have no idea.

HOWEVER, we have off-campus lunch as long as you get enough gold star passes (which you get for being a hall monitor or helping in the cafeteria etc.) and I have a ton.

There's a Starbucks right in front of our parking lot/entrance so maybe if you're ever free we could meet for lunch sometime?

---

From: Anne
To: Kathryn

[1 image attached]

I'm sorry to hear that. I hope your foster home is good.

"Is she as pretty as you?", prettier, I think. So do most others.

Just took this picture with her, so you can decide for yourself, haha!

From: Kathryn

To: Anne

You guys are both models, right?? Geez.

What about George, does he go to school? What does he do?

From: Anne

To: Kathryn

No, George…snarks. That's about it, at the moment.

Hope you don't mind, they're both reading over my shoulder (they think I'm messaging a BOY, EVEN THOUGH I TOLD THEM I'M NOT, HELLO, I CAN SEE YOU, THIS IS ME, IN CAPS, LETTING YOU GUYS KNOW I SEE YOU AND I SEE WHAT YOU ARE DOING).

Well, George just stole the mouse from me and clicked on your picture and so I told him that you're our long-lost cousin etc, tried to catch him up…he says he thinks you have the "Howard nose" (which he envies, apparently), and that you're "adorable" and "darling" and "cute as a button".

From: Kathryn

To: Anne

No, he didn't!!! Omg!!!

From: Anne

To: Kathryn
This is all of us together rn, we just took it…I would've tried to rope our dad into taking the photo with us (taking photos makes him so grumpy, which is why it's so funny), but he's asleep rn.

Okay so I told them you're interested in fashion (I mean, I inferred that, from the Elle/Vogue stuff so I hope that was right, lol) and now they BOTH want to talk to you and are threatening to kick me off the computer (I was about to go make some tea, anyway, but…)…is that ok? Do you mind if they start messaging you from my profile rn?

From: Kathryn

To: Anne

Yes!!!! Please, I could talk about fashion all night honestly, I have no outlet for it, it is très tragique! (I'm taking French I, since Paris is the fashion capital of the world, idk if I spelled that right, tho, lol). And I want to meet them!

From: Anne

To: Kathryn

This is George, your new favorite cousin. First off: you are, honest to God, the first person I have ever seen pull off wearing a beret unironically. You HAVE to tell me your secret, I'm going mad over here.

This is Mary, pls ignore him: If you ever meet my father, never let him know you're learning French, that's all he'll talk to you in for the next six months, he'll pretend he doesn't understand English. Unfortunately I'm not joking. And ditto on the beret thing--HOW?

From: Kathryn

To: Anne

Rhinestones!! I made it in my art class and only got a B. But I think it was worth it.

Chapter End Notes

ok SO it has been... a time. a time and a half.

i have a new job and am staring school soon so updating more often has been harddd. like, i wish i could do it more often, but i just have a lot less time/energy. and when
school starts i'll have even less time.

but this is a milestone: past 100,000 words, 30th chapter. i want to thank everyone for reading, and thank everyone who's stuck with it for so long.

my outline for this verse is long and involved (and disorganized! i need to get on that, when i get the chance). i think this thing could easily have thirty more chapters, honestly, all the way up till anne boleyn graduates whitehall, and then maybe an epilogue.

anyway, since i'll be able to write less, i was curious about reader preferences: do you guys prefer more frequent chapter updates, but shorter chapters (2,000-3,000 words), or less frequent chapter updates, but longer chapters (3,500 words+)? If you could let me know in the comments if you have a moment, i'd greatly appreciate it.

again, thank you! i hope you enjoyed :)}
bravery

Chapter Summary

[Elizabeth York] showered all her children with gifts, wore red and green all throughout December, even plaited her golden hair with green and red ribbons. Braided the hair of her daughters in the same way. She made them batches of candy cane hot chocolate herself: rich and sweet, with cream and whole milk and imported Belgian chocolate and peppermint extract.

Chapter Notes

okay, in case anyone doesn't know about the plantagenets/elizabeth woodville/the war of the roses etc. (the prequel to the Tudor dynasty, basically), here's a link that might help. otherwise, out of context, this chapter has the potential to be confusing: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princes_in_the_Tower

going with shorter and more frequent chapter updates, since that was the winning vote. you're more than welcome to let me know your preference, though, if you'd like

December 19, 2016, Monday, 11:54 AM

441 E 87th St, New York, NY, 10128

Henry lifts the bottom of his grey, cotton shirt to wipe the sweat from his brow as he walks up to the doorway of his apartment building. The doorman, dressed in red, recognizes him, nods and opens the door to let him in.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Tudor," he says, politely, "did you enjoy your run?"

"Yes, thank you," Henry says, nodding, removing his headphones, out of breath, "same to you."

He crosses the lobby, passing the mailboxes on the right, a white chaise lounge and couches surrounded by mirrored walls, fireplace set against the wall. A tall Christmas tree almost reaches the ceiling, set in the center of the room.

Bends down to the mini fridge to the left of the elevator, opens it, and takes out a bottled water.

An instrumental version of Holy Night plays through the speakers.

Henry jogs up to the elevator, lifts the card from the shoe-string necklace around his neck, and presses it against the reader.

Once the doors open, he enters, and presses the 'P' button (for the Tudor penthouse), then enters the security access code.

It's a twelve-digit code (long, of course, but his father is nothing if not paranoid, despite the default
extra security enforcements that come with most expensive complexes on the Upper East Side): 0211, for his mother's birthday, 48 (HT, for his father's and...well, his son's initials, as well, coincidentally), 39 (EY, for his mother's), and 0118 for his parents' wedding date.

Of course, Henry Tudor I has never told him that those are what the numbers stand for, but Henry knows. He knows.

---

When the doors slide open to the penthouse, the first thing Henry hears is yelling.

"When did you even find," Tudor's voice, loud and sharp, "the time to do this, Margaret?! It truly boggles the mind!"

"Daddy, please--" is Margaret's voice, breaking through choked sobs.

"Stop throwing things," is shouted by Marina, "please, let's just all calm down--"

Henry rushes in, past the foyer, and tries to follow the voices, into the living room.

He tries to decipher the scene and assess the situation, as quickly as he can: his father, chest heaving, stands in front of their Christmas tree, fists balled at his side, face red all the way up to his dark, receding hairline and covered in a sheen of sweat.

There's Kate, hiding behind Esperanza's (the younger Tudor children's nanny, and the maid--Tudor's hiring process is long and arduous for his household, and very few people make the cut, so she shoulders the burden of two jobs; when she doesn't have the time for cleaning services he hires a maid temporarily from an agency) skirt, as Esperanza says, in a hushed tone, "why don't we go back to decorating your dollhouse, sweetheart, you liked that, right?" and Kate nods. Esperanza puts a hand out and Kate clutches it, and they exit the room swiftly.

There's Margaret, arms crossed, head hung in shame, face dotted with red and streaked with tears, and Marina standing beside her, rubbing a soothing hand on her shoulder.

There's Elizabeth, sitting on the couch, brow furrowed, legs crossed, and rummaging through a bag....oh, and, of course, speaking of bags:

There are dozens of them, bags upon bags upon bags, scattered across the coffee table, some lying haphazardly, some on their couch, some on the floor (stop throwing things, Marina had said, and Henry assumes that was directed at Tudor).

"What's going on?" Henry asks, trying to keep his tone calm and even.

"What's going on is that your sister has bought out every boutique in the Tri-State area!" Tudor yells, gesturing to the mess around him, "or can you not tell?"

"I don't understand--"

"She bought," he hisses, "a fucking Birkin bag. Do you know what that is? I didn't."

"I was on the waitlist forever," Margaret says, "I had to--"

"The waitlist! Like it's some advanced, never-before-released device! But it's not, Henry, did you know? It's just a fucking purse, price raised by artificial inflation, that costs as much as a car!"

"It's hand-stitched--"
"Be quiet! You don't speak!" he snaps to Margaret, shaking his head, he turns his back to her, "God, I can't even look at you."

Henry rolls the water bottle in between his hands, and walks over towards the tree. He stops on the way, turns to Margaret and Marina, and gives Margaret a steadying look before kissing her on the forehead.

"Tears dehydrate," he whispers, passing her the water.

She takes it and gulps it down.

Henry walks over to his father, around him so that he can face him, and looks carefully into his blue eyes: intense, but lightly colored, the emotions in his gaze are always easy to read.

Henry exceeded his father in height by the time he was seventeen years old. Since then he has, technically, been physically able to look down at him while speaking, but it's never felt that way, to him. Subconsciously, since seventeen, he tries to shrink, be smaller around him; doesn't hold a completely straight posture as his grandmother, Margaret Beaufort instructed him to from a very young age (like there's a string at the back of your neck, God's hands pulling you upwards, she had said, a frightening image to a child, that had haunted Henry's nightmares-- as if he was a puppet and some scary figure controlled him from the sky).

But now he stands tall, posture fully erect: not like a puppet, but like a prince.

"She's just a kid, sir--"

"She's not! She's seventeen, she's almost an adult. Though her behavior certainly doesn't demonstrate that."

"Let's…can we return anything?" Henry calls out, and Elizabeth answers, "There are receipts in the bags, so probably."

"See?" Henry asks, tilting his head to the side, trying to still the tremors he feels within at his father's thunderous expression, "it can be fixed."

"I wish," Tudor says, harshly, eyes burning like the turquoise center of a flame, the hottest part, "I had had more sons. God knows you never gave me any of this grief, God knows your older…"

Silence drops, swift, wraps around the room like a cloak, the obvious unsaid ringing in everyone's ears.

"I won't let you do this," Henry says, voice silky, a threat imbued in his tone, an iron fist in a velvet glove.

"Excuse me?"

Henry doesn't know where this sudden bravery is stemming from: maybe rejection, maybe he's just become as raw as his skin, that turns smarting and red as he scrubs himself viciously in the shower (the scalding hot water runs down as his thoughts drift to Brandon and Anne, his impending marriage to Katherine, and he scrapes the loofah sponge so hard over his chest that when he steps out he has flakes of dry skin, as if he's blistered, as if he's sunburned).

Maybe it stems from the deep sadness that sinks him this time of year, has sunk him, every year since his mother's death. Christmas was her favorite holiday, she planned decorations and events starting in September. She showered all her children with gifts, wore red and green all throughout December,
even plaited her golden hair with green and red ribbons. Braided the hair of her daughters in the same way. She made them batches of candy cane hot chocolate herself: rich and sweet, with cream and whole milk and imported Belgian chocolate and peppermint extract.

But, wherever it comes from, the bravery persists, like a flag unfurling in his chest, and he continues:

"I won't let you," he clarifies, "make stuff up to make her feel worse. I gave you plenty of grief, and you know it, and I know it. She should know it, too."

"Henry," Tudor warns, "don't you dare--"

"Margaret," Henry says, looking over his father's shoulder and meeting her gaze, the stunned expression, she blinks slowly, as if coming out of a trance, "it's not true. He's bailed me out of headmasters' offices, he's even bailed me out of jail: for breaking and entering, vandalism, public drunkenness, disorderly conduct. He's always managed to wipe it from the records, of course. He's good at that. But I made mistakes, too. Believe me. I made plenty."

"This is not a mistake," Tudor snaps, "spending thousands of dollars frivolously is more than a mistake. It's sheer."

"And you've lost millions in risky business deals. Anyone ever print out the paperwork from them and throw it on the floor? Because that's what you're doing to her!" Henry shouts, flinging a hand to gesture to bags in disarray on the floor behind Tudor.

"You are not comparing business decisions to clothes shopping. How can you even think to make such a--"

"It's not like," Margaret interrupts, "anything I spend makes a difference to you, Daddy, we make the Forbes list every year."

Tudor spins around to face her, puts his hands behind his back, and starts to stalk around the room, like a caged lion, pulls at his hair and says, "Let this be a lesson then, to all of you-- the worst thing you can ever do is behave as if great wealth equals limitless wealth. They're not the same, to pretend otherwise can end in ruin. Go ask your grandmother, if you don't believe me, Margaret--"

"Your mother?" Margaret inquires, brow furrowed, "how would I--"

"No," he whispers, viciously, "go ask Miss Elizabeth Woodville, go ask her how well she fares after her lavish spending, ask her if she enjoys living in her shitty apartment, living on handouts and gift baskets from her adoring fans--"

"I'm sorry," Henry cuts off his father's spiteful diatribe, shaking his head through his apology, "I hardly think that's fair--"

"What's? Not? Fair?" Henry asks, spinning around to face his son.

"To call it lavish spending," Henry says, shrugging a single shoulder, "she spent the rest of her fortune trying to find her sons, I'm sure any parent with the same resources would do the same to find their children--"

"What are you implying, exactly?" Tudor asks, voice soft and dangerous, face blanched.

Elizabeth looks up from a receipt (she's been making a list of the purchases with the notepad and pen that's always atop the coffee table, she had to push some shopping bags over to find it, of course...in an attempt to avoid watching this confrontation and also to restore some semblance of order), wide-
eyed, startled at his tone.

In a way, Henry Tudor I speaking quietly is scarier than him yelling.

"Implying?" Henry asks, brow furrowed, "I'm not trying to imply anything, I just don't think that 'lavish' is really a fair way to describe it."

Tudor stops pacing, nods once, and laughs, bitterly, before taking a seat on his usual armchair: red, velvet, the back of it pushed up against the wall, their gas fireplace to the right of it.

The chair faces the couch, the coffee table, and the Christmas tree, so he faces his children. He crosses his legs, leans back in the chair, and puts his hands in his lap.

"Henry…don't you ever make that comparison again. God help you if you do, in my presence."

"What comparison," Henry asks, confused (there was the comparison in the amount of money spent between his father and Margaret, but that already seems like it was ages ago, that can't be what he's referring to, can it?), "I don't know what you're talking--"

"Elizabeth's brothers were kidnapped."

"Yes, I know--"

"Arthur wasn't."

It's the first time his name has been uttered by Henry Tudor the I in years. It's the first time it's been spoken in the Tudor household (in his father's presence, anyway), in years. A hush falls around the room. Henry feels as if he can't breathe, a tightness in his chest, and judging by the expressions he sees on his sisters' faces, he assumes they feel the same.

Any bravery Henry had felt before is gone, if the flag of it was unfurled, flying in his chest before, it's now limp, unmoving.

"So when you suggest," Tudor continues, twisting his wedding ring around as he stares at his son, "that I should have done what Woodville did for her sons…searched the ends of the earth, spent the entirety of my fortune; what will be your fortune…for what? Someone that left you, me, us, their family, of their own free will? Someone that doesn't want to be found? That's what's hardly fair."

"Sir, I promise, I didn't mean--"

"They're not the same!" Tudor roars, slamming his hand, palm down, on the oak table behind the chair, and Henry flinches.

"Don't," Tudor says, switching to a relaxed, quiet tone with an ease that's almost eerie, "suggest they are."

Henry rubs his chest with his fist, the mark of sweat on his shirt is still damp from his run, tugs at his collar, nervously. He'd apologize, but he fears that might make it worse.

"Now," Tudor says, evenly, with a sigh, as he examines the skin of the palm he slammed against the wood, "I'm tired. Elizabeth, Marina…go to your rooms."

Usually they'd protest such a request, but they murmur assent and leave the living room hurriedly, practically running down the hall to their bedrooms.
Henry nods to the couch, and Margaret sits down. Henry sits down next to her and rubs her shoulder, an attempt at a comforting gesture, but she just shrugs it off, so he withdraws his hand.

Tudor closes his eyes, folds his hands together, and rests his chin against them.

"Henry, take the car. Take your sister with you. Take the...purchases," he says, eyes still closed, the last word weighed with disdain, "and return as many as you can. Bring back the return receipts, I want that money back on my credit card accounts as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir," Henry says, quietly, biting his lip.

"And buy your grandmother a gift while you’re out. It is almost Christmas, after all."

"Sir?"

"Paul will drive you," Tudor says, "tell him that Miss Woodville’s apartment is the last stop. You and Margaret will drop the gift off there, wish her a happy holiday, visit with her, if you so wish. He knows the address."

Henry and Margaret exchange a perplexed look. The last time either of them saw their maternal grandmother was at their mother’s funeral.

But, evidently, their father has seen her since then.

Tudor opens his eyes, slides his wallet out of his suit jacket pocket, and takes out his Royale MasterCard (notorious for its exclusivity, it's embedded with diamonds and has no spending limit), and holds it out.

Henry gets up from the couch, walks over to the armchair, and takes it, then nods, slips it in his pocket, and tries to grab as many bags as possible, sliding them over his shoulders, up and down his arms. Margaret does the same.

"Oh, and Henry?"

Henry looks up at his father, expectant.

"Make sure it's an expensive one. I want her to know we're doing well."
send me word

Chapter Summary

"'And, if you should come upon this spot, please do not hurry on. Wait, for a time, exactly under the star. Then, if a little man appears who laughs, who has golden hair and who refuses to answer questions, you will know who he is. If this should happen, please comfort me. Send me word that he has come back."

Chapter Notes

quotes are from the english translation of the book 'le petit prince', by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/140807896117 this link is a picture of the page that's read in this chapter.

december 19, 2016, monday

elizabeth woodville wakes up and does her morning routine, same as she does any other day.

she grabs her robe, made of a crushed, white velvet, and slips it over her shoulders. she walks to her kitchen, fills a tea kettle to boil, sets it on her gas stove, and walks over to the framed photo that hangs above her kitchen table.

inside the frame is a photo, a tarot card, and a pressed, dried, white rose, that she set in a frame after her wedding to edward york.

the photo is of their wedding kiss after their vows. the tarot card is of "the lovers", the one she drew from her pack of cards on the day she met him, while she was waiting under the oak tree at that bus stop with her sons, thomas and richard grey.

she kisses the inside of her hand and puts it against the glass, as she's always done since his passing.

pours herself a cup of green tea, mixes it with honey she scoops out of a glass jar, and makes a piece of toast, buttering it and smearing the same honey on top.

she sits down at the kitchen table with her breakfast, and presses the 'play' button on the remote that connects to the speakers for her ipod. it plays, automatically(nothing she could set up, herself-- her older brother, anthony did it for her, and she has to call him if it ever stops working), a mix of
Loreena McKennitt, Florence + the Machine, and Regina Spektor.

It tends to set the mood for her customers: usually lovelorn girls, occasionally lovelorn men, or those with fire in their hearts, wanting to hear that they're destined for greatness.

Elizabeth taps her pack of Tarot cards at the table: a pretty one, the cards still glossy, that she ordered online a few years ago. Her old card pack, the one she drew from all those decades ago on the day she met her future husband, lies in a chest in the small storage in her ceiling, against letters from her husband, siblings, and children.

Compelled by some intuition (which she trusts, always, even if she doesn't know where it comes from), she gets up from the table and places the pack in an empty drawer. She doesn't think she'll be using it today, she thinks today, actually, that she should grab a ladder and retrieve the chest.

She doesn’t, as she usually does, light her lavender candles and set them out (they're the most soothing to those that want her to set a balm against their worries about their futures), but instead grabs the tall, thick, white ones, filled with crushed red and white rose petals. They're fragrant, their heady scent strong enough to make some people sneeze, even overpowering enough to make some dizzy, so it's not what she picks on weekdays (she offers reading services Monday through Friday).

Elizabeth lights them with a long, plastic lighter that Anthony bought for her (I know you don't think it'll ever happen, he had said, cheekily, as he unloaded the contents of the paper bag onto her counter, but someday, Miss Seventy Years Young, you might find your hands start to tremble. So, just in case).

She opens her front door and, out of habit, flips the sign on her door to "Open". Her fingers trace over the letters; the 'O' is made up of a circle of small, painted flowers (something her daughter Elizabeth had done for her) and flips the sign back to 'Closed' before shutting the door.

Elizabeth's not surprised when she hears a knock on the door. She doesn't know who it is (you're not that psychic, Edward had always teased her, when she didn't know the exact specifics of things), but she's sure it's important, feels a warmth bloom through her chest as she lets down the chain on the door, unlocks it and swings it open.

Henry, all of twenty years old, with his mother's eyes and hair and his grandfather's smile, stands in her doorway, six feet tall, a gift bag in his arms.

Margaret, seventeen, stands next to him, shorter, her face pretty with delicate features, a contrast to her brother's strong ones. Ballet-taught posture keeps her upright, even though the dark circles under her eyes betray a weariness that seems to run deeper than a single night of restlessness.

"What a surprise," Elizabeth says, beaming, "I have the two loveliest young people in New York at my doorstep."

Henry smiles and greets her, but Margaret remains silent, her gaze falling to her feet as she tugs at her sleeves.

"You're beautiful," Elizabeth tells her, and Margaret shrugs, "do you remember me?"

"Yes," she whispers.

"You're…" Elizabeth trails off, eyelashes fluttering, as if she's stunned.
Elizabeth's hair, a shade whiter, perhaps, than when he last saw her (he remembers thinking, at eleven years old, that in certain lights, it almost appeared platinum blonde, then flickered back to age, like a mirage) flows to her waist and dips when she tilts her head to look at him. The pale green shawl around her shoulders is wrapped tightly against her, and he sees that she's still slender; if anything she's lost weight over the years.

"Different," she says, finally, eyes lighting with amusement, some sort of coyness that Henry doesn't understand (what does she have to be smug about? all he's done so far is show up at her door).

"Grand-mère," Henry says (he'll never forget the incident in which she told him and all her Tudor grandchildren what name they should call her...a day that shall live in infamy), "you look much the same."

"Liar," she says, laughing, a twinkle in her eye, and he assumes she's recalling the incident, as well....

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2005

"Grandma," Margaret Tudor said, sitting at Elizabeth's feet, "will you teach me how to sew, like you do?"

"Certainly," Elizabeth said, tugging the string through the blanket she was embroidering, "but, please, don't call me Grandma, sweetheart."

"Why not?" Margaret inquired, sticking a thumb in her mouth, "it's what we call Grandma Margaret."

Margaret Beaufort, who was, at the time, on the other side of the room in her rocking chair, working on her own embroidery, looked up from her own pattern with her sharp eyes over her moon-shaped glasses.

Arthur and Henry, who were sitting atop the window seat on the bay windows, looked up from the book they had been reading together-- The Little Prince, not quite sure what was happening but knowing it was definitely something.

"Well," Elizabeth said, "you should call me what my mother asked her grandchildren to call her: Grand-mère. Do you know what that is, darling?"

Margaret shook her head, solemnly, wide-eyed.

"It's French for grandmother. Can you sound it out? I'm sure you're grown-up enough to be able to--"

"Grand-mère!" Margaret yelled, giggling, biting her thumb.

"Very good, sweetheart!"

"Why do you want us to call you Grand-mère," Henry asked, "are you French?"

"No, my rose," Elizabeth said, wryly noting his blush and the way he crossed his arms, furiously (I'm not a rose, I'm a boy, Henry had insisted before, but his mother had kissed him on the head and said, You're a Tudor rose, my love, and Henry had softened, but, still, said 'Rose' is a girl's name, and I'm not a girl), "but I'm not a 'Grandma'. Grand-mère is an elegant, dignified, title. 'Grandma' is for plump women that let their looks go and play Bingo-- do I look that way to you, Henry?"
Henry tilted his head to the side, gaze sweeping over her tall and willowy figure and said, "No, you are thin and pretty, Grand-mère-- just like Mama."

"Thank you, sweethe--"

"'Charm is deceitful,'" Margaret Beaufort recited, squinting as she examined her stitching more closely, "'and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.' Proverbs 31:30."

"Oh, thank you for the lesson," Elizabeth said, putting a hand over her heart, voice like honey, "yes, beauty is certainly not the most important attribute one can have. Nor should it be the most valued."

"Quite right," Margaret said, mouth pursed, "or at least, some people certainly think so."

"Oh, yes, your son included! I do suppose that's the reason he married a nineteen-year-old model when he was...twenty-nine, wasn't it?" Elizabeth asked, head tilted to the side, closed smile on her lips.

Something about the way she said the words made Henry fidget, and he tried to read the next line of the book Arthur was holding for him:

"For some, who are travelers, the stars are guides. For others they are no more than little lights in the sky."

His mother, Elizabeth York, was a television star, and her mother, Elizabeth Woodville, had been a movie star (something his other grandmother didn't seem to like very much)-- but that probably wasn't the kind of star they were talking about in The Little Prince.

Margaret Beaufort had thrown down her embroidery work and slammed the door behind her after that.

"What's wrong? Why is she upset?" Henry whispered, trying hard to concentrate on the next words.

"They don't like each other very much," Arthur whispered back, a finger over his lips (the 'shush' gesture Henry often received from librarians was quite familiar to him), "that's all. Read the line for me, Henry."

"I need to see it closer," Henry said.

"Okay, here," Arthur said, letting go of the book and handing it to Henry, who held it carefully as he read aloud:

"'For some, who are travelers, the stars are guides. For others they are no more than little lights in the sky.'"

"Very good, you may be better at reading than I am..."

Henry shrugged, and said, "Maybe," which caused Arthur to laugh (which had, really, been Henry's goal all along).

"What do you think it means?" Arthur asked.

"I don't know. But I think I like the first part better," Henry said, "about stars being our guides. They have to be more than little lights, and anyways, they only look little because they're far away."

"Do you have a favorite part yet?" Arthur asked, slinging an arm over his younger brother's shoulders.
"Yes," he said, "let me find...here it is. I underlined it."

"In pencil, I hope?"

"Of course," Henry said, last word imbued with disdain, "I'm not an idiot, Arthur."

"My apologies," Arthur said, "may I see it?"

"I guess," Henry said, passing it back to him.

"This is, to me, the loveliest and saddest landscape in the world. It is the same as that on the preceding page, but I have drawn it again to impress it on your memory. It is here that the little prince appeared on Earth, and disappeared.

Look at it carefully so that you will be sure to recognize it in case you travel some day to the African desert."

"I would like to go there," Henry said, "Margaret says it's just sand, but I still want to go."

"Maybe we'll go together some day," he replied.

"I would like that."

"So would I," Arthur said, laughing, he ruffles Henry's hair and he scowls, stretches his hand out and musses up Arthur's long, blonde hair in return, before leaning back against the window.

"'And, if you should come upon this spot, please do not hurry on. Wait, for a time, exactly under the star. Then, if a little man appears who laughs, who has golden hair and who refuses to answer questions, you will know who he is. If this should happen, please comfort me, Send me word that he has come back.'"

2016

Henry takes his coat off and hangs it on the hook by the door. When he turns around, his grandmother is staring at him.

"What?"

"So different," she says, shaking her head.

"What," he teases, "you're surprised that I'm taller?"

"No, of course not."

"More handsome?"

"Definitely no surprise there...you're lucky you got your mother's looks," she says slyly, sipping from the tea she cradles in her hands very carefully, as if it's hot.

"Grand-mère!" he scolds, laughing.

She shrugs, unbothered.

"We got you a present," Margaret interjects, she hands it to Elizabeth (passed off to her from Henry before he took his coat off), "Merry Christmas."
"Thank you, sweetheart…let's go into the kitchen. I'll make us all some tea."

Henry takes in the apartment. His father's assessment seems to have been something of an exaggeration. It looks lovely to him, cozier, certainly than any Tudor residence has been since his mother's death.

There are framed water colors on the walls, a table in the corner of the living room with a woven blanket thrown over it. A white couch makes half a square near the gas fireplace, a table set out in front of it, a vase filled with wildflowers on top of it. There's a small, potted evergreen atop another table near a window that leads out to a balcony, a small, woven star adorns the top of the tree.

The polished wood floors are covered in rugs of various hues: lavender, crimson, green and white.

There's no television, but shelves of books, picture frames atop them. The walls are a soft, inviting, butter-yellow.

He recognizes the music, playing low: Florence + the Machine. He's surprised she has such modern tastes.

All he knows is he walked in and felt calm immediately. Whether it's his grandmother's steady presence, her confidence, the way she stands fully erect even at seventy years old, or the welcoming warmth of her home, he couldn't say. Perhaps it's all those things.

Margaret still seems agitated, though, biting her nails as their grandmother leads them from the living room to the kitchen.

"Are you alright, Margaret?" Elizabeth asks after she's served tea.

Margaret considers this for a moment, blinks owlishly at her, then shakes her head, slowly.

"She had a fight with our father," Henry explains, hands folded atop the table, "or, we did, I guess."

"I see."

"I'm tired," Margaret says, "really, really…I just want to sleep."

"I can set up the bed for you, if you like," Elizabeth offers.

"I don't want to put you out," she says quietly, hovering a single hand over her mug of tea as if trying to warm it.

"It doesn't put me out, it's not as if I'm using it at the moment. Wait here, I'll get it ready for you."

Elizabeth starts to get out of her chair, and Henry gets up from his to help her up, but she swats him away.

"I'm not nursing home ready yet, dear, you don't have to worry," she says, walking a slow but steady pace to her bedroom.

Margaret watches as her grandmother sets a glass of water on a coaster on the dresser by the head of the bed.

"Let me know if there's anything you need," she says, eyes kind, before ducking her head and leaving, shutting the door behind her.
Margaret lifts the corner of the bedspread and settles in. The sheets smell of lavender and eucalyptus, smooth against her hands, the pillow is soft and plush. She lays her head down and closes her eyes before drifting off, the dulcet sound of instrumentals being the last thing she hears before she falls asleep.

"You're staring again," Henry says, pushing his saucer and cup to the left of him.

She is, but she can't help it. She's so surprised by the change that it's hard not to marvel at the beauty of it.

"You've changed," Elizabeth says, shrugging a single shoulder, "that's all."

"You said I was different. What did you mean?"

"Your…have a cookie," she says, pushing the plate towards him, and he shrugs (it's not like young men ever refuse them) before taking a chocolate-chip one off the plate and eating it in a single bite, "your aura is different."

"My what?" he asks, mouth full, squinting at her.

"The colors around your body."

"The what around my--"

"Chew first!" she says, laughing, shaking her head, he mumbles an apology before he finishes.

"I have-- excuse me," he says, as she makes her way to the fridge and grabs a carton of milk, walks to the cupboard and pulls out a glass, "I have colors around my body?"

"Everyone does," she says as she pours the milk into the glass, then hands it to him, "but most people can't see them. I can."

"Since when?" he asks, a skeptical eyebrow raised (which is the typical reaction to this, so she's not offended) as he drinks the milk.

"Since I was a girl. It's a maternal trait. But it has to be cultivated, or it dies."

"What are my colors, then?" he asks, grabbing another cookie, eyes alight with mischief. He's only humoring her and she knows it, but she's confident enough in her abilities that it doesn't really affect her.

"Well, there's the layer of violet, that indicates an old soul. Yours is…around five hundred years old, if I had to hazard a guess. But your dominant color has always been gold. It means you're like the Sun. Others have radiated towards you all your life, I'm sure you charm wherever you go, effortlessly."

The tips of his ears turn red as he ducks his head. Elizabeth assumes he's been made to feel ashamed of this, probably by a father that can only harness respect from fear and intimidation rather than natural charisma.

Henry shines and people follow. It's what she observed during the years of his childhood, and she knew then it was a gift he would keep all his life. As long as he didn't abuse it; use it to manipulate people into doing what he wanted them to do, Elizabeth knew that he would continue to glow.

"But there's something interspersed with the gold…that's never been there before. And it's what's
amusing me," she explains, grabbing a cookie herself and humming in contentment, waiting for the inevitable response to her hook.

It happens, of course, a good few minutes after she drops it.

He folds, sighs, and asks (as if he can't believe he's asking), "What is it, then?"

"What is what, Henry?" she teases.

"What's 'different'?" he asks, using air quotes.

"Oh, that. Well," she says, unable to keep the grin from her face, breaking another cookie apart in half over her plate, she takes a bite, "just that you're in love, that's all."

"Oh? And how can you tell?" he asks, laughing.

"You're colored with pink."

"Well, I'm engaged," he says, with a smile that doesn't quite reach the blue of his eyes.

"You are? I don't see a ring."

"I don't wear one," he says flatly, tugging on the ends of his sweater sleeves, covering his hands defensively.

"To whom?"

"Katherine Aragon."

"Well, it's not her, then."

"What?" Henry snaps.

Elizabeth holds her hands up in surrender, gaze cool, unfazed by his heated reaction. Henry takes a deep breath, tries to unclench his jaw-- he doesn't want to be the sort of person that yells at their grandmother, he takes in the slightly crinkled skin under her eyes, snowy and tinged with blue, her laugh lines, and senses a fragile exterior over her strength. She may not think she is, she may look incredibly beautiful considering her age, in fact, but she is elderly. And you don't snap at the elderly, they deserve respect. He knows this, so he tells himself to act like it.

"All I meant," she says, slowly, "is that it's not possible that it's her. Only because I can tell this is a recent fall. Someone you've met recently. And I know you've known Katherine for years."

"How? You stopped coming over when I met her," he says, brow furrowed.

"Arthur told me."

"You talk to Arthur?" he asks breathlessly.

"Oh," she says, wincing, hating the idea of ruining his hope, "no, darling, I'm sorry, I haven't since… he left everyone else. But he spoke with me when your father wouldn't. Kept me up, sent videos,
photos of everyone. I missed all of you, very much, I hope you believe that."

"Why…our father never told us why we couldn't see you anymore. He just said it was your choice."

"It wasn't. But--"

"What do you mean," Henry interrupts, eyes squeezed shut, "that you can tell it's recent, how could you possibly tell that?"

"The vibrancy and intensity of the new color suggests that it's…new love. It's a rose pink."

"A 'rose pink,'" he says scathingly, "okay, sure."

"You're being rude," Elizabeth says, quietly, laying her palms flat against the table.

"You're right," he says, wincing, "I'm sorry."

"Sensitive subject?" she quips.

"I guess it is."

Henry searches the room, desperately, for a change of topic. He doesn't want to talk about being 'in love', he doesn't want to think about it.

He thinks maybe he'll ask her to open the gift, but something else catches his eye.

The light from the window glints over the frame on the wall, and its contents: a pressed white rose, a sepia photo of a head of long, light hair spilling down the back of a young woman's wedding dress, a man a head taller kissing her, passion evident even through the faded picture. Next to that is a drawing the size of a playing card, a small caption underneath reads "The Lovers", a naked Adam and Eve covered in leaves meeting under an apple tree.

"Is this you," Henry asks, pointing to the wedding photo, "you and my grandfather?"

"Yes," she says, smiling, "it is."

"What's this drawing?" he asks.

"It's a Tarot card. I drew it from my pack on the day we met, though I suppose you think that's just a coincidence."

"I…I mean…"

"It's alright," she says with a shrug, "most people don't believe in things like that, I know, especially not in this day and age. I just ask that you be respectful about it, even if you don't."

"Of course…how did you meet?" he asks, taking a drink from his glass.

"I'm sure you've heard the story," she says, getting up from her seat, she sets the kettle on again, "would you like more tea?"

"Sure…I mean, of course I've heard it, but…"

"I hope so," Elizabeth says, reaching in the cupboard and pulling out the box of tea bags, tossing the old one in her cup into the trash and setting a new one in, "it's the stuff of legends, apparently."
"That's what people say," Henry admits, smile genuine and warm, "but I've never heard it from you. I would like to."

The kettle whistles (the burner was still hot, so it didn't take long for it to boil), and she turns the burner off before pouring the hot water into her cup.

"I will, then. Bring me your cup," she says, and he does, walks over to the counter with it, puts honey in it himself.

They return to the table with their cups on saucers (Henry holds hers, as well, though she insists it's not too heavy for her), and she begins.

It's easy, almost effortless, to slip back into the memory: it's been a source of comfort to her in the years after Edward's death. She tells Henry about it, but doesn't really hear her own words, watches as he smiles and listens intently, with a degree of distance, as she recalls it...

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1971

Elizabeth Woodville has been waiting for the bus with her two sons for twenty minutes, at least. They are standing at the bus stop under an oak tree, which partially covers them from the rain, but not entirely. Her large umbrella is open over them to protect their heads from the trickles of water that slide down the branches and leaves.

It is a cold, New York day, her sons, Richard and Thomas Grey, are huddled beside her, shivering, their hands in the pockets of her threadbare coat.

A town car pulls up to the curb and she panics, whispers, "Boys, stay close to me," and they huddle in closer.

Elizabeth has had a premonition, a terrible one, since her wedding to John Grey, that someone will try to take her sons away from her (she will not discover, till years later, that this was not for her eldest sons, but the ones she will have with Edward). It haunts her every time a stranger walks too close to them on the sidewalk, and she gives them change to call her from a payphone every day after school, to let her know they're alright.

The window rolls down, revealing a young (perhaps younger than her 25 years, even), handsome face, eyes blue and grey, smile dazzling.

"Now, why does a beautiful woman like you have such a scowl on her pretty mouth?" the man asks, gaze sweeping over her appreciatively.

Elizabeth gives a tight smile. She's knows she's beautiful, her golden hair always catches the sunlight. Her figure remains effortlessly thin, she was taller than all the other girls in high school. Men have compared her to Ingrid Bergman, Marilyn Monroe, sometimes (the last one is laughable, really-- while Elizabeth shares her waist size, the one thing her beauty lacks is curves, softness, and Monroe had that in spades). Her eyes are the blue of oceans, skin clear and pale as milk.

"I'm angry, I suppose," she says.

"Why, darling?" he asks, with a smirk, before bending his head and waving to her sons, who wave back.

"Why not? Our bus is late. I get to hear politicians speak on the radio daily about how much they appreciate our soldiers, our veterans. And I know it's all talk. My husband was decorated, a Purple
Heart. And here I am, his widow, standing with our children. Waiting for the bus to go to their school. From there I'll get to walk to work, in heels. We are destitute. We were evicted and we live with my parents now. Yesterday," she says, sliding a single hand under the elbows of Thomas' jacket, as if displaying it, "I had to cut up curtains to make patches for their elbows."

"I see. Perhaps I can help," he offers, tone somber now.

"How?" she asks, voice flat.

"I can give you all a ride to school, for starters."

"I don't know you."

"What is it you think I'll do?" he asks, eyes wide in innocence.

"I don't know. Because I. Don't. Know. You," she whispers the last part fiercely, but instead of recoiling he grins, eyes alight with the challenge.

The man undoes his tie, takes it off his collar, and puts his head back into the car, the window still unrolled.

She hears murmuring, the man's voice mixed with his driver's, perhaps, or someone else in the car.

Elizabeth raises her eyebrows, no earthly clue what he's doing, and Richard and Thomas look up at her, both shrugging, as if to say we don't know, either.

A pair of masculine, suntanned hands emerge from the open window, first, tied around the wrists with the dark blue tie that was just around his neck, then the rest of him.

"Here," he says, holding his hands out, "I'm entirely at your mercy. I had my driver knot this. He used to be a sailor, so I'm sure I won't be able to get out. Get in."

He beams at them.

Elizabeth hesitates, the premonition still hovering around the edges of her consciousness. But her intuition has always served her well over the years, and she gets no sense of malice from this young man. He's arrogant, perhaps, but not unkind.

She nods her assent and the man tucks his head back inside.

Elizabeth folds the umbrella up and the driver gets out and holds the back door open for Elizabeth and her sons.

She hadn't recognized Edward at all (though naysayers still talk today about how she "lured" him in, that her waiting under that tree was no accident, that she knew who he was. Richard Neville, Edward's campaign manager, was one of the people that whispered that lie).

He introduced himself without surname, had just told her his name was Edward, and she had, in turn, just told him that her name was Elizabeth.

After dropping her sons off, he had given her a ride to the diner she worked at, asked to come in for a cup of coffee.

When she dropped off his bill, he was scribbling something in a notepad.
"What's your name?" he asks, brow furrowed.

"I told you already. It's Elizabeth."

"What's your last name?" he asks, gazing up at her, expression soft, vulnerable.

"Why?"

"I'll keep asking until you tell me," Edward teases, voice singsong.

"It's Woodville," she says, rolling her eyes (she has other tables to get to), placing a single hand on her hip, (the other holding a coffee pot by the handle), "Elizabeth Woodville."

"Mmm-- and how do you spell that?" he asks, biting the end of his pen.

"I…Elizabeth as it usually is," she says, impatiently, "last name is W-O-O-D-V-I-L-L-E."

"Thank you," Edward says, putting the notebook down and lighting a cigarette.

"You're welcome," she says, before leaving to refill coffee at another table.

When she comes back the booth is empty.

He's left only a quarter and a dime for the coffee. She smarts in disappointment-- he had been such a flirt, and he had a town car and a driver. Stupidly, she'd let herself assume that those factors combined would mean she'd receive a large tip from him, but apparently not.

Elizabeth slides the paper slip of the bill, but it's on top of something else, which she flips over-- a note, scrawled out in spidery handwriting.

*I don't want your phone number, I want a tip,* she thinks, skimming that (the number, that is, on the bottom of the piece of paper) first before her eyes travel upwards and she reads the first part of the note:

"Consider this the beginning of a reform in how we treat the families of this country's brave and fallen soldiers. I have a bright future ahead of me, Miss Elizabeth Woodville, that I can promise you...I'm running for Senator, next, although I'm only a mayor, for now."

Brow furrowed, she flips the page over, and finds there's something attached from the side with a paperclip, a rectangular piece of paper, smaller.

She slides it from the clip and flips it over.

It's a check.

Addressed to her name.

*For $5,000.*
the tree that grows

Chapter Summary

"It doesn't change the fact that I did love him, that that love grew, and grew, and grew the more I got to know him. Sometimes the soil in which things begin isn't nearly as important as the tree that grows from it."

Chapter Notes

"The moon is always jealous of the heat of the day, just as the sun always longs for something dark and deep." -- alice hoffman, practical magic

the poem is...uh...mine, actually, so i hope no one thinks it sucks

so much backstory, and flashbacks. i do promise i know where the story's going! i have it outlined etc. the plot will pick up again, soon soon soon. i kind of just feel like so much of the story has gone so fast (though not the last few chapters, i know) that it's time to reflect, take a breather, go back, etc.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 19, 2016, Monday

"Did you take it," Henry asks, enraptured by the story, "I mean, did you take the check? Did you run after him, or…?"

"Of course I took the check," Elizabeth answers, "why wouldn't I have?"

"I don't know…it just…"

"You know, Henry," Elizabeth says, a quiet sadness cast on her face, "life isn't like the movies."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that…I think you assumed I didn't take it because that's what the hero or the heroine always does in movies. Even if they're terribly poor. And it's portrayed as this noble, righteous, thing, that they're too proud to accept help, to accept money. But it's just not realistic. And I…was a very proud woman, and still am, but…sometimes you can't afford your pride. And script writers don't ever want to admit that, it seems."

"I've…never thought about that, honestly," Henry says, quietly, tugging at a wisp of hair behind his ear.

"Of course not, love. You've never been without."

"I'm very lucky."
"Yes, you are. It's probably not something you'll be able to understand, ever, because of that, but… I'm not trying to make you feel bad, Henry," she reassures, taking his hands in hers and giving them a gentle squeeze, "but even if it's something you won't be able to understand, I think it's important that it's something you at least know about. Does that makes sense?"

He nods, thinks back to Anne, the things he's given her. Some she's taken (the purple doc martens), some she hasn’t (well…just the necklace, actually, she's taken everything else).

Was it her pride that prevented her from keeping the necklace, or did she just think it was wrong, like she had said?

Would she have agreed to their first private tutoring session if he hadn't paid her that amount (he knew $200 was an obscene amount for two or so hours, he had just really, desperately, more than he admitted to himself at the time, wanted to spend time with her)? Would she have said no to twenty, to fifty, to a hundred dollars?

Anne had teased him about his wealth, but he'd never thought of her as not…well-off. She went to Whitehall, after all, she blended in with the prestige. Her clothes were gorgeous, looked expensive, in fact. Her outfits were always well-put together. Her house was a beautiful Victorian, two stories, with a full front and backyard, in a nice, historic neighborhood in one of the country's highest cost-of-living cities. Thomas Boleyn was a single parent, but he had a high-ranking government job.

Henry recalls what's happened since November, and starts to connect everything, like a thread tugging through a seam, all the memories:

"It's Latin American," she continues, "I try to get it at Food4Less when I can."

"Food for…less?" Henry asks, puzzled, having never heard the name before.

"The grocery— oh my God," Anne puts a hand over her chest and laughs, delighted, "you don’t know what that is, do you?"

What she had said, so proudly, after he had asked her what it meant to be a Boleyn:

"We were taught that we're only as important as we make ourselves," she says, head held high.

The party where Valois tried to corner her, when he had swooped in to her defense (not that she had needed it):

Anne holds up her boot in one hand and the broken off sole in the other.

"My sister is NOT a prostitute," she announces, "if she were, she would buy me better shoes."

The notes they passed during tutoring:

not good enough. anyway: what will you be doing over break?

well, café will be closed. but i booked a gig as an extra on some teen soap. it's shooting near sunset and vine.

That day he learned that she had learned the truth:

"I have to study, Henry! Not everyone's parents pay for school, you know. I know that's
a completely foreign concept to you, but some of us have to maintain certain GPAs so that we can continue our--"

"Hey," he snaps, starting to get annoyed, "I have friends on scholarships, don't talk to me like I don't--"

God, she must've hated me, then, Henry thinks, wincing at the thought.

Henry appears lost in thought, gaze distant, and Elizabeth wonders where it was he went.

"Henry?"

"Sorry," he says, shaking his head, he looks back at her and asks, "did you call him?"

"Of course. I thanked him right away."

"Would you…"

He trails off, starts to fidget with the sleeves of his sweater again, brow furrowed.

"What?"

"Never mind," he says, stirring a spoon into his half-empty cup, "I don't want to offend you."

"I'm sure it's nothing I haven't heard before. Go ahead."

"I'm just curious about…" he closes his eyes, rubs a hand over his face, as if pained, "would you have…would you have called him, if he had just left a note?"

Elizabeth has a sense that there's some significance to this question. She has a hunch that it's a specific person he's asking about, but she's not about to bring the mysterious her up again, not after Henry's reaction to the mere mention of it.

"Oh," Elizabeth says, scrunches her face, as if seriously pondering this, "no. I probably wouldn't have. It's so rude to not leave a tip, really."

"Grand-mère," he groans, laughing, "please, you know what I mean--"

"I'm teasing. But…still, no, I doubt I would have. It showed me he was serious about his intentions, I suppose. And…it wouldn't have been smart of me to call him, had he only left his number and thirty-five cents."

"Not smart?"

"Women…that are cautious with their hearts, tend to avoid men that are wealthy. Because we know women are easily replaceable to them," she says with a shrug, drinking the remainder of her tea.

"What do you mean, 'easily replaceable'?"

"Well, a man that's wealthy has so many options. A man that's wealthy and handsome…and young…forget about it," she says, waving a hand, "how do you know you're not just like any of the others? That you'll be different to them? Especially if they have a reputation already, in the love department, and I learned that he definitely did."

"But you married him," Henry points out.
"Yes, I did. It was impulsive of me. I had only known him a month."

"Was it because…"

"Because he was rich? I've been asked that before, by reporters…first by my brother, Anthony, actually. 'Would you have married him if he was just as poor as you had been', 'would you have been as swept away'…I still don't know for sure. I might not have. But I've realized, actually, over the years, that it doesn't matter."

"It doesn't?" Henry asks, wondrously.

"It doesn't. It happened like it did. Edward was how he was. Thinking about how things might have been, if a certain factor was changed…is irrelevant, in the end. I loved him. If his wealth was an influence to me marrying him, well…it still doesn't change the love. It doesn't make the love I had for him any less real. It doesn't change the fact that I did love him, that that love grew, and grew, and grew the more I got to know him. Sometimes the soil in which things begin isn't nearly as important as the tree that grows from it."

The image stays with Henry, even after his grandmother tells him that she's going to go check on Margaret, that there's a chest with some "mementos and such" that he's welcome to go through:

A tree, grown from love. Branches that stretch higher and higher, reaching for the sky. He rummages through the envelopes on top, until he flips to one in his mother's handwriting. All of the letters from Elizabeth's eldest daughter, it seems, are in their own stack, tied together with a gold ribbon.

The one on top isn't the return address from either the New York or Los Angeles Tudor residence, however, but a mailbox from Whitehall. The post-mark date is 1989, the ink faded with age-- the letter is older than Henry is himself.

But the date means, that when his mother wrote it, she was eighteen or nineteen years old-- younger than Henry is, himself, right now.

Elizabeth is just about to close the door when Margaret starts and yawns, blinks at her, slowly.

"I'm sorry, I hope I didn't wake you."

Margaret gets up and shrugs, watches her grandmother as she sets a cup of something steaming on top of the dresser, next to the water. She peers over the mug-- it's warm milk, probably with honey, if she's trying to make a drink she remembers Margaret liking as a child.

Margaret ignores it and drinks the water, and Elizabeth takes a seat at the armchair in the corner of the room, starts to fold laundry that's in a hamper in the windowsill, humming to herself. Her hands move at a glacial pace, but she tucks the corners of the towels in neat squares nevertheless, eyes focused, mouth relaxed.

"So," Elizabeth starts, tone casual, not stopping her movements, "were you comfortable?"

"Yes, fine."
"Have you been sleeping well, lately?"

Margaret feels her kindness, like a warm blanket, with a thread of pity running through it that stings. She doesn't feel that she deserves kindness, but she doesn't have the energy it takes to muster up a stinging response, or any sharpness that might push it, and her, away.

"I haven't been, no," she answers honestly, looks at the palms of her own hands.

She had swiped so many cards, so many times, she's half-surprised it didn't leave burn marks. The feeling of elation never lasts once she's home with the things she's bought, the shame sets in as soon as she starts hiding everything in her closet.

"Why's that?"

"I don't know," Margaret says, shrugging, she squints against the glare from the bedroom window, but the sun settles back behind the clouds and she relaxes, watches people in the building across the street take their clothes in and out of washers and dryers, "it's fine, though."

"It's fine?" Elizabeth inquires, lightly, in a similar tone to one people usually use with small talk.

"Yeah, like…" she picks at a hangnail, annoyed by its existence, "I won't sleep for a few days, and then I'll sleep a lot for a few days. So it all comes out in the wash, or whatever."

"How do you feel when you don't sleep?" Elizabeth asks, placing the folded towels against the edge of the hamper before starting on the rest.

"Energetic, actually," Margaret says, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth, "which is…kind of weird, I guess. Energetic until I crash, that is. Like now."

"Mmm. And on the days you sleep a lot?"

"I…"

Margaret wracks her brain. This is harder to think about. There's less immediate consequences on her slow days. Time drags on, so she tries to sleep it away, get to the next morning, the next day.

It's all a blur, in general, but when it's fast, she knows the blur happened. There's always proof. There's the receipts, or her receiving a GED, or a suspension or an expulsion from school. A dry mouth the morning after a night out at a club, a broken heel.

When it's slow, it's hard to know how much time has passed. It's ceased to have meaning, for one thing. For another, there's a lack of action, which equals a lack of results. Perhaps the only proof she gets is a mountain of texts and messages from her friends or siblings.

She'll wake up one morning, actually bother to check, and realize how long she's been checked out. How long it's been since she suddenly flicked a switch and just…stopped caring. About anything.

"I feel…flat, I guess."

"Low?" Elizabeth suggests, setting the hamper, now full with folded towels and washcloths, aside, and folding her hands on her lap.

"I guess. I don't really think…I'd describe it like that, though. I don't think I know how to, really," Margaret admits, her own truth startling her.
"So, you wouldn't say you experience...highs and lows?"

Margaret scrunches her face, starts to button up her sweater.

Her aura has the main colors it has since her childhood, indigo and violet, like Elizabeth's own. Indigo represents intuition, a deep sensitivity, someone that feels emotions deeply. The violet also displays sensitivity, and high creativity. But Elizabeth noticed smudges of darkness when her granddaughter stood in the doorway, and now that she's had more of a chance to look at her, there's a layer of red.

Red by itself, in a pure form, doesn't suggest anything negative. As long as there's clarity to the color all it suggests is passion, energy, power.

But muddied red is anger, red that wars against a dark blue layer, an almost inky blue, is pure friction. It is obsession, restlessness, anxiety, nervousness.

And, rather than the dark blue and red overlapping to a purple in between, they resist each other, in juxtaposition. They battle for vibrancy and brightness.

"Sort of, I guess," Margaret says dismissively, setting more pillows behind her back, she sits up straight, her eyes, bright and blue, shine like stars as she says, "doesn't everyone, though?"

"Yes, that's true. Some people, though...feel them more intensely than others."

"Oh, yeah," her granddaughter says, voice bored, she twists her fingers through her long, tangled, auburn locks and reaches for her cell phone on the opposite side of the bed, "like who?"

"Like me," Elizabeth says.

Margaret pauses, puts her phone down. Looks at her, skeptically, a mask of teenage disdain, button nose twitched to the side, mouth pursed.

"What do you mean?" she asks, scoffs, really, crossing her arms.

"I mean I had intense emotional highs and intense emotional lows. And I did things during the highs that weren't smart. But I was lucky," Elizabeth says, "I'm sorry, do you mind if I do your hair? It's a mess, it distracts me terribly."

Rude, Margaret is about to say, but her fingers get caught in her hair as she tries to run them through it, and she has to pry them out, so the smart retort dies on her lips.

"Fine," she says, instead, and her grandmother nods, opens a drawer, and takes out a silver hairbrush.

Elizabeth sits beside her on the bed and Margaret turns around so that her back is facing her.

"What does...you were 'lucky'? I don't get..."

"Yes," Elizabeth says, and Margaret feels her hand at the bottom of her hair, unlooping a snag, "I had a husband, and siblings, that knew I had problems with...my highs and lows, shall we say. They looked out for me."

"What did you do that wasn't...what did you say? Smart?"

"Oh, sweetheart...I think the question is what didn't I do? I...slept with my first husband, before we
were married. That was a terribly stupid thing to do in the sixties, birth control wasn't as…easy to obtain. The morning-after pill didn't exist yet. Children out of wedlock were terribly disgraced, shamed."

"But he married you."

"True," Elizabeth says, voice low and musical, pushing the hairbrush through the ends of Margaret's hair, "but he didn't have to. He hadn't promised to. I did the same thing with Edward, and I had no ring from him yet, either."

"Why did you do it, then? If it wasn't...'done'? Back then?"

"I wanted to. I thought that was a good enough reason to do anything, back then. I didn't think of the risks. I said yes to Edward's marriage proposal, even though I had only known him for four weeks. That was reckless, too. And it's another example of how lucky I was…that he was kind and honorable, that I wasn't wrong about that. I could've very well been; it's hard to really get a sense of someone in so little time."

"What else?" Margaret asks, curious, now, she wipes a hand against her mouth and it feels cold against her skin.

"I…would get it into my head that it was a great idea to stay up all night, on nights before I had a six AM call time. I'd clean the entire house, floor to ceiling, even though we had a maid. Write or read poetry, I'd…keep Edward up," she quips, laughing.

"You'd…oh," Margaret says, realization dawning, "you mean, you'd make...Mom's siblings."

"I would. And then, when I went to set the next day I was obviously a wreck, if I was there on time at all, that is. Or, terribly late. I got quite a reputation as a diva, that way. Probably a deserved one."

"I didn't know that."

"I'm not surprised," Elizabeth says, working the brush from the roots the ends, "the press has always loved me, for some reason. The 'common people' always have, but the other notable families…not so much. It's funny, almost. That none of my fans were your grandfather's friends, but people I didn't know."

"I've done some…not-smart things, too."

"Well, why wouldn't you?" Elizabeth says as she works a section of Margaret's hair into a braid, "you don't want to stop doing what you're doing when you're happy, right?"

"Basically…yeah. How'd you know?"

"Lucky guess," she says, sliding a bobby pin in, gently, against Margaret's scalp, the braid pinned under her mass of curls, "how would you describe it, Margaret? How it feels? To be so…happy, energetic? So intensely?"

"I don't know if I know how to describe it…"

"I'm sure you could. You were always a good writer."

"I was?"

"Of course. I still have all your letters, if you don't take my word for it," Elizabeth says, starting to
"I guess it's…" Margaret tries to concentrate on describing it, closes her eyes, feels her hands tenderly lace the pieces together before looping it around in a circle, over the thickness of her curls, "it's like you're a kid on the swing-set at the playground that tries to go the highest. Everything is so bright. And you're pumping your legs, laughing, soaring, dizzy with exhilaration. You feel weightless. And you are the highest. Everyone below you looks…really small."

"Sounds kind of scary," Elizabeth says, quietly.

"It does, but it doesn't feel that way in the moment."

"What happens when it changes?"

"When what changes, Grand-mère,?"

"The feeling. You said…you start to feel flat. That you crash? That your energy…crashes?"

"Well…you're still on the swing-set, of course. But then…your friend calls your name and you get distracted, you feel yourself shift on the seat and you feel yourself slipping but can't do anything to stop it, you're powerless, even though before you felt…so powerful. So you're kind of in a panic and control is just this… faraway country."

"Then what happens, sweetheart?"

"You hit the ground. Your skin is broken, you're crying, and your back hurts too much to get up. At first you can't believe that this could happen. The contrast to… how you are now and how you were on the swing seems unreal. And you're so, so humiliated because everyone just saw you fall, and then…darkness settles. You couldn't catch your breath before, but now; now it's just hard to breathe."

Margaret feels warm, suddenly, cheeks damp with sweat, so she touches her face again. But it's not sweat. It's tears, that roll down her face and past her chin, drip onto her collar-bone.

"This is stupid," Margaret says, sniffling, "I'm just babbling…you should open your gift, we should go get Henry, I'm sure he's bored--"

"Henry's fine," Elizabeth says, stroking her hair, "shhh, darling. I gave him something to do, he's alright."

"Okay," Margaret whimpers, and Elizabeth hugs her, tight, settles her chin over the top of her head, "can I go back to bed, though?"

"If you'd like. If you're tired, certainly. But we should talk more, later, alright?"

"Okay," she agrees, easily, lacing her hand through her grandmother's, "okay, I would like that."

December 4, 1989, Monday

Dearest Mother,
SO much to tell you, I scarcely know where to begin.

I suppose I'll start with answering some of your questions from the last letter you sent me (thank you for the care package, by the way: the cookies and banana bread are long gone, of course, but the stash of tea should last a while…as long as I can hide it from my roommate, that is!)

No, there is no news of anything involving boys. I thought there might've been, but it was just a fluke.

I don't remember if I've told you about Jacob-- long, dark hair? Green eyes?

(Okay, don't show this letter to Dad, because of the next part I'm going to write…seriously. Don't. I address different letters to him for this reason.)

Body like Adonis (he's the art model for Life Drawing and…WOW. That's all I'll say about that)?

Anyway, he walked with me after this party on Saturday and we stopped by the Hugo fountain.

He took two coins out of his pocket, handed one to me, and said "Make a wish."

I told him this wasn't a wishing fountain and he shrugged and said "Who cares?"

I threw it in over my shoulder, like you and I did together at the Trevi Fountain, in Rome, last summer.

Back then I wished for…well, something God wouldn't like very much. I wished for a great hurt to befall whoever had anything to do with Edward's and Richard's disappearance (tell me, please, if there any leads…I know I always tell you that, but really, please do-- I want to know). And then, when we did it the next day, I wished for them to come back to us, of course.

So this time, I decided I should wish for something selfish, but something God wouldn't have a problem with. I wished for five children, in my future-- I want at LEAST that many, most of them girls, I hope, like you and Grand-mère Jacquetta…I so loved growing up with so many sisters! I miss them, and you, all the time.

Then, Jacob tells me to look at him, so I do. He holds my face in his hands, leans in.

So of course I'm like, oh, he's going to kiss me. What else?

But he doesn't.

Like, pardon my French, but what the hell?

All he does is stare at me, and then do you know what he says?

"See you later."

And then he LEAVES.

What a tease, honestly. What does that even mean??
Henry pushes the paper away on the table, startled at the similarity, in his own memory from Whitehall, to his own words ("see you later"): 

**December 4, 2016, Sunday, 1:20 AM**

They're standing close. He leans even closer, closing the distance between them effectively, and cradles her face in his hands, gently.

She's almost too beautiful to bear. But she's letting him look at her, and who knows when she will, again? Henry knows he should take advantage of her allowing him to look, for as long as possible.

The moon, full and bright, peeks out from behind the clouds. He listens to the rush of water from Hugo Fountain. Henry's never noticed the sound before, it's usually pretty loud here, during the day, he supposes the chatter of students drowns it out.

Anne sighs, lets her face fall a little bit left into his hand, as if she's melting into it, and he brushes his thumb against her cheek.

"Don't forget," he whispers intently.

"Don't forget what?" she asks, brow furrowed, confusion woven in her voice, along with something else he can't name (want? ).

"Just-- don't forget."

"Henry, what do you--"

"I'll see you," he says, withdrawing his hands.

He walks away, backwards, though, so he's facing her, giving a wave as he does so.

"You'll see me?" she asks incredulously.

"See you around," he says, putting his hands in his pockets, and shrugging, "see you later...whichever."

He shakes his head, leans over from the couch, and picks the letter up again, continuing from where he left off:

I'm done with college boys, they are all so endlessly immature. I think I'm going to start looking for men.

I haven't had much time to go to auditions, lately, because of classes. Uncle Richard took my headshots, though, which was so nice of him...they turned out beautifully. There's color and black and white, and I picked the font for my name. I was worried it might come off as pretentious, but he thought it was unique.

It's fairy-tale, storybook lettering. Very reminiscent of the sort of font they used in the 15th Century, really, in things they used back then, like their Books of Hours and such.

He told me I had "grown beautiful". Rude! Like I needed a reminder that the last time he saw me I had frizzy hair and was too skinny. He could've just left the 'grown' part out of the compliment.
What else…there's this girl in my creative writing class, her name is Alice Hoffman? Anyway, I read her draft of this short story. It's about two sisters that are witches. It's titled "Magic", though she thinks she might change that.

There was this beautiful quote I thought I'd share with you, I don't even have the draft anymore (I already proofread it and gave her notes, not that she really needed any), but I still remember it:

"The moon is always jealous of the heat of the day, just as the sun always longs for something dark and deep."

It's about the sisters, but I think it's more apt for lovers.

I won the poetry contest I told you about, actually! The prize was only fifteen dollars, but it was published in the school paper. I put the clipping in here for you, and one for Dad, too.

It's basically just about how much I miss you all, and how hard it was to leave home (move here! what is the charm of suburban New York… I know it's only a few miles away from Albany so that makes it easier for Dad's political stuff, but. Really. His sunny disposition would do so much better in sunny Los Angeles), and some other stuff

Richard proofread it for me and said it was very good, but that perhaps I didn't want to "give L.A. such a hard time?" I asked what he meant and he said "you're basically saying it's fake, that the people here are" and I said, "so? it's true."

He said, "I know, but talent agents might not appreciate your candor."

I doubt agents make a habit of reading college newspapers, but, if they do, oh well.

Hope you are doing very, very well. Keep sending me pictures.

I love, love, love and miss you. So much.

Love,

Liz

i know you, i walked with you once upon a dream...

The song playing through his grandmother's speakers right now (it's a cover by Lana Del Rey, he believes, he thinks he remembers it from the movie Maleficent, recalls Margaret and Marina bullying him into watching it with them in at the movie theater when it was released) is beautiful and haunting, and plays as he reads the poem, holding it with shaking hands:

the city of angels (show them to me)

by elizabeth york, winner of the whitehall poetry contest

i.

this is how it happens:

your family drops you off at the airport.
you get in line and don't look back because if you look back you will dissolve, the tears will spill and you will run back, throw your ticket in the trash and chalk this up to a wild whim, an all-advised fantasy, an impossible dream, and you'll stay and nothing will ever change for the better, or the worse.

you take a cab with the sixty dollars your father gave you

traffic is hell, so two hours later you roll up to hollywood:

more dirt than glamour, more desperation than stars.

ii.

here's what was:

your identity, woven in what you left behind

mother father sisters brothers

mixtapes and your hands on the wheel of that volvo,

the roses in your garden and the grass under your feet

posters of audrey and marilyn and your mother

in a small town time churns,

a priest's sermon,

rain overflowing the gutter,

folded sheets and big spaces in between,

everything was grey fading to clear smudged clean.

sober,

nothing is soft at the edges.

everything just…is, as it is, and when:

there is no revision of your role,

you are written, but don't get the pen.

iii.

in a city everything is red,

fast and frenetic

each day bleeds into the next,

a busy vein

flying, breathless
there are no spaces in between

everyone tries to be exactly what the next person wants,

drunk on noise and approval: you can be whoever you want

i struggle to catch up, pretend to get the joke (do that often enough and you'll become one)

iv.

they call this the 'city of angels'

but i haven't found them yet.

(show them to me)

i am blue but being that way

doesn't fix anything, doesn't help a leaky ceiling,

doesn't heal any wounds.

so let the angels know this:

that someone (me, always me) else (not just you)

feels weird and alone and scared

like life is a party they didn't get invited to,

like everything falls apart, over and over again,

to the point where the broken parts

look more like dust than puzzle pieces.

please tell them: i understand

Henry puts the newspaper clipping down on the coffee table. He wipes the tears that fall with the back of a closed fist before he picks up another envelope, slides the paper from inside out of it, gently, and reads.

Chapter End Notes

alright, again i'll ask (if you haven't already) for a vote on your preference for chapter updates, if you have the time: shorter length, frequent chapter updates OR. longer length, less frequent chapter updates.

esp. good for me to know since i will be starting classes soon (i've already started doing some reading in preparation and, oh boy...is there going to be A LOT of it).

i also have a job (hours vary, but sometimes it's more full-time than part-time) and do
volunteer tutoring, so I anticipate an even busier schedule than usual for me.
"I am a fucking martyr," George mutters to himself, closing the tab and returning to Twitter, "swear to God. I am the backbone of this family."

Chapter Notes

'there never was such beauty in another man. nature made him, and then broke the mould.' -- 'Orlando Furioso', (canto X, st. 84), by Ludovico Ariosto, written 1516

'i love you right up to the moon -- and back.' -- Sam McBratney, 'Guess How Much I Love You', written 1994

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 19, 2016, Monday, Washington D.C.

1:01 PM

Anne has felt tired since Saturday. It's a vague tiredness, nothing horrible, but…she doesn’t enjoy it.

So, even though it's not anywhere near her usual bedtime, she walks upstairs to her bedroom and settles into her bed, pulls the covers up around her chin.

She can feel herself falling asleep, and she gives into it, easily, relief sliding over her like warm honey.

"What is it you find so captivating that you have not heard my footsteps?"

Anne startles, looks up to Henry, closes her book and stands to curtsey immediately. He shakes his head, gestures for her to sit again, remains standing himself.

"I beg your Majesty's pardon--"

"I wish some day you would look upon me in the same manner you looked upon this book here," he responds, "what is it you read, my Lady?"

"Orlando Furioso, my Lord. A poem, by Ludovico Ariosto."

"I have read it. I used to be fonder of Italians than I am presently."

"Did you enjoy it, Majesty?"
"I believe I did… though all I seem to be able to recall is the princess Angelica being loved by so many men. And driving Orlando mad."

"Surely she can't be held responsible for the madness of another."

"No? Can't she?" he asks, words weighted with significance, gaze sweeping from the hem of her gown to the top of her French hood. It then lingers on the 'B' of her necklace, before he looks at her face, searching, the entendre in his question clear.

His smoldering gaze reminds her of the way sunlight spills through the robes of the Virgin Mary through the stained glass window during Mass: fire trapped in an ocean, simultaneously dazzling and impossible.

"Perhaps Orlando should not have let himself be driven to love or madness," she counters, then, lowering her eyelashes, hastily adds, "your Majesty."

Henry smirks, blue eyes bright with mischief. He puts his hands behind his back, walks closer to her, but instead circles around the bench, turns to the roses clustered behind her. He takes the petal of a white one, in between his thumb and finger, and strokes it, only half-turned towards her.

"Which passage caused your smile?" he asks, as he looks at the rose, rather than her.

"Non e un si bello in tante altre persone, Nature il fece, e poi roppa la stampa," Anne reads, in flowing Italian, her finger on the line on the page.

"'There never was such beauty in another man. Nature made him, and then broke the mould.'" Henry translates, easily (even as a boy he was noted as a skilled scholar, the philosopher Erasmus himself sang him praises, even though it would've been wiser for a man to sing them to the intended heir, Prince Arthur, instead), "Why does that amuse you?"

"It amuses me that any man should think so highly of himself, I suppose."

"Then you are very cruel, indeed, Lady Anne!" he teases, turning to face her, crossing his arms.

"How am I--"

"What is wrong with a man that thinks highly of himself?"

"Nothing wrong, exactly, just…some lack of fairness in the reality that women are scolded and shamed for such pride in their beauty, while men are not."

"Who shames you?" he demands, tone no longer light, face flushed under his copper curls, colors clashing.

"It does not matter much, Majesty. But I cannot say I enjoy the scrutiny. That is why I am out here," she says, gesturing to the topiaries, the trees and gardens, "rather than in there," Anne says, jutting her chin towards the palace.

Henry considers her, carefully, before taking his violet cap from atop his head. He twirls it around his hands, brow furrowed, then continues.

"I am glad to have found you out here. I have something for you."
"Your Majesty, I have already returned the gifts you so generously bestowed upon--"

"I have come to realize that gifts of such value might have caused your discomfort. Perhaps they even made it seem as if I were trying to buy your affection, and I wish to assure you that this is not the case."

"I was only set ill at ease because--"

"So I had a servant pick something else, at the London market booths-- it is simple, nothing costly. A piece any merchant could buy easily, for his intended, with enough left over to afford bread at the end of the day," Henry says, pulling a bracelet from his sleeve, a silver band with an etched rose. It is embedded with nothing, no precious gems, very dissimilar to the jewels he sent to Hever, sparkling and heavy and colorful.

In comparison, this piece is almost dull, but she finds she quite likes it. It has a subtle beauty.

He hands it to her and she dips her head before taking it.

"It is still a gift," Anne says, examining it in the palm of her hand, as Henry takes a seat next to her.

"Will you not accept it?"

"Gifts are for husbands and wives. My Lord, you are the first, but not to me. I am not the second, to anyone."

"Only for husbands and wives? Well…if this is true, the court must be in whispers over the nature of my friendship with Charles Brandon."

"My Lord!" she exclaims, blushing, laughing, "I cannot believe you would say--"

"I cannot believe I have finally made you laugh."

"I…"

Anne attempts to steady her hands, which start to shake, and remembers the words of her brother, his warning to her before she came to court: "His Majesty could charm a cardinal into paganism, truly; it is as if he is some sort of Greek god...be careful, Anne. He is in love with love, but I do not believe he has ever remained in it."

"I have heard it, of course, from afar, but never been the cause of it. I love the sound of it," he says, smile earnest.

"I…thank you, your Grace."

"I imagine it even makes the angels jealous. Their harps do not compare."

Anne sighs, glides a hand over her heavy skirt, a tiered grey damask that spills onto the grass below, turning the bracelet through the fingers of her other hand.

Cautiously, he takes the hand she smooths over her skirt in his, and kisses it. His mouth feels like silk against her skin. She gives a breathy sigh, a sort of gasp, a girlish reaction, Anne knows, and she squeezes her eyes shut, embarrassed over letting such a sound escape her.
"I accept your compliments, though I feel undeserving of them. I shall keep this," Anne says, withdraws her hand from his, gently, and slides the bracelet upon her wrist, "thank you, Majesty. But I can accept it only as your subject. Not as your mistress."

Henry rubs a hand over his hair, the sunlight catching glints of gold in the red, roughly, groans, "Anne--"

"If you care for me half as much as you claim, I cannot see why you wish to ruin my reputation," she says, abruptly, angry almost more at herself than him, for she should not have let it go this far. Should've feigned some illness the very second he appeared and asked to excuse herself.

"I do not wish--"

"For that is what has occurred with my sister. And only a fool repeats the mistakes of others. That is something I do not wish to be, Majesty. May I leave?" she inquires, gathering her skirts with a free hand, she stands up from the bench, turns to face him, and holds the book against her chest, as she sinks to the ground, in courtsey, till her face is on level with his knees.

"I would not like you to, no," he says, glare heated.

"If I yield for a moment, will you leave me alone as I have asked? Is that what it will take? Very well, then," she says, "we are inside this maze, out of sight."

"What is the meaning of--"

Flying in the face of convention, decorum, rules that dictate how anyone below a monarch is to behave without asking for permission, Anne rises to her feet and sits on the king's lap, places her hands upon his shoulders, and kisses him, softly.

He does not scold her for her impudence, as he has right to, but returns the kiss, fervently, opens his mouth against hers, hands searching over the bodice of her dress, tight against her waist, then takes one to cup her cheek, stroking his thumb against it as he just had the petal of the rose.

"There," she says, pulling away from the kiss, flustered and breathless, she lays both hands against the hard planes of his chest, "you see, your Grace, it is not worth jewels or attention. I am nothing particularly special, so you should not pay me any special attention. Again, I beg you not to."

She does not ask his permission to leave, but gets up from his lap, carefully. He, expression dazed, as if she has left him winded, does not stop her, but nevertheless she scoops her book from the grass and runs, as fast as her feet will allow, towards the exit of the maze, wondering if he can hear her sobs as she does so.

Anne cries, for she returns his affections but wishes she did not. It would make her life, her role as a lady-in-waiting, much easier, if she did not.

Her heart yearns and she has to tell it to quiet, has to tell it that it will be her undoing, if she lets it lead her.

The light hurts her eyes and she shields them, and suddenly she is falling, falling, falling deeper, and now she is somewhere else, not the maze, but in Henry's dorm, and...she feels the smoothness of high-quality sheets against her upper body.
There is Henry, except he does not have a full beard, he is the Henry she remembers, his hair still red and gold but he is only a few years older than she, rather than a decade, like he last was, standing against the roses, and rather than agony coiled tight in her chest, all she feels is joy, unabated, and warmth as she counts the freckles that spill over his nose. And he is lying down, next to her, not towering over her, not glaring at her from his seat on a stone bench. He is radiant with some sort of purity, some light...

"You realize," Henry whispers, brushing the tip of his nose against hers, "that this is stupid, right?"

"Lie down somewhere else, then," Anne says, closing her eyes.

His hands, warm against her bare waist, pull her closer to him.

They're in bed, a sheet and blanket pulled over both their shoulders.

"No," he huffs, "this is my bed."

"Then," she says, opening her eyes, "I don't know what to tell you."

"Whatever," he says, removing a hand, she sees him put one over the top of their blankets, tug on it, once, tease at pulling it down, "I'm looking--"

"No," Anne says, swatting his hand away, "you promised."

"Now," he groans before kissing her neck and blowing a raspberry on it (she giggles, reactively), "why would I do a stupid thing like that?"

Anne shrugs, says, "I don't know, but you told me you never break a promise."

"Ah, but there's a clause for that."

"Mmm? And what's that?"

"Anything involving my girlfriend's chest, of course," Henry says, one hand splayed flat against the small of her back, other hand cupped around her breast, thumb tickling its side.

"Try again."

"You're...breaking one of the Commandments, right now. You don't want to go to hell, Anne, do you?" he teases, nuzzling his nose behind her ear, kissing the spot under it.

"Which one would that be?"

"Thou shalt not...hide thyself under a sheet...when thyself is sexy."

"Huh. I must have been sick that day in Catholic school," Anne says, laughing, "I somehow entirely missed that Commandment."

"You went to Catholic school?" Henry asks, grinning.

"Yes. I'm sure I've told you."
"No, I don't think so…tell me…do you still have the uniform, perchance?"

"Did I bring my high school uniform with me to college? Is that what you're asking?"

"Yes."

"No…I did not."

"Pity. You still have it, though, don’t you? At home?" he asks, voice hopeful.

"Yes…why do you-- oh my God," she says, rolling her eyes, she moves herself from his arms and turns around under the blankets and he spoons her from behind, the cotton of his shirt soft against her bare back, "you are such a boy."

"I am," he says, as she feels his laughter shake against her, "I'm so glad you noticed. That bodes well for me."

Anne yanks at her quilt as she wakes up, startles out of bed, panicked, chest heaving.

She puts her hand over her heart-- it's pounding, beating erratically.

She tries to take deep breaths, reaches for the glass of water by her nightstand, now lukewarm, and gulps down the entire thing, greedily, throat aching with thirst.

Pieces of the dreams fall away, until all she can remember is Henry's dorm, and being in his bed, and a bit of their conversation within it. Vaguely, she remembers a rose garden, but not where it is. Or why it was there.

George is scrolling through Twitter on his laptop at the kitchen table, eating a bowl of frosted flakes, when Anne appears in the entryway, bleary-eyed, face rosy with color, pillow crease against her cheek. She wears grey yoga pants slung low on her hips, and a large, pink sweatshirt with a picture of a crown on it, that slides down her shoulder precariously as she steps on her tip toes to grab a glass from the cupboard.

"You alright?" he asks, "You look...flushed."

"Fine," she says, breezily, stumbling a bit towards the sink, filling the glass up with water, "just thirsty."

"Oh," he inquires, tilting his head to the side, "for what?"

"For water," she says, rolling her eyes before taking a drink from the glass, "honestly, George, not everything's an innuendo."

"That's what they want you to think."

"That's what who wants you to think?"

"The Puritans, of course."

"The…okay," she says, shaking her head, "I don't have time for you being weird--"

"Yes," he says, with a dramatic sigh, putting both hands to his heart, "you're obviously so strapped for time, given that you just woke up at…” he glances at the clock above the sink, then turns to her
"Whatever," she snaps, pulling out the chair across from him and taking a seat, "I just…"

"You just what?" he asks, drumming his fingers against the surface of the table.

"I had a dream. It was…weird," Anne says, leaning back in her chair, "I feel weird, I guess. I wish…I don't know what it meant. I guess that bothers me."

"Oooo, was it a sex dream?"

She blushes, drinks the rest of her water.

"It was," he crows, "oh my God, tell me. I love analyzing those."

"You love analyzing your sister's sex dreams?" she asks incredulously

"Oh," he says, wrinkling his nose, "fair point."

"It wasn't a sex dream," Anne says, running her finger around the top of her now-empty glass, worrying her bottom lip, "but…it was sexy, I guess."

"I'm sure I can handle it, then. Tell me."

Anne is hesitant. It's awkward, and she feels like her father is going to materialize at any moment, even though she heard the Bach from his study upstairs, even though he waved at her as she passed by his door.

But she recounts what she can remember…not the dialogue that occurred during the dream, because she can't really remember that, but the gist of it. So, in hushed tones, she tells him that she thinks it took place in his dorm room (that part she remembers), that what they said implied they were dating, the…touching, which George squirms at a bit, but it's not as if it was explicit.

"So…what do you think it means?" she asks.

"It means...that...you want…to be Henry's girlfriend. And you want him to touch your boobs."

"Yeah," Anne says, getting up from the table, "I reject that analysis."

"You can't reject my analysis, you asked for my analysis," George huffs, crossing his arms indignantly.

"I want a different one," Anne insists, as she opens the fridge and takes out a carton of cranberry juice, pouring it in her glass, "that's too literal. Dreams are supposed to be symbolic."

"Thanks, Freud," George says flatly, "I had no idea."

Anne shrugs, leans against the counter as she drinks her juice. Bats her eyelashes at him and pouts.

"Don't try Bambi me, demon. I am impervious to your Bambi. It does not affect me anymore."

She widens her eyes and clasps her hands together, rests them under her chin and continues to pout.

"Fine, whatever. You're so high maintenance sometimes, I swear," George says, opening a new tab
on his computer "let me Google this then…dream symbolism…la di dah…you were naked, you said?"

"Wearing pants. Shirtless," she corrects, wincing and covering her eyes with her hands.

"But covered up with blankets, right?" he says, squinting his eyes at his screen.

"Yes."

"And he wanted to look, but you wouldn't let him?"

"Yes."

"Was he shirtless?"

"No."

"Let's see…you're afraid…how surprising, a dream symbolizes a fear…of being…vulnerable around him. Exposed equals vulnerable. So. There you go," he says, looking up at her, "happy?"

Anne blinks, slowly, twitches her nose like a rabbit, then says, "No, I don't like that, either," before leaving the kitchen.

"You're welcome!" he yells at her retreating figure, shaking his head.

Rude.

"I am a fucking martyr," George mutters to himself, closing the tab and returning to Twitter, "swear to God. I am the backbone of this family."

December 19, 2016, Monday, New York, apartment of Elizabeth Woodville

Henry reads:

Dearest Mother,

I adore him, I do, I know I've told you so, I'm sure everyone knows, but…I am just overwhelmed with adoration for him, especially today. My Golden Harry, my sweet prince…I love, love, love him!

The most charming thing happened today, and I will tell you shortly, but first:

I know we're not supposed to have favorites, as mothers, but I think he's mine. So smart, so precocious…it's incredible. Tell me it's not terribly wicked of me to feel this way? You had a favorite, no (was it me? you can tell me…)? All parents say they don't but I'm pretty sure all of them do.

He's a quicker study than Arthur, actually, although I'd never tell him that, of course. His ego needs no help from me.

I think Arthur knows and doesn't mind, actually. I see little jealousy between them. Arthur likes to write letters, and Henry always opens his, eagerly, runs off with the envelope and tears it as he does so, laughing in delight. He responds right away, asks
me to read them before he sends them back("There can't be spelling mistakes, Mom, that'd be so embarrassing," he insists, so solemnly!)

He and Arthur both have their strengths and weaknesses, of course. Arthur is more serious, more even-keeled. Henry is rambunctious, quick-tempered at times, more silly.

But back to today: I was gardening (which Henry scolds me about, still -- "we have servants to do that, Elizabeth" he harrumphs, but I wave him away. Roses need a woman's touch, anyways, you always told me that) outside, and Henry sat next to me, chattering away, making a daisy chain.

He told me all about the Arthurian legends. He quoted passages, directly and correctly, I think, and used a stick he found as a sword, demonstrated and playacted some scenes. He bowed at the end, out of breath.

I can't believe Arthur is in boarding school already-- in Wales, of all things! I told him that that's who we named Arthur after, King Arthur, and he became very offended! He asked why we didn’t name him that, or "Lancelot or Galahad, at least". I told him those were quite mouthfuls for names, and that he might've been teased for them, so perhaps he should count himself lucky! Asked me what we named him for, then.

"You were named after your father, you silly goose-- don't you remember?"

He pondered this for a moment, then said, "That's not as cool, Mom."

What a smartass! I've been letting him watch too much television, maybe.

Then, he told me that he "liked, maybe like-like, I haven't decided yet", a girl named Jennifer in his class.

"I'm going to call her Guinevere and see how she reacts."

"You will?" I asked.

And THEN he tells me-- swear to God, this is verbatim-- "If she understands the reference, I'll know it's true love."

He told me he wanted to be a knight, and I told him that they only knight men in England.

"We will have to go there, then!" he told me.

Henry (I) will be pleased by this-- already he is saying he wants to send his namesake to boarding school in London, at the same one he went to. It's far too soon, I think. I know it's not realistic, but I wish he could stay here with me and his sisters forever, truly.

And I don't know why he couldn’t go to Arthur's school in Wales, if he must go. I'm sure it would be a big comfort to him to have his older brother there, but Henry said "the boy needs to learn independence, and Arthur won't want him tugging on his sleeve, anyway."

'Independence'! At eight years old! What a thing to say.

And I doubt Arthur would mind; he adores his little brother.
But now little Henry is quite fixated on this England idea. I'm writing this on a clipboard, as we are sitting on the couch in our living room, watching the BBC Pride and Prejudice series. He is watching, wide-eyed, repeating the lines and accents carefully. Margaret is practicing ballet and Henry scolds her every time she twirls in front of the screen, and she scolds him back. I should tell them to knock it off, but it's too amusing.

I'll intervene if it gets too heated.

I don't remember this series very well. Colin Firth is quite handsome, I do remember that. And I think I actually watched it when I was pregnant with Henry (ironically). I can't remember if there's anything too racy for children. I suppose I'll mute it or cover their eyes if there is.

I'm feeling quite…reflective, I guess. Sorry for rambling. It's been too long since I wrote you last.

When I first met Henry he told me that one day we would do everything on our phones. I was skeptical, but it seems that with every passing year, that becomes more and more true.

He also told me that there would be huge money in phones and the Internet, a cornucopia, that any innovators would cash in on this Golden Age of Technology. And that's certainly proved to be true-- we are ridiculously well-off. We have more than we could ever need.

I grew up wealthy, of course, so it's not that I'm not used to it. But it still feels…strange. I want to give back more than we do. There's just so much hurt in the world that needs to be healed, and we have the power to fix it. Or at least heal it, a little bit.

He's so reluctant to give to charity, though. I don't understand it, he grew up wealthy, too (though not like this). What is he so afraid of?

He always says we should "hold on to it, just in case". "Give sparingly."

Just in case? Just in case what, I always ask, but he remains cryptic.

Anyway, I'm ignoring him. I have plenty of money from my own trust fund, and from Dad's will(and I am MORE than willing to give you some, still…please. Please take me up on my offer, you cannot be reading tea leaves for every simpleton that walks to your door! You're Elizabeth Woodville, you're iconic. It's just not right). I want to work in and donate to homeless shelters, and I want to take the children with me. Even if I have to do it alone.

Stubborn, stubborn man!

Oh well.

His namesake is equally as stubborn, I think, but he listens to me more than his father does, I swear.

I hope that doesn't change too much, though I'm sure eventually, it will.

Do you remember that book you bought for him on his third birthday? "Guess How Much I Love You"?
I used to read it to him every night. He thinks he's too old for that, now, but he still whispers that line in my ear before he goes to bed: "I love you right up to the moon and back, Mama."

And I tell him the same, all the time: "I love you to the moon and back."

I love you to the moon and back, too, Mom.

Please visit more.

All my love and devotion and prayers,

Liz

Chapter End Notes

reader questions i anticipate:

-- is there any ~significance to Anne's dream, and the two different settings/centuries? answer: yes! there is. :D
--WHAT is the significance? answer: well, you're welcome to guess in the comments, and I'll tell you if you're close to the mark or not ;-) 

i was originally planning this chapter to just take place at elizabeth woodville's apartment, but i realized we hadn't heard from any of the Boleyns in quite a few chapters. So I wanted to balance it out.

Hope you enjoy!
a lost prince

Chapter Summary

It had been portrayed as a sort of David and Goliath situation for a while (at first). But they turned on Warbeck as the case continued and certain unsavory things came to light about Warbeck's background (his time in an in-patient psychiatric facility as a teenager was one of them, his time in a juvenile detention center was another); once that happened the press started to report in favor of Henry Tudor the I.

Chapter Notes

picture of the scrabble board:
http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/141861330212/boleynqueens-whose-scrabble-game-is-this

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Apartment of Elizabeth Woodville, New York, December 19, 2016, Monday

"Henry?"

"Jesus!" Henry startles, clutches at his chest, and looks up from the letter.

His grandmother stands on the other side of the room, near the hall, eyebrows raised in amusement, mirth in her smile.

"Sorry," he says, folding the paper into its original rectangle shape, "just…you're like a cat. I didn't hear you at all."

"Light footsteps," Elizabeth quips, walking over to the couch and taking a seat next to him, "sorry to scare you."

"Sorry to swear," Henry says, a curl of coppery gold falling into his eyes as he looks down at the sheet of paper.

"It's alright. Which one is this? May I see?"

He nods, hands the letter over. Elizabeth opens it carefully, both sides held in between her thumb and forefinger. She scans the page, smiles as she reads the last words.

"She loved you very much," she remarks.

"I know," he says, quietly.

His knee shakes, up and down, and she notes his hand is on the denim-covered kneecap with a firm grip, knuckles almost white, as if trying to press it steady.
Elizabeth observes him as his eyes are closed: tracks of red dot his cheeks, though his face is otherwise smooth. She reckons he’s been crying. The tinge of blue on the very outermost layer of his aura seems to suggest that too, although it’s dissipating by the second. It’s a very different intensity than the blue that beats against the red in his sister’s aura, electric and deep.

"Still…it's nice to be reminded, no?"

He nods, stoic, blue eyes shining, trained on the empty fireplace grate in front of them. They shift to the wildflowers on the table, then return to her.

"Would you like to keep it?" she offers.

"Are you sure?" he asks, voice cracking on the last word.

Elizabeth passes the letter back to him and says, "I'm sure. I have dozens more."

"Thank you," Henry whispers, he puts the paper back in the envelope.

"No need to thank me."

"I do need to. I know this is the best Christmas gift I'll get this year. Or maybe any."

Silence settles, not uncomfortably, but…Elizabeth is nothing if not good at the art of the segue.

She puts her hands in her lap and folds them and apologizes, in a light tone, for the lack of television, her lack of entertainment at all, really. Henry tells her not to worry about it, but she shrugs and says she'll pull out the little she does have in the way of entertainment.

They've decided on Scrabble. The board sits on the table in the living room.

Henry washes the few dishes in the sink, carefully (he's certainly learned his lesson about the soap-to-water ratio, and the slipperiness factor).

"Did my dear son-in-law give you two a time limit for staying over?" Elizabeth inquires, stirring the tomato soup on her stove-top with a wooden spoon.

The heat in the kitchen has fogged the windows.

Henry draws a heart on the window above the sink and says, "He said however long we'd like."

"Well," she drawls, taking two bowls from the cupboard, "since you're staying the night…you're going to call him, I suppose?"

"I suppose," he says, scrubbing the outline of the heart out with the end of his sleeve, "or text him, probably."

"I have an idea…"

Given the amount of mischief in her voice, and the smirk tugging at the corner of her mouth as she puts two plates on the cutting board, Henry guesses this idea is of the planned variety, not the spontaneous kind.

"Oh?"

"Why don't you call him and pass the phone to me?" she asks, smiling angelically, putting her chin
atop her hands, which are in the prayer position.

"Why?"

"We just haven't spoken in a while, that's all."

"Mmhmm. I'm sure that's it," he teases, throwing the dishtowel at her across the island. Elizabeth catches it and gasps in mock outrage.

"Don't throw things at your grandmother!"

"Don't lie to your grandson!"

"Don't..." Elizabeth trails off, narrows her eyes, then throws the dishtowel back, in a perfect arc, it hits Henry, taller than her, and covers his face.

"Still got it," she says, bending down and pulling a box of saltines out from a drawer in the island, as Henry laughs.

"Hello, sir," Henry says, biting into the edge of a cracker, "yes, yes we did. They all had tags, so they were all accepted...except the Birkin, but from what the woman at the store told us, we'll probably be able to resell for twice the value of what-- yes. It seems like it'll work out for the best. Yes?"

Elizabeth sits on the opposite end of the couch, her feet in slippers, resting atop of the ottoman, skimming the directions booklet for Scrabble as Henry talks on the phone.

"Well," he says, rolling his eyes, he makes the hand puppet gesture, opening and closing the 'mouth' of his hand, "that usually takes a few days to process, so...did they? Did Amex put you on hold?"

Henry gasps, silently, in mock indignation, and Elizabeth covers her mouth, shoulders shaking with quiet laughter.

"Actually, someone would like to speak with you. No, not Margaret. She's sleeping, actually...yes, I do know it's not even seven yet...here you go!"

He passes the phone to his grandmother, who takes it, eagerly.

"Henry? Oh, hello! So good to hear from you...oh, same to you, of course. It's been a while..."

Henry's first impulse, with empty hands, is to use his phone, click on one of many apps, but he realizes it's in her hand, so he eases a newspaper off from atop the coffee table, instead.

"No," Elizabeth says, disdain evident in her tone, already switched from fake cheer to chill, "Percy Warbeck's not staying with me...why would you ask that, really?"

Henry starts at the mention of the name. He hasn't heard it in a while.

Percy Warbeck was an upstart, junior employee of Red Dragon, from a few years ago. He had sued the company, been countersued by his father and the company, and lost.

It's a fairly clear memory to him, for a few reasons. One was that it had been in the news. The Tudor family was high profile, of course, and in the media a fair amount, but this particular case had
received a lot of press coverage. It had been portrayed as a sort of David and Goliath situation for a while (at first). But they turned on Warbeck as the case continued and certain unsavory things came to light about Warbeck's background (his time in an in-patient psychiatric facility as a teenager was one of them, his time in a juvenile detention center was another); once that happened the press started to report in favor of Henry Tudor the I.

The incident had also increased his father's (already intense) paranoia and distrust. Perhaps, in retrospect, it's what made him want 'insurance' with the Aragon family.

But these two reasons are eclipsed by the third: it's the last big event on the timeline of Henry's life before Arthur's disappearance. Warbeck had lost his suit, been utterly bankrupted by the case, actually. Henry's father had won his countersuit, and a few days later Arthur was gone.

"Yes, well, that was years ago. Have you ever heard of something called 'letting it go'? Oh!" she exclaims, snapping her fingers with her free hand, "Who am I talking to, of course you-- no, actually, I haven't gotten around to opening it yet. Why? Fine, I'll go get it…"

Elizabeth gets up from the couch, her long, green skirt swishing behind her as she grabs the gift bag from under the coat rack.

She rummages through it and pulls out a sachet filled with crushed stalks of lavender and rose petals, pulls out the bracelet within.

"It's a piece of jewelry, made to look like holly…rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. It's dazzling. Did you tell them to get me something expensive? What a dear you are…"

Henry zones out, hears the barbs his grandmother places faintly, in the background. There's a memory, a vague one, that presses on his consciousness…

Henry, fifteen, sits at the dining room table, picks at the croissant on the plate across from him. He reads a text from Clarissa, a girl from his boarding school. She wants to hook up again, apparently, so his response should be easy and honest enough: "can't, back home in L.A."

She responds, almost immediately: "if you only knew the amount of showers I spend thinking about you…"

Aw. And his father had warned him that British girls were cold. Please.

It's a hot July day, although in the Tudor mansion, it's freezing, as the A/C remains on full blast all summer long.

Esperanza, as though she can somehow read his mind, drops a huge textbook ("World Geography") in front of his plate. It lands with a thud, startling him. She crosses her arms and gives him a disapproving look.

"Jesu," he says, "what's--"

"Don't imitate me," Esperanza says, wagging a perfectly manicured finger in his face.

"I picked it up from you. Jesu Cristo this, Dios mio that…"

"What can I say, you inspire it in me."
"Thank you," he says, sweetly, taking a grape off his plate and popping it into his mouth.

"Your tutor is coming by today. You should study. Plenty of time for texting girls later."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he grouses, cracking it open.

"Yeah, yeah, what? If that's how they teach you to talk at your fancy school, Mr. Tudor should ask for a refund."

"Yes, ma'am," he says, turning a page, and she pats him once on the cheek before sitting down at the opposite chair and pouring herself a glass of orange juice.

Arthur comes into the room, face flushed, their father trailing behind him.

"I know how to tie a--"

"Turn around!"

Arthur does, sighs in exasperation, running a hand over his closely-cropped blonde hair as his father, equal in height, works around his collar and squints.

"Stop…fidgeting…" Mr. Tudor says, attempting to loop the tie.

"I'm not," Arthur snaps, huffing with impatience.

"You are," he insists, then, satisfied with his work, "there."

"It's tight," Arthur says, sliding a finger into the collar and trying to tug at it, making his way over to the table, he sits next to Esperanza and drinks his water, quickly.

"It's supposed to be tight," Mr. Tudor says, dismissively, he stands in front of their family portrait at the end of the table and reads the screen of his phone.

"Where are you two going?" Henry asks.

They usually wear suits to the office, of course, as they're doing now, but they usually don't on Fridays. And it's Friday.

"I'm the witness today," Arthur says, slamming the empty glass down on the table with such force that Esperanza flinches.

"Sorry," he says, quietly, then, louder, elaborates, "I'm testifying. Against Warbeck."

"Yes," Mr. Tudor says, slapping him on the back a few times whilst still looking at his phone, "yes, you are."

Henry doesn't even register the feeling of his phone in his hand, doesn't look up until his grandmother says, "Henry? He hung up."

"Oh…why would he ask you if Percy Warbeck was--"

"Later, Henry," she says, shaking her head, a finger to her lips, "come, let's go finish making our--"

"No."

"Theodore," "Dame Janet," "Arthur," "Henry," "Esperanza," and "Mr. Tudor" are fictional characters and the backdrop of this scene is an academic setting.
Elizabeth blinks owlishly at him, stunned. Evidently 'no' isn't a word she's used to hearing. But she
shrugs, twists her waterfall of white hair over one shoulder, and sits next to him on the couch,
crossing her legs.

"No?" she asks.

"Did you…_did_ he live with you?"

"Yes," she answers, evenly, emotionlessly, she leans over the table and rearranges the flowers in the
vase into a different pattern, "for a time, yes."

"Why?"

"I felt sorry for him, and he asked me, and," she says with a shrug, "not many have the courage to
stand up to your father in the first place, but--"

"Is this why he hasn't let us see you?" he asks, squeezing his hands together.

"Partly, yes."

"You couldn't…you couldn't have felt safe. He was…he…"

Henry's feels utterly at a loss, his head smarts from trying to figure this out. This can't be the only
reason, of course, because he hasn't seen his grandmother since his mother's funeral, and Percy
Warbeck happened after that. But…it explains a lot.

Except for this:

"He's _crazy!_" he exclaims.

"Schizophrenic," she corrects, smoothing her hands over the wrinkles of her skirt, "look, Henry--"

"You lived with someone that thought they were a lost prince? From the 15th century? _You_ felt safe
doing that?"

"He only thought that when he didn't take his meds, and I told him that he could only stay if he did.
And schizophrenia isn't…synonymous with violence."

"I still don't understand…"

"I wasn't scared, Henry. And he left after he lost the case. And that's all I have to say about it,"
Elizabeth says definitively, nodding, she gets up from her seat and makes her way to the kitchen,
"you coming?"

They had fallen back into small talk, somehow, after the strangeness of their previous conversation,
easily enough, as they made dinner together. They talked about Whitehall, about the printed pages
Anthony brought over from forums on websites about her career, about the weather, about the
questions people asked her when they came in for a reading, about Henry's trophies and accolades
over the last few years.

Maybe he'll ask more about the Warbeck thing, someday, but for now, Henry's content to eat the
grilled cheese he made as Elizabeth draws her nine letters for their game.

He draws a chart on a piece of paper with a pencil, "Henry" written on one side, "_Grand-mère_" on
the other, and lines up rows in boxes for each turn.
When he draws his own letters, he notices that his grandmother is lying some cards out next to her letter-holder, reading them.

"What are you doing?"

"Trying to see my grandson's future," she quips, "but it seems murky so far."

"We're playing Scrabble," he reminds her, "and maybe it's murky because I don't believe in things like that. Like I told you."

"I know you don't…I could still do it, though. You could just view it as entertainment?"

"Grand-mère," he groans, massaging one of his temples, "please. Focus," he says, tapping on the board, a large one that spins around for each turn, with raised borders around the squares for the letters.

"What if we play and make it interesting?" she asks, putting her cards away in their small box, and tucking the box into the pocket on her robe.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean…if you win, I'll leave you alone about readings. And if I win…I get to do a tarot card reading for you. And a general one. And you have to listen."

*Relentlessness must be genetic,* Henry thinks, watching her smile like the cat that got the cream, tapping her finger against her chin.

"Fine," he says, crossing his arms, leaning back in his seat, "I'm not worried."

"Oh?"

"I really good at this game," he says, with a shrug, "I haven't lost a round since 7th grade."

"Then it shouldn't be any trouble. You can go first," she says, bowing her head in acquiescence.

"Great," he says, placing his word across the star in the middle of the board:

   **Desolate**

It's nine points, which he writes down in his column. He has one letter left over, and so draws eight more from the bag.

"'Desolate', huh?" Elizabeth asks, turning the board towards her side, "Interesting choice."

"Stop," he says, laughing, "it's the letters I had. There's no significance."

"Mmmm," she hums, then, from the top of the board to the 'E' at the end of desolate, she puts in her word:

   **Quagmire**

Henry's mouth drops open as she tallies up her points.

"21 points," she murmurs, "except," she adds, lifting the letter 'A', "double word score there, sooo… 42 points!"
Elizabeth leans over the table, plucks the pencil from Henry's hand and the notepad from his knee, and writes her points in the column.

"Are you a witch?" Henry asks, narrowing his eyes, "I mean…"

"No," she says, passing the notepad and pencil back to him with a laugh, "though you're not the first person to ask."

Henry's turn, he ends up putting:

- Wedding, 17 points

Elizabeth's:

- Oxen, 19 points

He groans in disbelief, but then, gains momentum with his turn:

- Majesty, 40 points (double word score)

Elizabeth smirks when she puts the boxes for her next word down, and Henry laughs:

- Witch, 13 points

His next word ties her last:

- Destiny, 13 points

Elizabeth's turn:

- Lady, 8 points

Henry's:

- Brazen, 24 points (triple letter score on 'B', three points on its own)

Elizabeth's:

- Chivalry, 36 points (double word score)

*How*, Henry wonders, *does she keep doing that?* She's ahead of his 103 points by 15 points now, a fact she's well aware of, he's sure, given the smug manner with which she's drinking her tea right now, eyes wide over the rim of the cup.

He chooses his next word carefully, hands folded in the prayer position against his mouth as he squints at his letters, then the words he has to choose from on the board.

The best he can do is:

- Brave, 12 points

Elizabeth's turn:

- Lance, 14 points

Henry's:
Now, 8 points

Elizabeth's:
   Awoken, 18 points

Henry's:
   Spite, 14 points (double word score)

Elizabeth's:
   Your, 8 points

Henry's:
   Fate, 7 points

Elizabeth's:
   Ire, 3 points

Henry's:
   Pace, 11 points

Elizabeth's:
   Beg, 6 points

Henry's:
   Bid, 8 points

Elizabeth's:
   Go, 3 points

Henry's:
   So, 2 points

Henry's run out of letters, or, rather, runs out of any possible word combinations. He stares at the board, and the tally on the chart, in disbelief.

"No, no, no, no," he says, shaking his head, "you cannot have beat me by five points. That's just… not okay!"

He looks at the final tally once more, helplessly, as if looking at it again will somehow change what's written there:

   Henry: 165 points
   Elizabeth: 170 points

"Okay," Elizabeth says, shrugging, she spells her last word, 'do', off of the word destiny, a three-point word, "fine, I'll beat you by…eight points, instead. How's that?"
Henry glares, and she beams, sliding her pack of tarot cards from her pocket.

"Shall we?" she asks brightly.

---

From: Anna Seville

To: Anne Boleyn

Sent December 19, 2016, 5:00 PM

Girrllll….guess who's party I just got invited to?

From: Anne Boleyn

Jen's?

From: Anna

Nooo. Guess again :-)

From: Anne

The President's?

From: Anna

Nope! Better. Guess again!

From: Anne

Better? Wow. And no, I'm out of guesses.

From: Anna

You're no fun…check your Facebook. I'm like a thousand percent sure you're invited, too.

From: Anne

Okaaay, I will. Brb.

From: Anne Boleyn

To: Anna Seville

Sent December 19, 5:30 PM

I see. You're not going, are you?

From: Anna

OF COURSE I'm going. I mean, I'm sure he only invited me because he thinks you're more likely to go if I go, but…like I give a fuck.

Anne:
But…you loathe him. And I'm sure that's not why.

Anna:

"Loathe" might be a bit strong. And I'm sure that is why. The actual invited list is super exclusive. Everyone that's not on it has to pay a hundred bucks at the door to get in. This means we don't.

Anne:

Okay, well, you don't like him.

Anna:

No, I don't, but Tudor New Year's parties are epic. Apparently last year there was an ocelot. And Florence + the Machine was the live band.

Anne:

I mean…that sounds fake…but okay.

Anna:

How does that sound fake? You doubt the abilities of the wealthiest Forbes-listed family names in procuring wildlife for their parties?

Anne:

Were there pictures?

Anna:

The point. < ------------ > You.

Anne:

Idk if I'm going, okay? I have to think about it.

Anna:

I'm going.

Anne:

OKAY, I said I'll think about it, Pushy.

Anna:

OKAY, well if you miss Taylor Swift or a snow leopard, I'll be sure to send you pics so you know what you're missing…

Anne:

Mean!

Anna:
"Okay," Anne says, opening a new page in her notebook, "so, I think we need to come up with a game-plan for Kitty."

"What do you mean?" Mary asks, sipping her orange soda and putting it back down on a coaster on the dining room table.

"Well, she says she's not doing well in school. And we can't have a fellow Boleyn fall behind, or, like, flunk junior high or something. Dad would roll over in his grave!" she yells the last sentence, smirking as she does so, then holds her pen in the air and mouths "wait for it".

"QUIT TELLING EVERYONE I'M DEAD!" Thomas shouts from the kitchen, and Mary and Anne collapse into fits of giggles.

"SOMETIMES," George continues, untying his shoes and putting them next to the front door, "I CAN STILL HEAR HIS VOICE."

"SHUT UP, GEORGE."

"Should we tell him it's a meme?" George asks, pulling out a chair and sitting down, unwinding his scarf from his neck and throwing it on the table.

"Nah," Mary says, fingers tapping on the surface of her tablet, "I don't think he even knows what memes are. I don't want his brain to combust."

"Don't throw your scarf in my tortilla chips, George," Anne snaps, flicking the fringes of it out of the bowl sitting next to her.

"Don't put your tortilla chips where my scarf wants to go," George counters, and Anne kicks him under the table.

"Don't be an asshole," she says.

"Don't tell me about your sex dreams and then reject BOTH of my carefully considered and researched analyses!" he hisses, leaning towards her.

"Your what dreams?" Mary asks, eyebrows raised.

"My…nothing," Anne says, shaking her head, "focus. Kitty says she has C's in three--"

"What are we focusing on?" George asks.

"Kitty Howard," she says, rapping her pen against his knuckles, "try to catch up. So, we're probably going to meet sometime in January, but I thought that in the mean time--"

"Oh my GOD," George says, throwing his arms across the table, he takes Anne's hands, "Anne, you have to take me."

"Well, she lives in Los Angeles, so that might be a problem," Anne says, dryly, "anyway--"

"I mean, I don't want to jinx anything, but I might be getting a job there," George says, leaning his elbows against the table and putting his chin in his hands.
"Really?" Mary asks, grinning, "George, that's great!"

"I have the Skype interview tomorrow. But, anyway, if I'm there you have to make sure I can be there."

"Okay, sure, whatever," Anne says, impatiently, "we're getting off track--"

"Anne. I mean it. You have to make sure I can meet her with you."

"I SAID okay, George!"

"Like, if you don't, I will kick your ass."

"You'll kick my ass?" Anne asks in disbelief.

"Yes," he says, solemnly, shaking his head, "I mean, I won't enjoy it, but--"

"You'll kick my ass. Uh-huh. How much do you weigh again?" Anne asks, circling his wrist easily with her hand.

"More than you," he counters, "ballerina."

"I'm not a ballerina. Mary's the ballerina."

"I'm not a ballerina," Mary insists, putting her hands up in an "I surrender" position.

"Really?" Anne says, slipping a disc case from her notebook, "because this 2003 DVD titled 'Mary's ballet recitals' says otherwise…"

"Oh my God, give me that," George says, taking it from her hand, "we're watching it right now."

"No we're not!" Mary shouts as they both make a mad dash from the dining room to the family room, inserting the disc into the DVD drive, she runs after them and yells, "you guys! Stop!"

---

From: Charles Brandon

To: Anna Seville

Sent December 19, 2016, Friday, 8:11 PM

You got invited to the New Year's Party?!

From: Anna

You're admitting to being a Facebook stalker? And yeah, I did.

From: Brandon

I don't get it.

From: Anna

Rude.

From: Brandon
No, I mean… I haven't received an invite yet?

**From: Anna**

Idk. Did you sleep with his fiancee or something?

**Brandon:**

No!!!

**Anna:**

Hmm. That sounds, suspiciously, like something someone who DID sleep with Henry's fiancee would say...

**Brandon:**

Nope. Draw the line at fiancees. Only girlfriends and under.

**Anna:**

How noble of you.

**Brandon:**

I try…wait, did Boleyn tell him? That I told her?

**Anna:**

Do I look like a fucking owl to you?

**Brandon:**

Idk. Send me a pic and I'll let you know ;-)

**Anna:**

You're SO annoying. I can't believe I let you sleep with me.

**Brandon:**

I can.

**Anna:**

Please. But, no, she probably didn't. Idk. I'm not asking her for you. And could you blame her if she did? You're a dick to her.

**Brandon:**

Whatever. I'm a dick to everyone.

**Anna:**

My hero. Maybe he just forgot?
Brandon:
Yeah, maybe.

Anna:
Okay, well, I'm busy with my syllabi. So, later.

Brandon:
The quarter hasn't started yet. How's that possible?

Anna:
Most prof's have the syllabus from their classes last year posted as a PDF somewhere on the Internets. And if it's the same class they're teaching now, it usually stays the same. So I'm reading ahead.

Brandon:
Are you even a person?

Anna:
Jury's still out on that one. XO

Brandon:
XXXXXXXX….rated

Anna:
VERY mature.

Brandon:
Rated M for Mature.

Anna:
That's video games, asshole.

Brandon:
You WOULD know that.

Anna:
Yeah, I would. I'll show you what's what on Call of Duty online right now and show you how much I know that.

Brandon:
And take a break from your 'syllabi'?

Anna:
To kick YOUR ass? Abso-fucking-lutely.

**Brandon:**

Fine. Bring it on.

**Anna:**

What's your handle?

**Brandon:**

thebrandonstopshere

**Anna:**

Of...course it is.

Chapter End Notes

family shenanigans...yay!

next up is the "reading".

i haven't forgotten about anna seville or charles brandon. so texts were a reminder of that. characters still exist, even if i haven't mentioned them in a while, etc.~

also if you're like 'who the fuck is percy warbeck and why should i care', this should give a clue for what i'm going to do with that storyline in the future: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perkin_Warbeck
the moon and the sun

Chapter Summary

"Pain is a cycle, just like water. Just like the waves of the ocean. It thrashes and crashes, pours from the sky and then leaves, becomes air...it'll be there, it'll be gone, and it'll be back. We have to accept it, and let it in. Knowing that it will leave, that this is only temporary..."

Chapter Notes

dead trigger warning for the last scene of this chapter (not a spoiler, as the scene is a flashback).

http://www.tarotlore.com/tarot-cards/five-of-cups/

the celtic cross spread: http://www.tarotlore.com/tarot-cards/five-of-cups/

"The moon is always jealous of the heat of the day, just as the sun always longs for something dark and deep." -- Alice Hoffman

"According to the Greek myth of Endymion and Selene, the moon (Selene) fell in love with a handsome young king named Endymion."

"and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant and whatever a sun will always sing is you"

--E.E. Cummings, from “[i carry your heart with me(i carry it in]"

"moon: it is a tragedy, yes? that you have all the light in the galaxy to offer, while i may only reflect yours?
/
sun: but dear moon, i am lonely, i am poison to the touch. too often the ones i love come away with burns. if you dream, dream to be the stars, for mortals send up their dearest wishes and secrets to the stars.
/
stars: envy us not, we are but pinholes against the canvas of the sky. envy the moon, the center of the masterpiece, the sovereign of the wolves and the tides and the night."

--"celestial dialogue”, http://paperharbors.tumblr.com/post/140491229624/moon-it-is-a-tragedy-yes-that-you-have-all-the"

"tell me the story of evanescence

the balance between light and dark

how every dress she wears sways in the wind

how he can’t [take] his eyes off of the way she lives"
From: James Stuart
To: Margaret Tudor
Sent December 19, 2016, Monday
What are you up to?

From: Margaret Tudor
To: James Stuart
Fuck off. I'm not talking to you.

From: James Stuart
Sounds like you are, tho.

From: Margaret Tudor
You were a dick.

From: James
Now, that's no way to talk to your fwb, is it?

From: Margaret
We're not friends, and "benefits" is a generous term, on your end.

From: James
Where are you?

From: Margaret
I'm at my grandmother's. She's actually nice to me, unlike some people I could mention.

From: James
Your namesake? Thought you said she was dead.

From: Margaret
Sensitive as always, I see. No, the other one.

From: James
Oh. Well, wrud?

From: Margaret

Watching a movie on my tablet. Bye.

From: James

Bye??

From: Margaret

Listen, I'm not sure how much clearer I can be...we're not having sex again, and I don't want to talk to you.

From: James

Why?

From: Margaret

I'm over doing things that are bad for me. It's better this way, anyway. Didn't you tell me your friends gave you shit about sleeping with a high school girl?

From: James

A hot debutante? Nah, they think I'm a god.

From: Margaret

Lovely. Well, if that doesn't dissuade you, there's the little fact that your 22 years makes me illegal.

From: James

Fine, I'll leave you alone. Christ.

From: Margaret

Christ, my sanity, and I, all thank you.

"Choose," Elizabeth says, her pack of cards spread before her, one after the other, on the table in the living room.

"Choose?" Henry asks, incredulous, setting his mug of hot chocolate ("consolation, loser hot chocolate" his grandmother had clarified, smugly, and he had scoffed and said, "By eight points, Grand-mère, please") down on the coaster, "do you make your paying customers do the work, usually?" he teases.

"While I may be able to see your future," Elizabeth counters, evenly, with a dip of her head, "and your past, they are both still yours. So, yes. You draw the cards. I set them and read them."

"Fine. Do I look?"
"No, just pull out ten different ones. Choose carefully. Consider each one, before you take it out of the spread."

"How am I supposed to *choose* when I can't *see* them?" he asks, crossing his arms.

"By feeling."

"I… really?" he sighs, dramatically, rolls his eyes, running a hand through his reddish hair, then shakes his head and says, "fine."

Elizabeth finds herself surprised by the calluses on his hand, which hovers over the deck, considering. What could he have done to cause them, she wonders? The upper echelons of society tend to have hands like silk, and while his hand is a pretty one, a golden hue cast to it, the nails trimmed, neatly…the smoothness of youth clear on the back of it, there's some labor evident there. She won't ask where it's from, but she guesses it's either woodwork, guitar, the weight-lifting that male athletes tend to overdo, perhaps, is the most likely possibility.

Henry stops the movement, then pulls a card out with his index finger, sliding it towards himself. Repeats that action, slowly, nine more times, and Elizabeth is pleased to see that his consideration does seem to be genuine. He's choosing carefully, as she asked, following his instinct, waiting for it to come to him, his brow knit in concentration.

Elizabeth thanks him when he's finished, slides the remaining cards in the deck into a neat stack, and plucks the first one, flips it over, and slides it towards him.

----

"The Five of Cups," his grandmother says, folding her hands, head tilted to the side.

"You can read upside down?" Henry asks, bemused, as he examines the picture on the card

"No, but I memorized the deck a long time ago. I know the picture. Does it not say 'Five of Cups'?" she teases, and he laughs, admits that it does, written in black, cursive font on the bottom of the card, and at the top of the card, directly aligned with a man's head, is the roman numeral for five.

"He looks sad," Henry says, pointing to the figure in the center of the card.

It's a man in a dark cloak, his head bent. There's a bridge over a river in the background and a small castle upon the landscape. There are three cups on the ground, tipped over, in front of him, and it appears that that is what the figure is looking down at.

"He is," Elizabeth says, chin in her hand, "and he is you, in a manner of speaking."

"Oh?"

"The first card in the Celtic Cross spread, which is the most detailed kind of reading…my favorite, personally…represents the present. Your current state of mind, your surrounding environment, what is influencing you. The man here is sad because of what he's lost. Do you see?" Elizabeth asks, leaning over, she taps a finger on the two cups, upright, behind him, "he's so focused on what he's lost, that he's not even paying attention to what remains."

Henry squints at the card, points to the castle, and asks, "What does this mean? The river and the home? The bridge?"
"The castle represents patrimony-- property, inherited from one's father. The river passes through, between the man and the castle, but the way it passes may not be what he expected. Depending on the context, some interpreters say the bridge symbolizes marriage, but, clearly, by the world-weariness of the man and the fallen cups, not one without frustration and bitterness."

Great, he thinks, fighting to keep the sarcastic thought from escaping his lips.

"So there's five cups...why are there three knocked over?"

"Three losses," Elizabeth says, "but two are left."

_Three losses, but two are left._

"So...my..." Henry gulps, clears his throat, "my mother is one. Arthur is...two. This is the present, though? Not the future?" he asks, embarrassed by the way his voice shakes, "or am I to lose someone else, too?"

"Yes, darling," she says, patting his hand, an attempt to comfort, he assumes, "it's the present. The losses have happened already. It doesn't always mean literal loss, as in death, or...disappearance, though. Sometimes it's someone that's left in some other way, or something more intangible than the loss of a person. The loss of a prospect, or dream, or hope. A loss great, or small."

_The loss of a dream or hope? Well, if this is the present, Henry thinks, the most recent one is painfully obvious:_

"Be with me."

He had thought he felt a "yes", in the air, then (though he had scolded himself for the wishful thinking), trepidation, perhaps, but also tenderness...the heat between them, remaining from the night before, memories of it dancing between the two across the distance that was between them on the front porch.

It was running through his mind, and he swore he could feel it running through Anne's too: her kiss, her pull, the way she had used her body like a weapon and he had lost the war (of resistance, of self-control). The way she melted into him and became vulnerable after her display of confidence; "you do, you do think I have something to be shy about, you didn't even say anything", she had said.

What was he supposed to say? As if he possessed the power of speech during _that!_ As if he _would've_ admitted to his thoughts, even if he had been able to, as if there was any coherent train to them at all: _you are a wonder, I want to touch you everywhere, always, I want to know what it's like to hold you in my arms and keep you there, please stop exposing your skin, all it makes me do is think of kissing every inch of it, right here, right now, damn it all to hell, Thomas who? Katherine who? Jesus, who? Please stop/don't stop. I can't think straight/but I don't want to._

"Be with you?"

"Yes."

"While you're engaged?"

"...yes."

"No!"
Elizabeth is happy, honestly, that this is a card of the present and not the future. She thinks of the last time she predicted a loss. Her prediction had prevented it, of course, during her eldest daughter's life, but...the loss had manifested in a different way.

Arthur had survived, but, for all intents and purposes, it seemed like he was very much gone.

In the vision she had on his birth, of the way he had left the world in his most recent past life, he hadn't made it past fifteen years. Elizabeth had considered herself quite accomplished when he made it past that birthday, but now she's left to wonder how things may have changed if she had said nothing.

Maybe her, sharing the vision with her daughter, the advice she gave her, had altered their paths in some way. Maybe she wasn't supposed to share it.

She'll never really know, and she knows she must resign herself to that fact: no one can change what's already been...

Birthdate of Arthur Tudor, September 20, 1992

The room, finally, Woodville notes with some relief, smells more like lavender than the antiseptic smell of a hospital, thanks to the glass jars full of crushed lavender she'd set up on the windowsill.

"You can't do that here," the nurse on duty had said. Woodville had given that iconic silver-screen smile of hers, cradled the nurse's face in her hands, kissed her on the forehead, pulled away and said, in a voice that brooked absolutely no argument, "I can, and I will."

The effect had worked like a glamour (she's not a witch, despite what some have said), the nurse simply blinked in stunned amazement and said, "I...I..." and then left the room, muttering, "I don't get paid enough for this."

Another came in to replace her a few minutes later, and either didn't notice the jars or didn't care enough to comment on their presence (given the glazed look on her face and the dark circles under her eyes, Woodville assumes it’s the latter).

"I can't," Elizabeth York says, gritting her teeth, head pressed against the pillows behind her neck, legs writhing beneath the sheets, "Henry, I can't, I need drugs--"

"Shhh, darling," Henry says, kneeling at her side, brushing her bangs, damp and stuck to her skin, away from her forehead, "it'll be alright, I'm here...you know it's bad for the baby...you're strong, so strong, I know you can do this."

Woodville, kneeling at her other side, holding her eldest daughter's hand, glares at him.

"I am strong," Elizabeth snaps, taking short breaths, "but I need...drugs. I changed my mind, I can't do it."

"Elizabeth," he says, in an even, patient tone, "I know it hurts, but we decided, together--"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Woodville says, unable to bite her tongue any longer, "my dear son," (she's
rewarded by this particular remark with a glare from Henry that she's sure equals hers...he hates when he calls her that, as does his mother, whose face twists into sourness every time, but he can't ever complain. He is her son-in-law, after all, like it or not, but to ask to be called something else would insult and offend Elizabeth, so he's stuck with it and Woodville revels in that fact, "have you ever been in labor? Because I have."

The nurse, flipping through the paperwork, sitting in a chair by the sink, giggles at this.

"Really," Henry says, "don't be ridic--"

"Have you? Do you have a lovechild somewhere? Are you Zeus? Did someone spring, fully-formed, from your forehead, like Athena?"

Elizabeth's shoulders shake with quiet laughter that turns to a groan, and she squeezes her mother's hand.

"We agreed," Henry reiterates, through gritted teeth, he turns his sharp, blue gaze from his mother-in-law towards his wife and pleads, "please, sweetheart, don't you remember?"

"I don't care what I said, I want drugs!" Elizabeth shouts, suddenly, wrenching her hand from his, she throws a handful of ice chips across the room.

"Ma'am," the nurse says, getting up from her chair, "you need to calm--"

"Don't 'ma'am' me," Elizabeth protests, adjusting her position in the bed, "I'm twenty years old, how old are you?"

"Elizabeth!" Henry scolds, adjusting her hair, sticking to the back of her neck, trying to place it over her shoulder, "Don't be rude, she's just doing her job--"

"Get out!" Elizabeth yells, cracking her neck with a roll of her shoulders, "just get out!"

Henry blinks, stunned, tugs at the neck of his scrubs, says, "Excuse me?"

"I think you'd be better leave," Woodville says, lightly, eyes sparkling in mirth.

"I'm not missing my son being born," Henry snaps, worrying a hand through his dark hair.

"And you won't," Woodville says, evenly, using the back of her hand to feel the temperature of her daughter's forehead, "these are early stages. I'll make sure to send for you. You won't miss it."

"I..."

Henry bends to his knees, traces a circle on the back of his wife's hand, and she kisses his hand, pats it once, before saying, "This is women's work, after all, I think."

"Are you sure--"

"Yes," she says, nodding, before wincing in pain.

He shrugs, says, "If that's what you really want," before getting up and walking towards the door.

"Oh, Henry?" Elizabeth calls out.

He turns around, expectantly, smiling.
"Yes?"

"If you try to take any pictures of me during labor," Elizabeth says, in a voice sweet as honey, "I'll kill you in your sleep."

----

"How did you do it? So many times? With me, even?" Elizabeth asks, panting.

"I had a glass of wine."

"*Mom!*"

"Oh, please. As if there's any risk once you're already in labor. As long as you stick to a glass…you can't during pregnancy, of course. You think I'd do anything to risk you, hm? *Any* of my children? I didn't even drink coffee when I was pregnant. It was miserable. Your father almost divorced me."

"He did *not.*"

"Well," Woodville says, lightly, "I wouldn't have blamed him if he had. I was vicious!"

"It's your first one," she continues, chucking her under the chin, "it'll get easier, I promise--"

"*First* one? I'm *not* having another one," Elizabeth snaps, biting her lips in pain, she throws her head back, fighting tears, "*forget* that, this is *bullshit*--"

"Open," Woodville says, gently, and Elizabeth does, sucks the ice that her mother pushes through her cracked lips.

"Legend has it," Woodville says, dabbing some petroleum jelly from a small container she brought with her, onto her daughter's mouth, "that the Woodville women are descended from mermaids, did you know?"

"Mother," she groans, gripping her mother's hand so tightly it turns white, "*please*--"

"We're of oceans. Connecting to that helped me get through it. My mother helped me. So now I'm going to help and ease you."

Woodville puts a hand on her daughter's forehead, says, "Breathe. You're in water. You're submerged, but you can breathe. It's easy. Breathe."

Her daughter's eyelashes flutter closed and she does breathe, in through her nose, out through her mouth.

Woodville takes her hand from Elizabeth's sweaty forehead, moves it down to cup the left cheekbone, brushes a thumb against it, and tries to transfer the image, the vision, works her voice into soothing slowness, like water itself:

"Pain is only felt when we resist it. Did you know? We have to stop pushing back against it, and when we do, it hurts less. Pain is a cycle, just like water. Just like the waves of the ocean. It thrashes and crashes, pours from the sky and then leaves, becomes air…it'll be there, it'll be gone, and it'll be back. We have to accept it, and let it in. Knowing that it *will* leave, that this is only temporary…"

"Are you there?" Woodville whispers, and Elizabeth nods, slowly, "it's beautiful, isn't it? You can see the sunlight pouring through the blue, like a golden net, like hundreds of infinity signs, swimming around…"
That night, while Henry is out to pick up takeout, after Arthur is born (no wife of mine is eating cafeteria food, he had declared, cheerily), while Elizabeth Woodville is holding her grandson, while her daughter is sleeping in bed, she feels a pang in her temples.

Elizabeth winces, shakes her head, as if to clear it, and leans down to kiss him on his soft, smooth, forehead.

As soon as her mouth leaves his skin, she sees it, a vision that pours through in light:

A boy, on the cusp of being a man, fifteen years of age, his face grey and pale, slumped in bed, a girl, with skin fair as starlight and hair like flames, her gown, green (she ordered bolts and bolts of the material, in velvet and satin and silk, it's his color, his family's color), the skirt of it pooling on the floor, clutches the bedframe as she wails, "Arthur, no, please...my love...come back..."

But it is too late, and he is gone.

Elizabeth Woodville waits until her daughter wakes up. She does not tell her about the vision but, instinctively, Elizabeth York knows that what she's telling her (to please, please make sure Arthur has doctor check-ups, as regularly as possible, tell him it's for his own good) is inspired by one.

She listens to her mother and, over the years, sends him in frequently, but he's nothing if not the picture of good health. Arthur starts to resent the frequent appointments, and his mother, a bit, by association.

So Elizabeth York, in turn, starts to resent hers, a bit. And her visions.

Woodville grins in relief and hugs her eldest daughter, tight, on Arthur's fifteenth birthday, says, "He made it," and Elizabeth rolls her eyes.

Birthdate of Katherine Tudor, February 11, 2009

"Mom, can you come here?"

"Of course," Woodville says, shutting the curtains of the hospital window, she goes to her daughter's bedside.

She seems drained, wan. The birth of her youngest daughter had been a long, difficult one, but she and Henry already decided on Katherine for a name.

Elizabeth had apologized and told Henry she needed her rest. Henry had taken Katherine from her arms, delighted with her, and told them he was going to the hospital chapel.

The rest of Elizabeth's children have been waiting in the family room they requested, and last Woodville checked on them they were all asleep, save Arthur, who was poring over a book about Eastern religion, Henry asleep against his shoulder, Margaret asleep against his. Marina and Elizabeth Tudor are at the house, still, with a nanny and Cecily York, their aunt.

"Sit, please," Elizabeth says, and Woodville does, pulls up a wooden chair with plush padding on the seat up to her daughter's bedside, and holds her hand.
The freckles stand out against the paleness of her skin, and her hand is cool to the touch, Woodville notices.

"I'm going," she rasps, smiling, softly, lips trembling.

"Going where?" Woodville asks, lightly.

"Going," she says, with emphasis, closing her eyes, "away."

Woodville catches her meaning and panics. Perhaps she is having a fever, delirious, but she touches her face gently and she doesn't feel warm.

"No, you're not, you're just tired, darling, do you need me to get the nurse, do you feel ill--"

"No, I don't. I feel the same as I have after every birth. But I know. I don't know how," Elizabeth says, tranquil, gaze blank for a moment, she levels her grey-blue stare against her mother's almost identical one, "but today, I know. I'm leaving."

"No, no. I would've seen--"

"You stopped trying to see. You said doing it for a living exhausts you, that you don't try to see for yourself anymore, that sometimes it changes and it's wrong and usually it doesn't prevent anything, you told me. And I think you knew that I didn't... want you to, anymore, but I think... that was wrong. I wish I hadn't stopped trying, maybe I would've seen... Henry... sooner..."

"Henry?"


"I don't--"

"No," Elizabeth says, her voice breaking, she shakes her head, vehemently, "no, I know you know, you always know, you're never wrong about anything, it's so infuriating, but you're never wrong--"

"Elizabeth!" Woodville snaps, she holds her daughter's upper arms in her hands, and stares at her, "Elizabeth, if I knew what you were speaking of I would say it, I don't know. I have never seen anything emanate from Henry but a golden light, and a bright future. I haven't seen any darkness, any tragedy, at all, I don't know what--"

"The horse, you haven't seen it? The horse?" she asks, panicked, she starts to cough, "no, you must have--"

"Elizabeth, no."

"Oh... I do not... know... perhaps you can't see it yet? Because he's just a boy? It will not happen until later, he is... in his thirties or forties, I believe... You have to tell him, though. You have to make sure he listens to you, you have to make sure he believes you... maybe you will not see it until he is a man?"

Elizabeth bites her lip and tears spill down her face, her mother notices grey in her hair, in a few strands, laced with the gold, and she's missed their appearance, she has never seen the age until now. When did she get older, she finds herself thinking, stupidly, when did her hair change color, how did I miss that?
Her daughter gasps, starts to take short breaths, rubs her chest with one hand like it pains her.

"My love, please, I think you are having a panic attack, I don't know if it's the stress or what is the cause but I need you to take a deep--"

"Mother!" she shouts, "No, listen to me, he falls, he falls from the horse, you have to warn him…my darling boy…he becomes someone else, I do not…it will mean his death, in one way or another, either he will cease to breathe or the most important piece of him will die…the moon and the sun, do you remember? The letter I wrote you? It's about them, I didn't know…the moon and the sun love each other, they live in balance, harmony, but it sets them off kilter, and what…Mother, what happens when the sun covers the moon? It's an eclipse, darkness, so much darkness, the golden era is gone, it's gone until…what they created shines again…but the moon, the moon, she does not deserve this, it is such a heavy price to pay…it is not her fate, and yet it happens…"

Elizabeth's teeth start to chatter, her hand feels icy, now, not just cold, and she grips her mother's hand, lined with age, tight, in a grip that hurts.

"I could not bear it, please, tell him, please, promise me, Mother! Promise me you'll tell him, as soon as you see it, tell him when he is a man, I know you will see--"

"Fine!" she snaps, taking her daughter's face in both hands, "I will tell him! But you will be there, too, you will see him be a man, too, stop talking like this--"

"No, no, I won't," Elizabeth says, and shakes, and the shaking becomes more jittery, frenetic.

Woodville, panicked, calls for the nurse, a doctor, anyone, the door ajar, a few are luckily in the hall and they come in (not nearly fast enough, she thinks, for the urgency of her tone).

"Tell them I love them…make sure they know I loved them." Woodville fears, as her daughter starts to seize in bed, her eyes now closed, as the nurse and doctor push her out of the way and call for back up, that these may be the last words she hears from her.

Chapter End Notes

so. idek. um....this entire chapter was supposed to be the reading, but i got super inspired by flashbacks. so they're going to be interspersed within the reading. and the reading is significant.

sorry to fool everyone into thinking this was just a light college fic, lmao. truthfully i've had the backstory planned for a while, and some of it's dark (without giving anything away, i did want to warn at that). i've always planned to make historic flashbacks significant, too, but i wanted to just tease a few at first and then add them more rapidly.

i know the writing may seem inconsistent, so i wanted to take this opportunity to explain it/myself, a little bit:

the intro to chapter one misrepresents the tone of the fic, i know, but that was actually intentional by me.

one of the themes i'm trying to play with in this story/verse is perception. how we perceive ourselves, and how we want others to perceive us. and also how we, as
characters, as people, want to perceive ourselves.

so:

"He is not only rich, but also handsome, a younger man that radiates a sort of unavoidable, golden charisma. Those close to him feel his warmth, those far away yearn for it. He's regarded as a demigod on campus, with all the reverence that comes with his station in life...

Today's going to be a good day.

Henry knows this with the confidence of someone whose had a life of mainly good days."

Henry has his own challenges. He struggles with what he's lost. He struggles with his relationship with his father.

But he doesn't want anyone else to see that.

Hence the introduction.

Hence how he's perceived, by the majority of people at Whitehall-- even by his best friend.

But then comes Anne Boleyn.

And she sees through the image he's created, rather easily. Sees him, rather easily:

"'It's whatever,' he says with a shrug, 'but for the record, I don't think people should like me.'

'If you say so.'

'I don't--'

'You expect them to. That's why it bothers you that she doesn't. You're a Tudor,' Anne says with a shrug, 'so it makes sense.'"

It both unnerves and excites him.

"'And as for being a Tudor...well, I don't want to assume. I didn't grow up in the Tudor household.'

'Go ahead.'

'You were taught that you were important. That your name was important and that you were too, for carrying it.'"

He lets her see the parts of himself he hides. And I juxtaposed this with the intro purposefully. By doing so, I wanted to demonstrate the significance of him sharing the things in his life that he struggles with:

"'Something most people don't know..."

Henry closes his eyes, fiddles with the top of the pack, flicking the lid open. Closed. Open.
"I have a brother. An older brother. Arthur. I haven't," he takes a sharp breath, "I, I haven't…spoken to him. For quite some time. It's been over four years, I think."

"Henry--"

"Please don't say anything."

so, to sum up, almost everything is significant. and please let me know if you have any questions!

oh, also, idk how many of you follow me on tumblr, but for those who don't know, i'm currently taking a fifteen-credit college course load. and it is totally kicking my ass. so updates will not be as frequent as they have been, unfortunately! writing this is sort of going to be, like, my reward (for example, yesterday i turned all my assignments in, and now i get to do this! which i've been writing scenes for as study breaks anyway).

♥♥♥♥
the lovers

Chapter Summary

And on that same night, across the state lines, Elizabeth Woodville will see the same glittering vision he does, she will smile as she stirs honey into her tea. She will look over at the lit candle on her nightstand.

And she will let it burn, all night.

Chapter Notes

quotes are from the song of solomon, the old testament. i'll do the exact quotes in the end notes (since they are rather racy).

speaking of. the raciest scene i've written for whitehall (not super detailed, but still technically smut, maybe?) is in this chapter so if you're uncomfortable with that, stop reading after page break after "the lovers" and you can start reading at the next page break, which starts with "december 19".

See the end of the chapter for more notes

February 11, 2009

Elizabeth runs, stumbling, towards the chapel, tries to hold herself up on the frame of the doorway.

"Henry."

Henry is holding Katherine in his arms, and before he looks up to see his mother in law he says, "Isn't she the most beautiful--"

The look on her face stops his words cold.

"What? What's happened?" he asks.

"Henry," she says, again, and her voice shakes, and her hands shake, and it's the first time he's ever heard or seen that. At her husband's funeral she was poised, steady, posture straight. She cried, then, nobly, tears slipping down her face quietly. She did not fling herself on the ground weeping like an Italian widow, much as was expected from an actress known for her flair for the dramatic. She remained collected, throughout it all.

But, that was for her spouse's death. Spouses survive each other, it happens all the time. It is sad, but somewhat expected, always. You get married with the vows "til death do us part", after all.

Now she sways, as if inebriated, in the doorway. Blinks damp eyelashes, hand over her mouth.

When you have a child, he knows, as Kate is his sixth, there are no such vows exchanged. Why
would there need to be? Parents aren't supposed to survive their children. Children survive their parents. That is, after all, the natural order of things.

You wouldn't tell an infant to swear a vow. They can't speak.

*Parents aren't supposed to survive their children.*

"Take her," he says, passing Kate over, before running out of the chapel.

---

Elizabeth falls to her knees on the floor of the chapel, her granddaughter, still sleeping, cradled in her arms.

Tears fall from her eyes and plop onto the infant's downy head, which wakes her up. She blinks, slowly.

She hears Henry's strangled cry, his "No!" and little Kate starts to wail, as if she knows, too.

"Grand-mere? What's going on?"

Elizabeth looks up to see Arthur, seventeen, on the verge of manhood, his jaw set in a firm line like his father's, hair fair like his mother's (but darkening with each passing year, closer and closer to the shade of his father's).

"I…I…"

She looks at the door, it warps, her vision obscured by tears, but she can't answer. She knows the answer, but she can't do it, she can't look at her grandson and tell him, she tries to draw the words and the strength from deep within her but neither comes, she's barely able to hold Kate, light in her arms, still wailing.

But he knows, anyway. Nods, once, and turns to leave, but then there's Hal, in front of him, eyes bleary with sleep, wearing a red sweatshirt and grey sweatpants, his feet only in socks. He wipes his eyes and scolds, "Arthur, you left me! I woke up and you were gone!"

Arthur says nothing in response, simply walks past him and leaves the chapel.

"Grand-mere?" Hal asks, bottom lip trembling, "what's--"

And then Margaret comes (not in pajamas, but rather a white pinafore dress she often wears to church-- "I want to look pretty for whenever I meet my new sister", she had insisted, even as the hours had passed, until she had fallen asleep in it), mimics her brother without knowing it: "Hal! You left! That's not very nice--"

And so, there they are. Her grandson and granddaughter stand side to side, looking at each other in confusion, knowing something is very, very wrong, but not what. Elizabeth, still kneeling on the floor, tears dried on her cheeks, still holding Kate, who is still crying, but the cries are deescalating, the wails turning quiet and sniffing rather than brass and loud.

Hal takes Margaret's hand, walks towards Elizabeth, and they sit on the floor next to her without saying a word.

---

**February 2009.**

In the weeks after her daughter's death, Elizabeth Woodville falls into her grandson's dreams.
She doesn't want to. It feels invasive. But she's done everything she can think of, and she sees nothing of him and a horse.

Or, no, that's not true: she sees him riding plenty of horses. Skillfully, joyfully. He dismounts easily, rides easily, as if he is one with the animals.

But no tragedy, no fall.

He has dreams within dreams. They exhaust her, but she's not one to take dying proclamations lightly, and knows of no other ways to honor her daughter's wishes.

The first string of them she sees on Shrove Tuesday, late at night....

A woman, pretty, with flaxen hair, fusses over her baby in her arms, who is wailing, face red, tears streaming down her plump face.

"Oh, Nan, hush...please..."

"Has she been fed?" asks a man, of dark hair, middling height, and swarthy skin, as he walks into the room, puts a hand on her shoulder.

"She has, I have not a clue on the cause of her distress."

"May I?" he asks, and she nods as he takes the infant, gently, into his arms.

He bops his finger, gently, once, on the nose, and her eyes (a deep brown, now, not blue at birth as her siblings were, rather they had started at a grey the color of thunder clouds) fly open.

She calms and coos as he walks from the window to the fireplace with her, humming a tune as he does.

"I see she knows she is already her father's favorite," the woman remarks, a single eyebrow quirked as she adjusts the slightly askew brown hood on her hair.

"Now, please, wife...that is ridiculous," he tuts, even as he kisses the top of his daughter's dark, downy hair, "I love all my children equally."

"I do not recall you saying George or Mary were 'destined for greatness' on the days of their birth the first time you held them...or is my memory weakening?" she teases, walking over to the window, which overlooks an apple tree, to join him, "You did not even begrudge me for having a daughter instead of a son."

"Now, why would I do a foolish thing like that, Liz, when I already have one?"

"I do recall you wishing for another."

"Oh? I do not."

And then the room shifts, it is not a manor but a castle, and there is an older woman, handsome, her dress grand, and she leans down and says, "La Petite Boulain...how long do you wish to stay in France?"

And it's the baby, but now she's a little girl, dark eyes solemn even as she beams and
speak, in perfect elocution, "My lady, I do very much wish that I could remain here for
the rest of my days! But for the absence of some of my dear family, I do not think I
would mind at all!"

And then it's the girl, but she's older, twenty, maybe, and they cross paths (he knows his
wife is there, somewhere, in the background, her wealthy and powerful familial relation
beside her) and she sinks to a curtsey and he sees it, from the perspective of a person
watching from above, rather than his own. Sees the pearls woven in her dark waves,
her skin clear and glowing, matching their translucence.

The sharp intake of breath he takes upon seeing her in front of him is visible, his eyes
become almost comically wide, he was walking, deep in thought, before, clearly
distracted, but that is erased now, he is rapt. He looks a fool, the awe on his face
matches that of a man that has found God, has stumbled upon an angel on earth. It
cannot; it should not be the way a king looks at a subject (and yet it is) it's certainly
never the way he's looked at one before, even one he's desired, even one he's bedded,
and there have been a few.

"Lady Anne?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," she answers, in soft deference, her eyes dark and deep, she stares
at him, openly, directly, with a quiet, steady confidence (one that matches the kind he's
only ever seen, before this, in queens).

"Forgive me," he says, and he moves, to let her pass, as if she were the monarch, not
him. Watches the color rise to her cheeks before she dips her head, and walks past him.

Watches himself, watching her walk away, yearning, in plain sight.

1509

Henry awakes with a gasp, shoots up from his pillow so fast that it shakes the bed, and
Catherine opens her eyes, asks, "My love, are you alright?"

"I am perfectly well," he says, shaking his head, then settles back into bed, content,
kisses her on her bare shoulder, "only a strange dream…"

"Of what?" she murmurs.

"Nothing of import…"

Henry smiles, then, remembering the news she told him last night, almost laughs aloud
of sheer joy: "I cannot wait until our son is born."

2009-2016

And then Henry, her Henry, wakes up, startled.

Elizabeth feels him remember nothing of the dreams as she blows out the candle on her nightstand.

He'll remember nothing, but will crave strawberries and cherries in the weeks to come, and not know
why.
He'll remember nothing, but will see a falcon, flying overhead as he sits in the gazebo outside, and feel a surge of hope, and not know why.

He'll remember nothing of the dreams he has all throughout his childhood.

He'll walk around and he won't realize it, but everything will come to him in muted colors, the slightest haze of grey.

Until, that is, he grabs the hand of a girl with dark and deep eyes.

And everything is brighter.

And on that same night, across the state lines, Elizabeth Woodville will see the same glittering vision he does, she will smile as she stirs honey into her tea. She will glance at the lit candle on her nightstand.

And she will let it burn, all night.

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**December 19, 2016, Monday**

The first card is in the center of the table. Elizabeth flips the second card over, squints at it, and laughs, loudly and unabashedly, before lying it down, horizontally, across the Five of Cups.

Henry taps his left hand on the table, looking the very opposite of amused, as she continues to laugh, eventually covering her hand with her mouth.

"Alright, *Grand-mere*. What is so funny?"

"Nothing," she says, clearing her throat, which earns an eye-roll from him, "this is…the Second Card. The Page of Wands."

The card depicts a young man, standing with what appears to be a long branch, set firmly on the ground of the picture.

"It looks like a walking stick."

"Well, it's a *wand*."

"Okay, *Grand-mere*. If you say so."

Elizabeth regards him, coolly, then slides the saucer full of cookies from in front of him towards her, and places it on her lap.

"Hey!"

"It crosses the questioner, which is why I drew it over the first one, across it, in the middle. Because the first card is supposed to represent the questioner himself."

"Crosses?"

"It represents your obstacles. The things you are trying to accomplish, or overcome. The immediate challenge you're trying to overcome, really."

"What does it mean?"
"It can signify family intelligence. Since this represents an obstacle, maybe gaining more information about your family and past is something you're trying to do."

"And that's funny, why?" Henry asks, running a finger along the rim of his cup and licking the remaining hot chocolate off it.

"It's one interpretation. Another is that this is a young man in search of somebody extraordinary. And beyond that, Waite's specific interpretation—"

"Waite's?"

"Yes, A.E. Waite's, he was a British mystic. His interpretation of this card is that this is a young man of a significant family. In search of a young lady."

"Oh, Christ," he mutters, picking at a callus around his thumb.

"No, Henry. Not Christ. A lady. Weren't you listening?" she teases.

"Grand-mere?"

"Yes?"

"I'm going to need more hot chocolate if I have to sit here for...how many more cards?"

"Eight."

"Oh, my God."

"No, Henry. Not God. Eight. Do you need to get your ears cleaned?"

The third card is drawn reversed, or upside down. Upright, it depicts a man sitting on the ground, working on a piece of art, a star set in a circle. The circles of stars rise up a tree, towards the sky.

Upside down, it's almost entirely a different picture. At first glance Elizabeth thought it was the Hanged Man (the only card where the figure is upside down when drawn upright). But it's the Eight of Pentacles. The man sits as if on a ceiling, and the circles of stars look as if they're falling from him, out of his grasp.

She explains to Henry that this card crowns the questioner, that it represents his goal.

Reversed it's an unfortunate card: it means lost ambition, vanity, greed. If it had been drawn upright, it would've been a positive one, representing pride in one's work, skill in one's field.

The fourth card is drawn reversed as well. This causes Elizabeth some surprise, for two cards drawn in reverse is already well above the average drawing. Even one reversed card makes a reading an outlier, it happens quite rarely in her line of work.

Reversed cards are significant, in that they tend to be connected.

The fourth card is "beneath" the questioner, as in it is what they already have in their possession, and what they have to work with.

The card is the two of wands.

A tall man stands in the picture, holding a globe in his hand, overlooking the sea. To the left of him is
a pillar, and upon the pillar there is a decoration of a rose, a cross, and a lily.

Elizabeth has to take the questioner into account for these readings. Roses symbolize love, but they're also the Tudor family crest. A cross represents faith, a lily represents purity.

Reversed, it means surprise, wonder, emotion, and fear.

Reversed, it means the questioner wants to move away from an unfulfilled future, but is too afraid to do so. Either too afraid of the consequences, or too afraid of the answer to question not yet asked.

If it's what Henry has to work with, it's not great.

The fifth card is a fairly insignificant one in this particular reading. As it usually is: all it represents is the questioner's past, and most are already aware of theirs.

The sixth card represents what is coming to be. Henry's is the "three of wands", and it means a difficult undertaking or business will thrive under collaboration.

Elizabeth draws the seventh and hears a dull roar in her ears.

Her hands shake, because what she's drawn…isn't possible.

She had forgotten, when she picked her old pack of cards, the one she used as a young woman of twenty five, that no drawing from it could be accurate (it never can be, with a missing card).

There's a card from this pack has been missing ever since she framed the photo of her and Edward in her kitchen.

So it's simply not possible that it's before her now, and yet here it is. In her hand.

What's more is that the writing is still there, although she just saw it, in her kitchen, though Henry pointed at it and asked about it. Her handwriting, the ink now faded with years:

1971, Edward, the oak tree

Perhaps, she thinks, vaguely, Anthony's teasing is correct. Perhaps she's been on the edge of dementia as she's aged, and has simply never realized it.

She hasn't doubted herself so much in years, so she turns the card over, and asks, in what she hopes is a casual tone, "Henry, my eyes aren't quite what they used to be, what's the caption, here?"

Henry cants his head to the side but shrugs, leans in and reads:

"The Lovers."

Sunlight spills through the window. Anne sits on the bed in her undergarments and Henry kisses her, fully dressed himself.

“I memorized a passage I think you'll like…I wrote you something, too.”

“Oh? But whatever could surpass 'whose pretty ducky’s I trust surely to kiss'?” she teases, rubbing her nose against his.

Henry stills, then takes his hands off her shoulders, then turns from her, stalking towards
the window of their interconnected bedchambers.

“Henry?”

“I don’t wish to speak to you at this moment.”

“Oh, love, it was in jest—”

“I don’t enjoy being mocked, Anne.”

"I love your letters. Don't doubt it because I brought one up light-heartedly!"

"If you think it's a matter of such hilarity I won't kiss them. I won't kiss them ever again," he says, and she can't see him (his back is turned to her) but hears the pout in his voice nonetheless.

"Please don't be cross. I'd very much like you to do so."

"No."

"Please, Henry?" she whines, and then begins slow work of unlacing the strings on the front of her corset, "oh, this is more difficult than I thought--"

"What is?"

"Turn around and see for yourself," she remarks, and in what seems like an instant he has rushed over, sits next to her on the bed, and grabs her hand from the strings.

"No," Henry says, lowly, kissing her hand, "only I get to do that."

"But you were all the way over--"

He unlaces the strings, is halfway down the line of her bodice, the top halves of her breasts now exposed, and palms each partially-covered one as he whispers, near her ear, "only I get to touch you."

"Only I," he continues, as he makes quick work of the unlacing the rest, before releasing her chest from confinement, "get to see you. Like this."

He kisses the tops of her breasts, then her mouth, hungrily, fingers interlaced with her hair.

The scene flickers, the room goes hazy, and then it's the same, except Anne doesn't have a necklace on anymore, and there has been something that warrants forgiveness, apparently:

"My humblest apologies," he says, on his knees, kissing the knuckles of one of her hands, "however shall I redeem myself back into your good graces," hooking a hand under one of her knees, he traces circles onto her skin, gaze locked onto hers, "have you any suggestions, my lady?"

"Oh, I don't know…you could always try something that has done the trick before?" Anne suggests with a shrug of one bare shoulder.

"Very well, I shall."
He lifts her thin, white underskirt, and kisses a trail upwards, from the inside of her knee, and recites a word per kiss: "your. thighs. are. like. jewels," and stops once he reaches her sex, head now in between her thighs effectively as he places languorous kisses upon it.

"I am'…oh," she sighs, then recites, as well, voice breathy, "'faint with love…' oh, Henry…I am…my beloved's and his…desire is for me," and he squeezes her thighs in response, pauses from his task and whispers, "yes, yes it is," before continuing the pressure of his tongue against her.

December 19, 2016, Monday

Anne starts awake, grips at her sheets, and nearly stumbles towards her bathroom.

Two sex dreams in one day, she thinks as she scrubs her face with soap, putting the tap on as cold a setting as possible as she rinses her skin, is ridiculous. Get it together.

She doesn't know what's triggered this. They kissed, sure, but she and Henry had kissed before…

Although their first kiss was quite a bit different than their last one…

Their first was soft and sweet and…gentle. No nose bumping, no teeth clacking, which was a miracle, really, considering what her nerves had been at the time (both at the thought of kissing him, and about doing so with an audience).

It had transported her, almost. She had completely forgotten that anyone was watching until he pulled away. And he was the first to do so, to her embarrassment. Anne might have continued if he hadn't (for how long, she's not really sure) so lost was she to the moment.

He had tasted like mint, Anne remembers as she dabs strawberry lip balm from a pot onto her own dry, swollen mouth (when she had woken up her mouth had been felt tender to the touch, as if it was real, as if the kissing in the dream was real, the strangest thing…and her face, she notes, in the mirror, is still flushed, still feels warm, despite the cold water she just washed her face with, as if that other kind of kissing had been real, too…)

But yes, Henry's mouth had felt cool pressed against hers, tasted of mint and honey something earthy, like tea (which she had thought was strange, until she remembered that he used Burt's Bee's lip balm, and a lot of it, since he had a generous mouth, and was constantly popping Ricola cough drops…he seemed paranoid about sickness, actually, his grey-blue eyes flew wide open if anyone so much as coughed or sneezed anywhere near him and he'd take a cough drop and then use a miniature hand sanitizer bottle for his hands).

And now, she scolds herself for remembering such stupid details about him. Such stupid, insignificant details, that she had taken mental note of without even realizing.

She's going to need to forget all about that stupid dream, obviously. How does one even look someone else in the eye after having a dream of such nature about them?

Chapter End Notes
"Your (rounded) thighs are like jewels."

"I am faint with love...I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me."

-song of solomon, old testament

http://omgcenter.com/2012/10/17/the-sultry-song-of-solomon/

i know there are a lot of time jumps in this chapter, so please let me know if you have any questions or if any of it was unclear.

hope you enjoy! sorry it's been so long since an update.
surrender ourselves

Chapter Summary

She loves letters in the surreal and the real, and if he writes carefully enough, maybe she will love his. That is the thought that keeps him going, page after crumpled page.

Chapter Notes

"for wherever i am, i am yours." -- letter written by henry viii to anne boleyn, est. 1528

'my heart and I surrender ourselves into your hands.' -- letter written by henry viii to anne boleyn, est. 1527

a lot of the quotes spoken by henry in the dreams are historically accurate and gleaned from his letters and i'll include them in the end notes (the entire quotes) if anyone would like that...or i might just edit them in later, i'm fairly tired atm.

if the sex scene in the last chapter made anyone uncomfortable, know that there is another one in a dream sequence. (also, on a historic timeline, the first dream has occurred on a later date, and the second one an earlier one)

dead trigger warning (minor character, past event) for this chapter.

"Hal" is used for younger Henry in the 2009 flashback scenes, just so he's not confused with his father, Henry. also because he was called that in his childhood, etc.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2016

Henry considers the card, held in between his thumb and forefinger, tilting his head to the side to make out the picture.

It's quite beautiful: it's supposed to be Adam and Eve, clearly, though for a piece of art depicting two people that were naked all the time, it's rather PG, in his opinion: the hair of the woman flows down over most parts willingly depicted in Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and the man stands behind (what Henry assumes is) the tree of knowledge, its leaves thick and green and hanging with red apples. They hold hands over the trunk of the tree, their hands, clasped together, the center of the art.

"It's upside down," he remarks, but when he looks up from the card he sees his grandmother with a rather dazed, vacant expression on her face, blinking, slowly.

"Grand-mere? Hello? It's upside down," he repeats, waving the card back and forth, "didn't you say that was supposed to mean something?"

"Pardon?"
"Are you alright?" he asks, brow creasing in worry.

She's been sharp and quick witted since she greeted them at her door, he's noticed, not even sharp for an elderly person, but sharp for a person in general. Elizabeth Woodville has been since the last day on which he last saw her (his mother's funeral, a day clouded in haze of grief, so much so that the memories are difficult to recall, so much so that he's really stopped trying to recall any of them at all), and it's no surprise: the regal turn of her head, the long, slender, elegant neck, the height and posture of her and the magnificent, movie star hair, glossy and white rather than platinum blonde, go hand in hand with the acerbic tongue and remarks.

And with her children and grandchildren, such remarks have always been smoothed with honeyed tones, a teasing, cloying sweetness and inflection, so they're known to usually not be of any severity.

He does remember, once, before their shared loss (all of his memories before the death of his mother are sharp, of extreme clarity, and the grief counselor his father made all of his children go to said this was a sort of coping mechanism, the forgetting versus the remembering), that he excitedly relayed to her that he was learning about the history of Ghana and Nigeria in school.

"Did you know," he had said, hand tapping against his knee in a staccato rhythm, "that the future king was chosen by the Queen Mother? In Ghana? And that in Nigeria the Queen Mother had possession of the royal insignia and could refuse it if she thought the future king not up to par?"

"Those are some rather big words, Hal, I'm--"

"Yes I know," he interrupted, impatiently, increasing the speed, shaking his hand out of a cramp as his leg continued to bounce up and down under the breakfast table, "but Grand-mere, wait, what I was going to say was that you remind me of a Queen Mother."

"How so?" Elizabeth asked, letting her elbow rest on the table, chin in hand, obviously pleased by this comparison, if evident by her smile and the way she met her eldest daughter's eyes over the table, if nothing else.

"How you hold your head," Henry said, chugging down the glass of orange juice in front of him and wiping the back of his hand with his mouth, and then, continuing, "and stand tall and how you are a mother, to so many, and how everyone knows this."

She had laughed at his enthusiasm and thanked him for the comparison, but he had never stopped thinking of her that way, really. Even when she was gone.

So it's jarring to see confusion on the face of one he has always considered queenly. It doesn't fit; it doesn't fit her.

"I'm…yes," she answers, suddenly, crisply, her laugh lines crinkle as she gives a close-lipped smile, "yes, I'm fine, would you like…to take a break, Henry? Or we can be done, if you'd like. I don't want to bore you any longer."

"I'm not 'bored'," he protests, "why--"

"You don't believe in these things anyway," she says, distantly, dismissively as she takes the card from his hand, "I'm sorry I pushed you--"

"I don't really, but I believe in finishing things you start! Come on, you've got me all curious now and you're not going to finish?" he teases, "You won fair and square, after all. Eight points is
eight points. It's your right."

"I think this is about...someone you'd rather not discuss," Elizabeth says, diplomatically, "and quite frankly, my darling, I'm not too keen on being scolded for mentioning her. So..."

"Someone you'd rather not discuss".

Well.

The thing is that Anne Boleyn is hard to talk about (for him). She's hard to describe. The way he feels about her is not quite understandable, even to himself, let alone anyone else.

To care so much about someone, so quickly, so deeply, had to be some sort of insanity.

To watch her run into someone else's arms after holding her in his was the gentlest sort of pain he had ever felt, one that cradled his face with soft hands as it stung (and stung and stung). What should've been only the mildest of disappointments (at most--he had just met her, for Christ's sake, they had had--what? A few flirtatious conversations within what was maybe the course of twenty minutes, one dance, some chemistry, sure, but it's not like that was rare, for him, anyway) had instead felt something more akin to a crushing blow. The embarrassment he had felt about being so incomprehensibly sad at such a turn of events had turned his face red all the way up to his ears, and that was an embarrassment in and of itself (he really hoped no one had seen, righted himself as soon as he saw Margaret but knew he had to leave, that he wouldn't be able to school his face into a casualness he did not feel for very long).

He had seen Lizzy in the hallway afterwards and selfishly hoped that the familiarity of her could be like a salve to this very (unfamiliar) sting, her light sweetness, her easy affection.

But erasing the memory of one girl with the presence of another had not proved nearly as easily as it had before. He kissed the surface of her golden, tanned skin and imagined it pale and covered in beauty marks, nuzzled her neck and pictured the hollow of someone else's throat, ran his fingers through golden curls and saw dark, shiny waves (unpinned from where they were twisted at the nape of her delicate, swanlike neck, one by one by one), smelled eucalyptus but remembered peaches and jasmine.

Eventually he had rolled over, frustrated with lack of results, and asked, defeated, if it was alright if they just slept. Lizzy had agreed easily, and if he had been in a different mood he might have thought to be offended by her lack of disappointment, but as it was he hardly noticed, the burning feeling he had eclipsed anything else.

And then he slept and he saw exactly what he had imagined (it felt terribly invasive, but how was he supposed to prevent where his subconscious went?), although he saw it within a strange context.

She burned through his dreams all night, vividly and the dreams repeated and entered his casual daydreams during class, bits and pieces of them, at the most inconvenient of times, really.

He can remember them, still.

It's the strangest thing, but he'll recall them right before going to sleep, and fall right back into them, dreaming again. The first one, especially:

"What would your scholars say to that, hm?"

"That words spoken can be just as easily unspoken," Anne answers readily, wearing a white
chemise, sitting on an armchair of red and gold cloth, head bent over a piece of needlework, tugging the thread, "that promises broken can be just as easily unbroken."

The fire crackles in the grate, and Henry shuts the open book he's held whilst pacing, abruptly, throws it onto the bed and asks, "What do you imply, my lady?"

"That you will tire of waiting," she murmurs, lashes lowered, continuing to stitch, "and what is a marriage oath to the Queen if not a promise made? I fear, truly, that all the legate shall convince you- -"

"I tire of waiting, but not of you. Never of you, sweetheart," he insists, and her hand stills, but she still has not met his eyes, so he takes the needlepoint from her and gently sets it aside, near an astrolabe upon his desk, tilts her chin up to look at him.

"Never of you," he repeats.

"Never of me?" she asks, softly, the deep brown of her eyes brimming with tears, and he answers with a kiss, reassuring, soft, pressed against her mouth.

"How would you like to be made certain of this truth?" Henry asks, kissing her on the forehead, then the tip of her nose, and she giggles (and he is happy, so happy, to see that her tears are blinked away), then twines both hands around the back of his neck, "Hm? Shall I," he brushes his hand against her jaw line, "tell you words that are new or recite ones I have already written to you with my own hand?"

"Recite," she whispers, "I like to hear them read in your voice," and he nods, then places both hands on her waist and lifts her, swiftly, arm tucked under her knees, her hands still around his neck, then lets her down, gently, to the top of his downy mattress; the satin of it feels smooth against his calves. Anne wriggles against the pillows behind her as he sits next to her, taking her hand in his.

Anne tugs at the sleeve of his robe. He looks over at her and puts two fingers up, then to his lips, beseeching her to wait, before he clears his throat and begins:

"My heart and I," he says, placing her hand over his chest, gently, "surrender ourselves into your hands," he kisses her other hand, "beseeching you to hold us commended to your favor, and that by absence your affection to us may not be lessened: for it were," he continues, ghosting fingertips upon the square neckline of her smock, "a great pity to increase our pain, which absence produces enough and more than I could ever have thought could be felt," Henry grins and Anne's hand leaves his chest as he pushes the smock down off her shoulder, "reminding us of a point in astronomy which is this: …"

The 'point' seems to be a bare spot on her collarbone that he kisses, the 'this' the way they embrace and meet in a kiss, which starts chaste and closed but ascends to the French fashion as the seconds pass.

"Which is...?" Anne asks once they part, her face slightly dewy with sweat now, and he smirks before nuzzling her neck and pulling the other shoulder down, she tugs at the ends of the sleeves and rolls the top down to her waist. His mouth now covers the spot white linen once did, before pulling her close and whispering the rest:

"The longer the days are, the more distant is the sun, and nevertheless hotter;" he says, fiercely, hand splayed against the small of her bare back, tracing circles, "so is it our love, for by absence we are kept a distance from one another," he continues, having pulled her even closer on the word 'distance', she dips a hand into his robe and tugs at the triangular neckline of the nightshirt within.
"And yet it retains its fervor, at least on my side; I hope the like on yours," Henry continues to quote, and at this, Anne cups his face in her hands, shifts her hips, impatiently, and he slides his hands down the sides of her waist, tucking fingers into the rolled-down chemise, "assuring you," he whispers, as she wriggles upwards and he yanks the remaining piece of fabric downwards, "that on my part the pain of absence is already too great for me; and when I think of the increase that I am forced to suffer," Henry says, laughing, softly, "it would be…"

"Would be…?"

"Oh," he says, rubbing his nose against hers, "I think you remember this part."

"'Would be almost,' Anne recites, as she falls back onto the bed and he joins her, hands encircling her wrists as he kisses a path down her neck, "almost…oh," she sighs as he kisses a path down the ravine of her breasts, stopping at her heart to dance fingers along her ribcage, "intolerable, but for the firm'--oht!" she laughs, eyes cast downward, "very firm indeed, I see," and he growls before tickling her sides in earnest, "Henry!" she squeals, "how am I supposed to remember--when-- oh! 'firm hope'," Anne continues, swatting his hand away, "I have of your unchangeable…affection for…for me," she finishes, weakly, as he now kisses the inside of her thighs, gently scraping his teeth over the skin there but not…not…

"For me?" she asks, and he nods, face flushed, his russet hair mussed from how she tends to pull it as they kiss, answers, "for you, always," before he dips his head in between her thighs and places kisses there for her, only her…

"Oh, George, you are so cruel--"

George and Mary Boleyn both freeze as they cross the path of the their king and the sound of their mutual laughter falters. They are like two deer who have realized a hunter is present; that the rustling of leaves heard ahead was not from the light footsteps of a rabbit but rather a lion.

Anne, standing presently across from him, leans her head in forward, brows almost reaching her hairline, a reaction to their lack of, and they hastily murmur deference, bow and curtsy in unison.

Mary slides a look that is a mixture of panic and pity towards her brother, one that Henry does not miss (but then, he does not miss much, nor has he missed the paper clutched in the younger man's hand, and how it trembles).

"And what is this?" he inquires, lowly, a ringed finger pointed to the paper.

"Your Majesty, I--"

Henry holds his hand out, palm up, and George dips his head as he hands over the piece of paper.

He reads, brow drawn together as he does, then dismisses them both, and they all but scurry away, leaving Anne and Henry behind alone, standing together under the apple tree, the one she can view from the windows of her bedchambers.

"This is my answer, I suppose. My words," Henry says, holding the paper out for her to glance at, pulled taut between two hands, like an angel with a herald, before rolling it back up, "written by my own hand, passed around like sordid gossip that one delights to share in. So that is my answer--"

"Majesty, no, I did not give him that, nor leave to read it, he must have--"

"--as to why you remain at Hever and will not return. Very well, then," he says, briskly, and he does
not know what to do with what he holds any longer, but does not much want to give it back into her hands, so he shoves it into his sleeve, "I give you leave to continue to read my letters aloud with your brother and sister and laugh at the fool you have made of the King, but I will not send another, and this one I shall keep. Though I have always known you could not care for me half as much as I care for you; I must say I have never imagined your affection towards me to be so very little."

He turns and walks, swiftly, towards his horse, the length and strength of his legs assure that he is there, the reins in his hands, in a manner of mere moments.

What he does not see is Anne, the pale green of her skirts gathered in her hands, struggling to keep up with him.

But what he hears is her voice, calling out, ringing clear as a bell, "'I send you this letter, beseeching you to apprise me of your welfare, which I pray to God may continue as long as I desire my own.'"

His hands still on the reins. He will not look back, his pride has been too wounded for that, but he finds he cannot leave, either, pets the neck of the horse, instead.

"Majesty, I have never, nor would ever, let anyone else read any of your letters to me, they are dearer to me than any gifts I have ever received, in my whole life. They are locked in a chest in my bedchambers for me only, I do not know how my brother was able to open it... 'My heart and I surrender ourselves into your hands.'"

Anne bites her lip, looks heavenwards, then closes her eyes, feels the sun warm her face as she continues:

"'Henceforth my heart shall be dedicated to you alone. I wish my person was, too. God can do it, if He please, to whom I pray every day for that end.' And I do, too, but my prayers are selfish and in vain for you will soon, I believe, if your annulment is to be had with the haste you desire, want an alliance with a foreign princess, as kings are supposed to have. You will want this and so, to save myself from a sad end I have removed myself from your sight and made every attempt to put you and your words from my mind but if you have been listening to the 'woman you esteem most in the world' you will know I have failed most utterly in this endeavor, as I can recall the words of your letters like they were written on my very own heart--"

And Anne opens her eyes to see his closed as his mouth has interrupted her speech midsentence, crushed against her own, she closes hers again as he moves his hands, before caressing her face, to her hands and kneels, settling on the grass, bringing her down to kneel with him.

"There's nothing," Henry elucidates, resting his forehead against hers, "I want more than you. Nothing."

"I care for you greatly," she insists, "my affection for you is great, I love all of your letters--"

"And I love all of you."

2016

On the night they sit on the balcony together, the one in which he reveals a brother lost to him and she tells him of why she loves letters, Henry crawls into bed and dreams the dream with the letter and the garden and the quoting of the letters and wakes up with a start.

She loves letters in the surreal and the real, and if he writes carefully enough, maybe she will love his. That is the thought that keeps him going, page after crumpled page.
Letter-writing is a form of self-restraint, he learns in the coming weeks. Who among them in their generation is not partial to the immediate response?

The drawn-out waiting, the suspense, kept him on edge throughout the rest of the semester.

In any case, he never expected himself to be someone that could fall so fast, and he doesn't really think anyone could understand.

But then, the light catches the wedding band on his grandmother's slender left hand, the cluster of diamonds and emeralds. She met her husband under an oak tree, and they were wed just shy of a month after that, so…if anyone could understand, it could very well be her.

"Fine," he says, spreading his hands out, a gesture of negotiation, good will, or surrender, depending on the context (surrender, probably, Henry thinks, in this case), before clasping them together, "what do you want to know?"

Elizabeth Woodville knows almost nothing but what she saw of the girl in white and gold mask. Knows that Henry's had dreams, but hasn't entered any in a while, hazarding a guess that the dreams to come after that meeting (and the way he saw her) would vary from romantic to sexual in nature, something that should be kept private, prophecy or no.

Besides, her daughter said nothing of a girl, only a fall from a horse. It's doubtful the two are connected, and he's unlikely to dream of his end himself. Elizabeth believes that in life, we can dream and see the death of others, but the deaths of ourselves and their nature is too heavy a burden for any mortal to bear, too much to carry with us. It creates too much fear.

"That you'll listen to me," Elizabeth answers, "that's what I'd like to know-- if I tell you what I see, will you listen?"

"I have been listening," he protests, tugging at the sleeve of his sweater.

"Henry…"

_Some things are too heavy to know, especially to remain unshared, and yet I hold one of the heaviest truths of all…_

_February 2009_

Elizabeth knocks on the slightly ajar door of her son-in-law's study.

"Henry?" she calls out, softly.

"Come in."

She enters to find him sitting at his computer, fingers interlaced together, resting against the keyboard, staring at it. He's wearing the same shirt he wore yesterday, the top three buttons undone, face unshaven. His eyes, which usually hold an alarming clarity, are bloodshot against the light blue.

"We need to decide on flower arrangements," she says, "and we still need to pay them for the--"

"I don't have time," he snaps, and suddenly begins to type, furiously, stopping to scrub a hand across his cheek, the salt and pepper stubble of it, "I wrote a blank check, it should be on the corner…"
Elizabeth nods, and leaves the doorway to approach his desk, slides the check in question off.

"Put in whatever it takes," Henry says, typing still, "whatever it takes, whatever it costs, I don't care. I trust you."

_I trust you-- that's_ certainly something she's never heard before. Not from him, anyway. Not to her.

"Alright...and the...cremation?" she asks, lowering her voice, "they're charging us by the day, which doesn't matter," she adds hastily, at his livid expression, "but it should be done before the funeral."

"Not yet," he says, curtly, taking a swig of the dark liquid in a crystal glass on a coaster next to his mouse-pad.

Judging by the open bottle of whiskey next to it, and his demeanor, Elizabeth supposes it's not cola he's drinking.

"Oh? Is there...some sort of problem?"

"I'm flying someone in. A different examiner. They missed something. So someone more...advanced, is required. This one has more experience. They'll find whatever it was."

"To what end? They said it was S.U.D.E.P.--"

"'Sudden Unexplained Death in Epilepsy Pregnancy,'" he parrots, mockingly, "she didn't have epilepsy. That doesn't make sense."

"It can develop very late, although it's rare. And death often doesn't."

"Don't placate me," he says, pouring more alcohol into this glass, "you never have before. Let's not change that, shall we?"

"Then let her rest," she says, crossing her arms, "please. She wouldn't have wanted--"

"She will rest. She will be cremated. I will spread her ashes in the Pacific, as she wished. As soon as I find...what happened. What they did, or didn't do. What went wrong."

"Henry--"

"Truth is, it _was_ probably something _they_ did wrong. Perhaps they mixed two medications that can induce seizures. _Someone_ was incompetent. She'd had five pregnancies before, she'd never had seizures. Someone has to be blamed."

She considers touching his shoulder, but decides against it. He's tense, and, really not the most touchy-feely person on his best days, and this is definitely not one of those.

"And you think that will fix anything?" she asks, canting her head, pulling on the sleeves of her robe, the silk cool against her fingers.

"No," he admits, easily, tilting his own head to the side (he hasn’t looked up at her since her inquiry about her daughter's cremation), "but they have emptied me. I am gone. So I will empty their pockets. It won't be justice, but it will be...something. Drink?" he offers, suddenly, reaching to the left of his desk, next to the printer there's a row of glasses, lined up neatly by size.
She shakes her head and he shrugs, says, "Suit yourself."

"I know you loved her--"

"She was my partner," he interrupts, voice breaking, "she was my life, you can't possibly understand--"

Elizabeth glares at him, viciously enough to cut his words short. That's not something she'll listen to, not after Edward. Not after her sons.

"Oh," he says, sheepishly, drumming his fingers against the desk, "well, yes, I suppose you can, but...still, you have no idea, what I did...for us."

And now his eyes are blurry, he leans back against his chair in defeat. He does not look at his mother in law, or his computer screen, any longer, but rather some fixed point in the distance, eyes out of focus.

Elizabeth glances behind her shoulder but sees nothing but the door.

"I sold my soul for this woman, to-- and for what?" he asks, hoarsely, then, laughs, hands limp against the mahogany of his desk, "well, I suppose it doesn't matter now..."

"You sold your soul?" she asks, perturbed by this heavy phrasing, "what does that--"

"I stepped into the darkness," Henry continues, calmly, as if she has not even spoken, "and back into the light, as if I had never been there at all."

Elizabeth is overtaken by a vision, a sharp pain in her temples throbs as she sees:

A battlefield, mist swirls around the surrounding trees, tall and ominous. Two figures in armor, atop horses, their faces shrouded and one is...Henry, her daughter's husband, and one is...she cannot see, but Henry cuts him down and he falls. His face is bloody, flat against the ground, body lifeless. Another man in armor take something from his visor. And a crown is placed on Henry's head.

And then there is Richard, her husband's brother, driving, the night is black and there is fog, again, deep, the moon above is full. And he pushes the brakes as he takes a curve, and nothing happens. The car doesn't slow and he pushes down again, confused, panics, and the car swerves off the road, spins, and crashes...wraps around a tree. The airbag doesn't go off (it's supposed to, but it doesn't), and there is Richard's face, covered in blood, flat against the steering wheel. His body twisted, lifeless.

She's back in the study and Henry is asleep, slumped in his chair, and she doesn't want to think about what she just saw. Doesn't want to think about how they may be connected, though the parallel is fairly clear to her, she can't...it's too much. It's too much for her to know.

There has always been an edge to Henry Tudor the I. But the quantifiable sharpness of that edge has never been realized by Elizabeth, till now.

What she realizes in this moment is that the edge has been softened, somewhat, by her daughter's love. And now that she is gone, so, too, is any softness in him.

Elizabeth does not see the future, but rather feels it, in her bones: if Henry has ever shown any small
bit of mercy to those that cross him, he will no longer do so. If he ever feels the slightest bit betrayed by those he has considered loyal, he will cast them aside. "Forgiveness" will be a word to a language he does not speak, nor care to.

He did show mercy, actually, when her daughter pushed it. Elizabeth recalls the name of Adam Simnel, a teenager that had shoplifted merchandise from Henry's stores. Henry had wanted to punish him to the fullest extent of the law, but his wife had begged him to reconsider, citing Simnel's youth, unemployment, poverty, lack of opportunity and the son he had to support as his reasons for the crime. Her husband had yielded, eventually, hired Simnel as a janitor, actually, but insisted on withdrawing a percentage of the price of the stolen merchandise from the boy's bi-monthly paychecks (something else Elizabeth York had tried to soften him on, to no avail in this instance).

She is worried for all his children, but perhaps especially towards his sons:

Arthur, who is careful to a fault, studious and serious, quiet and introspective, whose opinions on the disparity of wealth in the world are strong, uninhibitedly so; Arthur, who wears his own like a secret shame whereas his father wears his like a crown. His seriousness, his inability to make a choice, or simply the length it takes to make one, will most likely be to his detriment.

Hal, who is sensitive, intelligent, loud and unabashed; Hal, prideful but generous to a fault, who is the opposite of careful, whereas his father excises the most care in every decision he makes. His impulsivity, the way in which he does not so much make choices as act before one of his thoughts has even completed a sentence, will be to his detriment in regards to Henry as well. While his father may not have patience for choices to be agonized over, nor does he have patience for those who make them impulsively.

Both of them, brave as lions and twice as tenacious.

February 2009

"Arthur?"

Arthur looks up from his notebook, glasses sliding off the edge of his nose. Hal blinks, owlishly in his doorway, rubbing his eyes, wearing pajamas. He has a buzz cut now, he notices, since the last time he saw him today it was longer.

Arthur never locks his door, but, then, he never wants to. And in this week, he's kept it open. Just in case.

"Yes?" he asks, putting his pen down and shutting it to save his place, then setting the notebook on his bedside table.

"I…couldn't sleep," he says, quietly, gaze downwards, upon his feet, scratching the back of his neck.

"Do you want to sleep here?"

"No," Hal scoffs, scuffing the carpet with the bottom of his slipper, "I'm too old for that."

"Alright," he says, with an easy shrug, "do you want to sit next to me, then? I was just thinking I could use your help on something, anyway."

"Okay," he agrees, brightly, he walks from the door, leaving it ajar, to the King-sized bed, and Arthur pulls up the comforter so he can get in, "I mean, I guess if you really need my help."
"I sure do," Arthur says, as Hal settles in next to him, pulling the cover over them and resting his back against the headboard, "I'm writing something. And you're a better writer than I am."

"I hate writing," Hal says, rolling his eyes, "you know that."

"Doesn't mean you're not good at it," Arthur counters, as he pulls the notebook back to his lap, "I'm working on the…eulogy."

Hal blushes, and his brother thinks maybe he's embarrassed by his ignorance, so he explains, softly, "A eulogy is something you--"

"I know what a eulogy is, Arthur," he huffs, crossing his arms, "please."

"Well, excuse me, Your Highness," Arthur says with a smirk, elbowing him in the side as he opens the notebook, "of course you do, how could I forget that you know everything?"

Hal glares at him, but that, too, turns into a smirk and then they are laughing, together, enjoying some levity that has been quite lacking in the past few days.

"This is what I have so far," Arthur says, passing the notebook over, and Hal takes it, and the pen, pushes the end of it so that the nib snaps out.

"I thought you hated--"

"I do," Hal says, eyes scanning the page, "but I'll do it for her. Of course."

"Of course," Arthur says, with a nod, "sorry."

"It's alright. This is good."

"Thanks," he says, running a hand along his younger brother's peach fuzz, a golden color that doesn't reveal any red (that's usually not shown until it's grown out somewhat, once it's reached curl status it's more red than gold, actually), "when did you get balded?"

"Few hours ago," Hal answers, beginning to write, in rather illegible scrawl, Arthur notices over his shoulder, but he's sure he'll translate for him later, "I kept…pulling my hair. Getting frustrated. I get frustrated…a lot," he admits, "but he noticed that I was today and said it was driving him crazy. So."

"I see. I'm sorry--"

"It's fine," he snaps, worrying his bottom lip, "don't worry about it. I'm going to write about her charity work…what I know about it, you can add to it. And how she used to take us with her. And what she…"

He drops the pen, suddenly, a tremor in his left hand has started (probably what made it slip from his grasp), and the nib of it hits Arthur's white sheets and the ink pools, staining it blue.

"What she," he continues, tapping his hand against the page, then picking at his cuticles, "what she…taught us," Hal finishes, and his voice breaks like a puberty change on the last two words, but Arthur knows, as the tears slide down his brother's face, that that's not what it is.

"I'm sorry," he says, sniffing, and Arthur takes his hand and squeezes it.

"It's okay to be sad, Hal. It just happened--"

"But I'll never get anything done if I always feel sad. I can't just be sad for the rest of my life, but it
feels like...I always will be."

Arthur has no idea what to say to this, simply squeezes his hand in reassurance once more time. He lets his brother lie down and fall asleep next to him, because he figures that's the least he can do.

Minutes pass, and then:

"Arthur?"

Margaret and Marina stand in his doorway, now, wearing matching, pink nightgowns, Marina holding a teddy bear, clutched tightly against her chest.

"We couldn't--"

"Sleep?" Arthur whispers, smiling, nodding to Hal, "c'mon, join the party."

And they do, they pick their own pillows out and then they are lined up, all in a row, by age: Arthur, still awake, Hal, asleep, Margaret, sleeping next to him, Marina, sleeping next to her.

---

**February 2009, (later that night)**

The door to Arthur's bedroom is wide open when Elizabeth Woodville passes it on her way to the guest bedroom.

She sees four of her grandchildren, sleeping peacefully in the same bed, and comes inside.

Arthur's glasses are still on, as is the lamp next to his bed, so she takes them off and sets them on the oak set of drawers next to the lamp.

Before she turns off the light, she notices that Hal's face is nuzzled against Arthur's shoulder, in sleep. That both their eyelashes are long, both grace the dark circles underneath.

Perhaps, she thinks, as she shuts the door behind her, *they'll be alright, after all...they do have each other.*

*They all do.*

Chapter End Notes

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i tried really hard to get the past life/historic henry's dialogue as authentic sounding as possible (i studied his letters pretty thoroughly to sort of try to figure out the tone/how he spoke) but i'm fairly insecure about if i managed to do so. /shrug


Lambert Simnel = Adam Simnel

Simnel was an impostor that was forgiven by Henry VII and became a kitchen boy. This was the closest modern equivalent to that I could think of.

ALSO: sorry the timeline's been so slow (in regards to December 2016), I don't know if
anyone minds but I could understand if they did. I've been elaborating on backstory etc. so that's taken quite a bit of writing, and I enjoy it and it'll be important as the story continues.

To make up for that (and also because it's a relevant date that will be coming up shortly), I was going to write the next chapter as a flash-forward scene. But some people would mind spoilers, I'm sure? I'm not sure I'll be doing it. I considered just adding 'MAJOR SPOILERS AHEAD', in the beginning notes, with a bunch of "*" underneath it, so that if anyone read on a desktop they would know not to read it.

Anyways. If anyone wants this or really, or has a problem with it, let your opinions be known in the comments! ♥♥♥
of roses red and falcons white

Chapter Summary

flash forward, future scene in Whitehall, post-2016

Chapter Notes

SPOILER WARNING~~~
this is a future timeline event.
post-2016.
please don't read if you don't want spoilers.
please don't read if you don't want spoilers.
please
don't
read
if you don't
want spoilers
for the timeline
of this story.
sorry to be obnoxious, but i really don't want anyone to be upset by spoilers and want to
make sure that any reader that doesn't want spoilers
doesn't read this.

please only read farther than this if you are okay with spoilers.

~ major plot spoilers ahead~
4:00 AM, post-2016 (flash-forward)

Anne Boleyn stands in front of the entrance to Henry's apartment complex, ties the ribbon around the waist of her dark grey, damask robe, then crosses her arms, chest heaving.

She can hear the door open, and she knows who it is-- he just ran after her down the staircase

"I can't believe you lied to me, again! You promised you--"

"I didn't lie to you," Henry yells, "I told you about it straightaway--"

"Actually, no, I think it'd be better if I couldn't believe it, the sad thing is that I can believe it--"

"I would've told you who it was, but you didn't ask--"

"You're right, I didn't ask. Because I feared the worst, and this," she remarks, laughing, looking both ways before crossing the street, "this is definitely the worst. This is most definitely the worst thing that could have happened."

"We had broken up!" he shouts, running after her.

"For a day," she seethes, taking a seat on the park bench (it's insignificant and she's not sure why she cares at a time like this, but she's wearing her silver ballet slippers, the ones with stars on them, her favorite, as she was too angry to think of changing clothes before storming out, and she doesn't want to dirty them further by scuffing them along the concrete), "I hope it was worth it."

"Of course it wasn't," he says, taking a seat next to her, and she scoots over to the far end of it, away from him.

"So you're marrying her, after all. You told me you were going to find a way to get out of it, but, no. You just found a way to get more into it, instead."

"I…didn't…"

Henry trails off, bends over, placing his elbows on his thighs, cradling his head in his hands.

"You are. I know you. You wouldn't be who I fell in love with if you didn't. I wouldn't like you very much, if you didn't, actually," Anne says, and she tilts her head upwards, to all the windows of York Apartments, the place she's spent the most time in these last few weeks, with the realization that she won't be spending much more time here. The closed curtains, the other lives that aren't this one… most people are sleeping, probably, and she's down here.

They're down here, and the dawn is cool, the grass behind them shiny with dew. The clouds above are as deep a grey as the pattern of her robe, heavy, threatening to spill rain, so dark, in fact, that she wouldn't be surprised if she heard the crack of thunder.

The day's on the whisper of beginning as they're on the whisper of ending.

"I don't want to. But…"
"But yes. It's the thing to do. So everyone gets what they want. Your father gets what he wants, her parents get what they want, she gets--"

"She doesn't want this either, and I certainly don't."

"Everyone gets what they want. Except me. Of course," she says, simply, with a casual shrug of her shoulders.

Anne feels like her throat is closing up, so she clears it.

"I'm so sorry," Henry says, voice hoarse, "I can't tell you how sorry--"

"Leave, please."

"Anne--"

"Leave, please. I need to be alone."

She looks at her knees, shaking under the skirt of the robe, as he gets up and turns away, taking a right on the sidewalk.

Anne doesn't know where he's going. It's not the direction of his apartment, certainly, but his shoulders are slumped as he walks away, and she doesn't want to watch him get farther from her anymore.

So she stands, crosses her arms, and turns away from him. Waiting for…she doesn't know. He could run back to her, but to what end? It's not like it would make much of a difference.

And then things fade, her vision blurs with tears, and she hears:

"Anne, run! Towards Falcon, RUN!"

But she doesn't process this, really, it's a scream of agony, of pure panic, it doesn't make sense in this context, and why is he telling her to run?

The next thing she feels is being pushed, hard, she stumbles to catch her balance but falls, chin hitting the pavement, then piercing pain and blood pooling from it, wet and sticky, against it. She's fallen on something sharp, she thinks, vaguely, because she feels the dampness and stinging on her neck, too.

And the next thing she hears is the blare of a horn, then ringing in her ears.

And the next thing she sees is blackness, utter and complete, unfurling over her like a blanket.

"911, what is your emergency?"

"There's been a car accident, I came out of my apartment because two people were screaming, fighting, it woke me up, thank God I did--"

"What's your name, sir?"

"Thomas, Thomas Cranmer."
"What's the phone number you're calling from?"

"207-210-1536, my cell phone."

"Where's the accident?"

"1533 White Tower Boulevard, Los Angeles."

"Nearest cross streets?"

"Um…to the accident? White Tower Boulevard and Falcon Avenue."

"How many cars involved, and is anyone hurt?"

"One, but the driver ran, they turned the ignition off, the bumper's over the sidewalk… I hope to get help but I doubt it, they must've been drunk…they hit a pedestrian, but two kids are injured…the boy is…God, he's in bad shape, please send help right away, he's barely breathing. The girl is better, because she didn't get hit…her chin's banged up, and her neck seems to be cut…yes, there's definitely a gash there… I think there was some broken glass where she fell… The car was headed for her but the boy ran towards her and pushed her out of the way of it…and then the driver braked and the boy rolled over the top, I think?"

"Okay, Mr. Cranmer, we've already sent help; it's on its way. Thank you for calling, you did the right thing. Do they appear conscious?"

"The boy, no. The girl, no but…oh, alright, she's coming to, I think…"

"Ask her what day it is."

"What happened… where… where's Henry?" asks a girl, faintly, the operator hears it, the caller must be using speakerphone on his cell.

"Miss, can you tell me what day it is?" the caller asks, as per instructions.

"Um…it's May… May 19th, I think?"

"Oh, God, I don't even know myself… sir?" the caller asks, "is that right?"

"Yes, that's right. It's May 19th."
Elizabeth is reading a paperback mystery novel, sitting on her couch, when she hears her house
doorbell ring. She bookmark her spot and gets up, quickly. She doesn’t recognize the number, and
usually that makes her cautious enough to let it go to voicemail, but…a strange sense of urgency
overakes her, and she trusts it, so she lifts the phone from the cradle and presses the green button for
'talk'.

"Hello?" she asks.

"Grand-mere?"

"Arth--"

"Don’t say my name," Arthur says, quickly voice tight, "please, sorry, let’s…just not use names at all,
alright? I'm worried…just in case."

"Alright," she says, slowly, walking back to her couch, "how did you get my phone number?"

She only recently had it installed (she refuses to get a cell phone…she doesn’t trust them. She doesn’t
trust phones that are smaller than her wallet. They irk her), and she’s given the number to only a
handful of people.

"Anthony."

"Where are you?"

"I'm at...a 7-11. Payphone. I told...Sir that I needed a coffee, and fresh air. Before it starts...I don't
have much time. But I need...your advice."

'Sir' is what Henry makes his sons call him, out of "respect, tradition, and honor". Arthur had
informed her thusly in one of his letters, but they haven’t spoken for quite some time.

"On what?"

"I'm a witness today, in the case with...the boy," he whispers, "the intern?"

The "boy's" jacket is draped over one of her armchairs, his shoes in front of her fireplace, his bag of
off-brand honey nut cheerios rolled up with a rubber band in her kitchen cupboard. He's in court
today, but she didn't know Arthur was.

Percy Warbeck. He couldn't possibly mean anyone else.
"And?" she prompts.

"I'm supposed to…I'm supposed to say he stole from us. Our ideas."

"Did he?"

"No," he says, voice cracking, "no, he didn't. He's not lying…we stole his, not the other way around. Or…I didn't, I had no idea we were doing that, until this, I would've tried to stop it…had I known."

"There are other witnesses called, aren't there? You can't be the only one--"

"Yes, yes," Arthur says, the speed of his words making his impatience evident, "but it doesn't matter. Everyone is lying, because they want to keep their jobs, or they've been promised promotions….everyone is giving him these glowing character recommendations, ones you and I both know he doesn't deserve…his lawyer is an absolute shark, he's managed to convince the judge and jury that he's the grieving widower that was taken advantage of, who took someone under his wing, that the boy got power-hungry but that's not…that's not what happened. At all."

"So what will you do?"

"That's the thing, I don't…I don't know. I tried to get Sir to compromise, as soon as I found out, I said we should offer him compensation, perhaps have him sign a non-disclosure agreement or something…but he wouldn't. I tried. You know how stubborn he is."

"Yes," she says mildly, and the light from the window pours onto the stained glass mosaic on the wall, illuminating the roses there, "yes, I certainly do…"

---

**February 2009, funeral of Elizabeth York**

"Thank you for all your help."

Elizabeth looks up from her plastic cup to find Henry in the doorway of his kitchen. She says nothing in response, simply drains the rest of the sparkling apple cider, eyes intent on him over the rim of it. He shifts, awkwardly, foot to foot.

"Really," he continues, biting his lip, scratching at his cheek (clean shaven, now, but covered in red spots, as if his hand shook as he applied to razor to it), "I couldn't have done most of this without you."

Elizabeth crosses her arms, empty cup in one hand, and stares. He's unsettled by her lack of response, she can tell, but she doesn't mind. He should be.

"Elizabeth?"

"It's funny," she says, suddenly, laughing. Suddenly, she tosses the empty cup in his sink, then begins work on the dirty dishes, pours the tap on, "I'm sorry, it's just quite funny to me--"

"We have staff for that, you don't need to--"

"So funny to me, actually, that you actually think," she continues, ignoring him, reaching for the dish soap, she squeezes a generous amount in as the water steams and pours over them, "that me helping with my own daughter's funeral, means that I don't blame you."
"Blame me?"

"Oh, yes," she says, with vicious emphasis, "I actually blame you entirely. Because, you see," Elizabeth continues, scrubbing furiously at an appetizer tray, "I've been rereading her more recent letters, reading between the lines, really, turning over things she said to me...and you know what? She didn't want another child."

"That's not true--"

"It most certainly is. She was tired all the time, she didn't want another child, she was done, but you pushed her, you pushed and you pushed... you pressured her because you think the larger the brood, the larger your fucking 'dynasty.' And she wanted to please you," she says, scathingly, all but throwing the rinsed tray onto the rack, "so she acquiesced."

There is silence, then, for a moment, the only sound the running water, the tension palpable, she looks over her shoulder to see his own shoulders slumped, and thinks maybe he's seeing a glint of truth in her accusation, but when she turns back to the sink his voice doesn't sound much like that of a man who is defeated by words:

"Well, I guess they don't call you the Ice Queen for nothing...to begrudge the existence of your own granddaughter, Woodville?" he scolds, any trace of patience or confusion in his voice has now, it's purely sardonic, "That's quite something. Quite cold, really even for you--"

"Don't get it twisted," she snaps, "of course I don't...don't twist my words--"

"Oh, and why ever not?" Henry taunts, "You've made such sport of twisting mine, over the years."

"Then let me be perfectly clear. I don't resent Kate. I resent you."

"Hmm. I think you're a projecting a bit, no?"

"I beg your pardon?" she asks, tone imbued with the very iciness he accused her of, she turns her back to the sink and rests against the counter.

The edges of her sleeves are damp and translucent, now, her dress is white (the color of mourning, and her daughter's favorite, symbolic to her of purity and light, the moon and the snow and her family crest, among other things she loved), the sleeves long, the skirt sweeps the floor. She worries one in her hand, vaguely hoping it dries in the sun (the service is outside, no one but family and staff is permitted inside the house).

"Let me be perfectly clear: just because your husband," he says, eyes glittering with malice and triumph, she feels her jaw tense as she waits for the end of his sentence, "treated you like a brood-mare, doesn't mean--"

The slap that interrupts him is sudden, reactive, she doesn't even see it coming herself. The shock on her face mirrors his as she strikes him, clear across his face.

And then Henry's face distorts, blanches before settling into a grimace. He cradles his cheek and says, with an almost eerie calmness in the face of her physical outburst:

"Get out. Of my. House."

2009
"Gladly," Elizabeth says, with an infuriating smirk, posture at ease, a studied insouciance mastered by those like her, Henry knows (ambitious, cunning to the point of cutthroat, just as he strives to be, but...it looks most ill-flattering on a woman, truly).

"You won't be seeing them again," he remarks matter-of-factly, hand slipping from his face, watches with satisfaction as this unnerves her, slightly, a flash of panic that sweeps across her wide-set cerulean eyes that dulls as quickly as it appeared, "my children. You're not welcome back here."

"Fine," she says, tonelessly, long-fingered hands at ease, resting against her pale skirt, "and if they want to see me?"

"They won't."

"And if they do?" she challenges, no fear in her countenance whatsoever.

*Does this woman never slump*, he thinks, irritably, not for the first time, either...they are exactly the same height, and she always stands tall.

*Stand tall: like there's a string at the back of your neck, God's hands pulling you upwards*, was what his mother had whispered in his ear, time and time again, her hand on his back every time shyness caused his shoulders to hunch, but Elizabeth Woodville is no one's puppet. Certainly not his, and certainly not her husband's, either, though he knew the insult would cut nevertheless.

She stands not like God is pulling her upwards but like God stands right at her side, waiting for her next command. It's an unnerving confidence, one he's envied over the years, and one he would very, very much like to cut low. One he is very, very tired of, now more than ever.

But she shrugs and turns to the window, the view of the well-cared for property, the white tents set up outside, easily seen from this angle, and murmurs, so quietly he barely hears her:

"Roses need a women's touch."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," he snaps, "of course that was you."

"What?" she asks, vaguely, arms crossed, a soft smile playing upon her mouth, a deep wine color, covered in gloss (Henry knows if his mother were alive she'd make some cutting remark about her use of makeup, that Woodville would respond in kind about her lack thereof, but supposes that's as irrelevant as the way the wind blows, now...she is impervious to criticism, in any case, a flaw she treats like a strength, like she does her many others).

"She always said that. Never mind that we had staff to do the gardening, never mind that--"

"Oh...you foolish man," she says, with a gentle, easy laugh, but her gaze is fixed so rigidly that curiosity gets the better of him and Henry moves, squints to try to see what she's seeing through the window and focuses on his children, lined up properly, in a row, nodding to every guest, Arthur shaking their hands.

"You thought...she was talking about flowers?"

His mother-in-law says the word 'flowers' and, as if on cue, Hal lifts his head, tugs on his older brother's sleeve, and points at something above (perhaps a bird...he's been drawing falcons, lately, Henry's noticed, sketching them as he pushes food around his plate during breakfast, shades the letter 'B' before erasing it or crossing it out, his brow furrowed, as if he doesn't understand why the images are flowing from his pencil). They look up, together, at the sky, shielding their eyes with their hands.
Elizabeth turns back to him, gives him a small, pitying smile as if it is a gift he should humbly thank her for, and it is this, perhaps, that angers him more than anything.

"You're leaving," Henry says, jutting his chin out, "right now. No goodbyes."

Elizabeth dips her head.

"As you wish," she says, coolly, dipping into a mock, shallow curtsey.

The midday light cascades through the kitchen window, setting the white of her hair to gold, for a moment it paints her as something otherworldly. A righteous spiritual messenger, perhaps, a glowing demigod, but then she turns, quickly, on her heel, and leaves the kitchen. He hears the light padding of her feet, and it seems she is following his instructions, her footsteps echo in the direction of the front entrance to his home, rather than the one that will lead to the back, where the service takes place.

*Trick of the light,* Henry thinks, *nothing otherworldly there, just a bitter old widow. Nothing more, nothing less.*

An intrusive thought flickers through his mind:

*And you're just a bitter old widower, hmm?*

The voice taunts, matches Woodville's, that trademark, mocking lilt, the one she's used in every movie when her character's telling the lead what's what.

He leaves the kitchen, walks into the living room, furious at himself for letting her voice get into his head, and stills upon seeing the framed photo on the mantelpiece of the empty fireplace.

It's been there since his very first Christmas in this house, and he's never paid it much mind before. The frame captures his wife and her mother, hands on each other's arms, smiling, thick as thieves, looking almost identical.

He grasps the frame with a trembling hand and throws it against the wall. Broken glass rains down the pale green (color scheme selected by Elizabeth York herself, twenty years young, her delicate fingers gracing each palette with excruciating care, holding up each card closely, against the light of the room, elbowing Henry each time he teasingly tried to tug one from her grasp) smoothness of it; shimmering memories that collect on the floor like so much dust upon the photo within.

**2011**

"I don't know…I don't know what to do," Arthur says, and he sounds very much like he is choking through the connection on the line, and she supposes he is, in a way. Choking on indecision is, she knows, one of the heaviest feelings that humanity has to endure.

"What feels right?" Elizabeth asks, evenly, trying to remain neutral, or at least keep her voice that way, but it's hard to when she's sheltering the very boy whose future hangs in the balance.

Still, she is skilled at masking her feelings. Her career might be mystic these days, rather than theatrical, but she's picked up a thing or two from her former career as an actress, nevertheless.

"Nothing," he says, with a gasp, "nothing I could choose feels right, there's no happy ending here no matter what I choose…and I know it's so terribly selfish of me, that I should be thinking of my family, of the boy, even, more than I'm thinking of…her, but I can't help but think of her. Not," he
says, with a self-deprecating laugh, "that *that's* anything unusual, for me, but…"

"Who?"

"If I tell the truth," he continues, as if she hadn't spoken, "her parents won't let me marry her. They wouldn't want to align themselves with us after a scandal like this. And if I *don't* then I've made myself…then I'll no longer be the kind of man that deserves her. *So what do I choose?*"

"I can't make that choice for you, darling. You have to--"

"I have to go," he says, abruptly, "he's calling me on my cell."

"Goodbye, please be--"

The line goes dead.

Elizabeth places her phone back on the cradle, and notices, with a detached sort of interest, that her chest feels just as dead, leaden with sadness and an uneasy feeling of what's to come.

---

**2016**

Henry's grandmother had cited the "easily triggered tiredness of the elderly" as a reason for cutting his tarot reading short, with a kiss on his forehead and a promise to continue in the morning. Neither of them put the Scrabble board away. It's a pretty picture, the words both of them picked align together, almost like some kind of poetry, so it's kept as it was when they finished the game, out on the table.

He knocks, lightly, on the door of the guest bedroom, but receives no answer. Knocks with more force, and still, nothing.

"Margaret? Are you awake?"

He opens the door to her sitting on the long edge of the bed, the one closest to the window, her back to him. Auburn curls flow down her back in rivulets, a lovely luminescence in contrast with the white of her t-shirt. Her phone, covered in a pink case, lies to the left of her, connected by the wire of headphones (her reason for not answering when he called her name, Henry presumes, that or she's just ignoring him).

"Margaret?"

Margaret turns around, startles upon seeing him, and takes her headphones off, pulling her legs in to cross them.

"What?" she asks.

"I just wanted to check on you. Before heading to bed. Are you okay?"

He leans against the doorway, feels the distance at them pull. It would feel dishonest to come any further inside, so he doesn't, but is hit with a pang of sadness at this fact, regardless.

"Yeah. I'm *always* okay," she scoffs, balling the bedspread in one fist, "not that you would know."
Margaret watches her brother's brow furrow, and the level of satisfaction that causes her, his confusion and hurt at her cryptic words, buoys her to a level of giddiness.

It's sick to feel that way, probably, but she doesn't care-- let him wonder about her, for once.

"What does that mean?" he asks

Margaret levels him with a steely gaze singular to the Tudors. It is the color of the swelling of a storm above the sea, and as impenetrable as armor, that says: you don't understand me, you couldn't possibly understand me, and you never will.

But Henry is a Tudor, too, through and through, (lest she forget it) so he pierces right on through it (one of the few that can):

"Margaret. What. Does. That. Mean?" he asks, in a tone that brooks no argument; one of such severity that it cannot be disregarded, not even by one so blasé and confident as Margaret Tudor, seventeen:

Socialite, debutante, beauty, princess, party-girl.

(Wild, wilder, wildest.
Sad, sadder, saddest.
Lost and always, always trying to nurse those broken wings.
Always, always wishing someone were there to help her do so.
But no one ever is.)

"Nothing," she says, coldly.

This is her brother, she knows, technically, although he lingers in the doorway, uncomfortable, more like a stranger than a familial relation (never mind a close one).

Her brother, Hal. Henry Tudor the II. Twenty years young and decades more worldly.

Playboy, trust fund kid, athlete, prince, god.

(Fast, faster, fastest.
Lonely, lonelier, loneliest.
More brilliant than he'll ever give anyone the chance to know.
Always, always waiting for the other shoe to drop.
And it does, it does, it does.)
They continue to stare at each other, at an impasse of sorts, both knowing this:

When life bottoms out, the Tudors bounce back.

No matter the cost.

The cost, mainly, is this: their lack of intimacy with one another.

They're more than the sum of their parts, but no one knows that.

It doesn't matter.

Henry's the one that stayed when Arthur didn't (either because he wouldn't or couldn't-- Margaret's decided, in the years that passed since his disappearance, that the difference between the two doesn't really matter if the result is the same; and it is).

Here is a truth that Margaret knows far too intimately: left is left and gone is gone, whether your ashes are scattered in the ocean like her mother's or your back has been turned to your family for years and still hasn't turned the slightest bit back.

So, as her brother, Henry is many things, to her: he helped her learn to read (he learned so early himself), he taught her how to tie her shoes. After her mother left (and her grandmother followed) he helped her zip up the back up her dress when she couldn't reach. Learned to braid her hair, and did so, without complaint.

But as she reached her teenage years, as they spent the majorities of their years apart at their respective boarding schools, their confrontational moments began to surpass their intimate ones.

Really, his absence has marked her more than his presence ever has. And he doesn't even care to know.

"Nothing?" he asks, incredulously.

"Yes."

"Fine," he says, with a curt nod, "good night, then."

"Good night."

He closes the door behind him, and as soon as he's gone, she wishes he had fought for an answer more.

Margaret falls back onto the bed, and pulls her knees to her chest. And she remembers the last time (besides him, defending her in the face of their father's anger, earlier this morning) he really, really felt like her brother…and thinks:

_Huh. It wasn't all that long ago, after all_...
"Where the fuck are you going?" James Stuart shouts, standing on the bottom of the stairwell of the Eltham (up there in prestige with the Ritz Carlton, it's been the primary spot for Southern California debutante coming-out balls for the past five years or so) with friends, smoking a cigarette, watching Henry Tudor as he runs up it.

"None of your fucking business, Stuart," Henry snaps, tone clipped, pulling the door at the top open with brute force, it slams shut, heavily, behind him.

*Intriguing.*

"Why are you all sweaty?" Margaret asks, blinking back tears, gloved hand curled upon her cheek as she looks into the mirror to see Henry, red-faced, standing behind her, chest heaving.

"You said it was an emergency!"

"He's not here," she whimpers, plaintively, crossing her arms.

Girls flutter around them in the background, like matching white butterflies, their skirts like unfurling wings, putting the final touches on their makeup and hair, murmuring coquettishly to one another and giggling at the sudden forbidden male presence in the debutantes' prep room (and his level of handsomeness, of course).

The supervising matrons are too engrossed in their clipboards and tasks to take such instant notice of him, but Margaret verily doubts that they would kick out the son of the wealthiest, most influential patron to this event, rules or no. Such things aren't done, not by those that like to avoid scolding by their superiors.

"Who? Dad?"

Margaret nods, biting her lower, plump, stained mouth.

"Shit," she mutters, leaning towards the vanity and daintily plucking a q-tip from a jeweled cup and using it to swipe at the pink lipstick now on the bottom of her two front teeth because of her nervous habit.

"Did you call him?" he asks, adjusting his tie in the mirror, smoothing his copper, mussed hair (he smells vaguely of smoke, so he was probably outside, and the weather is dependent on the Santa Ana winds this week, the gusts not kind to the already default unkempt Tudor curls) with a single hand (*vain as ever, Margaret thinks, with only the mildest of judgments-- she's plenty vain herself, after all, and knows it).
"Of course I did. He's not answering. He promised he'd be here, he went to rehearsal with me and everything, I don't understand--"

"And his promises mean less and less these days," Henry interrupts smoothly, if cruelly, "don't get your hopes up for him anymore, Mar, you're only setting yourself up for disappointment--"

And with this, she bursts into a wave of tears, hiccupping, gasping, water clinging to her false lashes with determined grip (the adhesive glue for it is strong, probably dangerous, but such things are risked in the name of beauty, especially at coming-out debuts…so said her makeup artist, in any event).

"Oh, hey," he says, softly, kneeling down to her, "fuck, I'm sorry…just…oh, c'mon. It's not that bad, is it?" Henry asks, reaching for the box of tissues on the vanity and passing them over to her.

"I don't have an escort for the father-daughter debut entrance, so…yes, it is! I'm going to have to wait till next year, I can't believe this--"

"I'll be your escort," Henry says, quickly, squeezing one of her hands, "alright?"

"It's supposed to be your dad, though," she whines, "it's embarrassing--"

"Are you saying I'm embarrassing?" he asks, with an exaggerated, affronted gasp, putting one hand to his chest. Margaret giggles and says, "Yes!"

"You definitely are," purrs a voice with a lilting quality, Scottish accent strong and prominent.

Henry pulls his gaze from his younger sister to the smirking face of James Stuart, standing behind them, head tilted to the side, green eyes alight with mirth.

"You're not supposed to be here," Henry says, coolly, before standing up and winding a loose curl of Margaret's, taking a bobby pin that she hands him, and sliding it in.

"Neither are you. And you're a pretty sorry replacement for your father, wouldn't you say?" James taunts.

Margaret watches their rivalry play out in the mirror with interest. She doesn't know the cause of it, but she worries it may escalate out of control. With Arthur no longer there to pull Henry back, calm him with a reassuring hold on his shoulder; with their mother long gone, no longer a figure he'd want to impress with any gentleness, Henry's temper tantrums flair and he goes straight to the jugular in all arguments, with little regard for any potential consequences.

"Shut up, Stuart," Henry replies, clipped, he moves to the left of her and takes her pearl necklace, looping it carefully around her neck and clasping the back of it, "you're so fucking unnecessary, I swear…"

"What's your problem?" James scoffs, a strange reply, Margaret thinks, given that he's the one that confronted her brother first, but boys are strange and she doesn't pretend to understand them.

"My problem," Henry spits out, spinning around to face him, "is that Katherine beat you in that fencing match and you've been bitter and standoffish to her ever since. You suck. It's fine. Some people have to suck, y'know? So people that are good at things have something to measure themselves against. Let it go, though."

"Please, as if I care about that--"
"As if you don't," Henry says, stepping closer to the older boy, "why else would you be on my ass all the time?"

"Oh, you just make it easy to be," James says with a face-splitting grin, dimples appearing in both freckled cheeks, "you're just so lame."

"Am I? Huh. That's not what your girlfriend said when I fingered her at your piano recital last year," Henry says casually, with a shrug, and the head of Marianne Boyd, pinning sparkly flower barrettes into her younger cousin's hair, snaps up, cheeks a dull red.

"You're so full of sh--"

"She was wearing that marvelous dress with the slit up the side, if you recall," Henry says, droll, tapping his index up his chin, "we were in the Imperial balcony, sitting in the back…shame, really, that you're the one with all the training," Henry pauses to simper, as James' face becomes a darker shade of red with each word, and Henry lifts his left hand, wiggling his fingers, tauntingly, "but that my hands are still the best at playing concertos...according to her," he continues with a nod towards Marianne, "anyway."

Marianne glares at him, and Henry calls out, "What, you thought I'd keep that a secret? You should've thought of that before you lied and told Matilda Navarre I had an STD."

James launches himself at him, but Henry must anticipate this even as he looks at James' girlfriend, because he blocks him with his arm quite easily, then yanks an arm around his neck, flips him, and holds him close, James' middling height no match for his six feet.

"Careful," Henry whispers, his expression so tranquil it verges on boredom. Margaret can make it out despite the sotto voce; she cranes her neck to hear, even with the murmurs of titillation that now surround them at this occurrence. The older women are gone (perhaps they've left to get assistance, brawls may happen after the debutante ball but before it guarantees chaos), "my father might not be here, but…he has more lawyers at his disposal than you have brain cells at yours."

And with that warning, Henry releases him from his grip. James pushes at his chest, once, to Henry's heavy-lidded amusement, before storming out of the prep room.

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2014

Margaret loops her arm with her brother's, standing at her place on the stairwell in the procession. He smells of smoke and Irish Spring soap, the usual, and is much taller than she is (the usual, though this height discrepancy is slightly alleviated, at the moment, by the presence of the white Valentino heels on her tiny feet) and she whispers, "What if I trip?"

"You're ballet trained. If you can plié across a stage, I think you can manage to walk down a flight of stairs," he whispers back, the violins swelling in the background, marking the intro to start off their descent into the ballroom.

"But what if I do?" she asks, eyes wide as saucers, suddenly terrified of the prospect.

"Then you'll still be the prettiest girl here," he reassures, patting her on the arm, and she beams and glows at the praise, "but you won't. I've got you."
so this marks a milestone! 40 chapters and 140,000 words. this story has 20 subscriptions and i’m honestly so awed and honored that that many people want to be emailed with each chapter update!

thank you for all your comments and kudos, they mean a lot. ♥ ♥ ♥

something lovely that a friend made me on tumblr, if you like visuals for stories:

"Tudor women," he mutters, as a cab driver lays on the horn when he tries to pass, "will be the fucking death of me, I swear to God…"

Apartment of Elizabeth Woodville, December 20, 2016, Tuesday

It's not yet seven in the morning. A time for quiet conversations and yawns reminiscent of high school students that walk up the steps of busses, dragging their weary feet. Mornings lit with a soft, undemanding glow. The beginnings that hint at the rest of the day.

Students aren't dragging their weary feet this morning, though, given that it's winter break. The majority of them are probably snuggled in their beds, sleeping deeply and peacefully.

Henry Tudor, however, is not. Much to his chagrin, Margaret decided five in the morning was a perfectly acceptable time to blast Ellie Goulding (or what the fuck ever), but truth be told he wasn't sleeping that well before that occurred, anyway.

Was he? He can't remember when he sleeps, or when he doesn't. Often he wakes up exhausted, feeling as if he hasn't slept for longer than ten minutes, even if he knows the vague stretch of time from when he can last remember lying down in his bed to when he wakes up was probably closer to ten hours.

And if he hasn't been sleeping, what has he been doing?

It'd be unsettling, if he paid it any mind, really.

Henry used to have an indifferent relationship to sleep. He never thought about it; it just happened. He slept when he was tired and woke up when he had to. The time from when sleep became an elusive, abstract concept to him, the time from when dreams weighed heavy yet unremembered, details seeping in randomly throughout his day (at the most bizarre of times, truly), can be drawn in a straight line back to October 31.

The night when he met…

Anyways.

His grandmother, evidently, slept through the music or has stayed in her room, in any case.

So, he's very much awake, and standing over the table, head tilted to the side, staring at the Scrabble board.

The words feel familiar, in a strange way. Significant, though he can't remember why.

The feeling he has is akin to the one gets when they walk in a grocery store, grab some food, and
know they're forgetting whatever it was they walked in there for in the first place (but can't recall what), only…more intense than that, perhaps?

Majesty…Lady…Fate…Destiny…Now…Awoken.

Destiny, now awoken.

Then he hears someone rummaging around in the kitchen, the sound of water pouring from the sink, and shakes his head. The phrase dissipates like air, and he shrugs, mind blank to whatever may have been there before, and he walks away from the board with the square tiles of words still on it and into the kitchen.

Tudor town car, December 20, 2016, Tuesday, 9:05 AM

Their goodbye to their grandmother had been quick, to make up for their lingering and eventual sleepover of last night. Breakfast was scones and tea, and while Henry was still putting on his coat and Margaret was using the bathroom, Elizabeth had pulled him aside by the neck of it.

"Grand-mere, what--"

"Has Margaret done anything…impulsive, lately?" she'd asked, eyes darting to the hallway, as if watching for her reappearance.

"There was the random shopping spree, sure," Henry drawled, feeling slightly miffed at her hand around his collar, her fingers cold against his neck (elderly people are always cold, he thought as an aside, it's like, a thing, for some reason), "but what do you mean--"

"Anything else? Anything at all? Really think, Henry, it's important," she said, with an easy smile that did not match the urgency of her tone.

"She took the test for a GED, I guess I thought that was kind of weird, but--"

"Ask her why."

"What?"

"Ask her why she," and then, she had released her grip on the collar of his jacket, started to brush some imaginary lint off the front with the palm of her hand, whispered, quickly, "trust me, please? Trust me. Ask."

And then Margaret had walked over to them to grab her own coat, the questioning of the impulse/trust me track had been abandoned by his grandmother so swiftly he wondered if it had really happened at all.

But Margaret's arms are crossed, and she is looking out the tinted window of the back of their father's town car, and Henry knows it happened.

Everything's been happening and nobody's been explaining, and he's tired of it, and he doesn't know why his grandmother asked him to ask her, but he's going to, anyway.

"Mar?"

"Hal?" she mimics, scornfully (neither diminutive has been used by either brother or sister for quite some time, and Margaret is hazarding a guess that his usage of it means he wants something or
other), hand gripping the end of the leather seat so tightly that her knuckles whiten.

"Why did you…why'd you apply for a GED?"

It's not what she's expecting, at all.

No one ever asks her why she does the things she does, all they ever focus on is the fact that she did them. And how to fix it.

The town car moves at a glacial pace, traffic is almost at a stand-still, and she's been wondering if there's something to the New Yorker tradition of subways. She's never been in one, her father is deathly paranoid of germs and her older brother is, too.

She pulls her gaze from the window, the view of the rows and rows of traffic, the snow dusting the hoods of the cars, pedestrians bundled up in coats, pushing past each other on the sidewalks, and looks at Henry.

His hair, longer than it usually is (she sees him every summer and he keeps it closely cropped, probably due to the heat, or perhaps so that it doesn’t hang in his eyes during athletic pursuits) and reddish, curls tucked behind those elfish ears, the generous, wide mouth her girlfriends stare at every summer at the Tudor residence (with no self-consciousness whatsoever—girls seem to never have any shame when it comes to her brother, so Margaret supposes he's handsome, though all she ever sees is annoying) twisted into some consternation that implies concern rather than a smirk.

His eyes, the tranquil grey blue of rain falling over a partially cloudy sky, are kind upon hers, but rather than putting her at ease, they put her on edge. She doesn't like kindness, it is harder for her to handle than dislike or disdain, more breakable than either of those things, so her own eyes fill with tears.

"What do you mean?" she asks, flatly, blinking them back, making an attempt to swallow them down.

"I mean, why did you do that?"

Margaret leans her head against the window, stares at the glass privacy screen, her own reflection.

"God," he says, gently, "you look exhausted, Mar."

There it is again, she thinks, and snaps, reflexively, "Well, you look like shit, too."

"I didn't say you--"

"You have dark circles under your eyes," she remarks, sliding her thumb over her knuckles, still, peering at her reflection in the dark glass.

Margaret watches Henry's reflection in the glass now and sees him touch the skin under his eyes delicately, with his forefinger and middle one, and snorts.

She expects him to let it go at that, like last night, but he presses through her defensiveness and scorn, instead, and she's colored with shock that he does:

"Why did you do sign up for it?"

Why is a heavy question, and it weights heavy on her brow, she closes her eyes against it.

What's more shocking than the truth, though? Maybe that'll make him leave her alone.
"I don't know," she says, tugging on the bottom of her skirt, crossing her legs, "in case something happened, I guess. And I couldn't graduate. To have it. Just in case."

"Just in case what?"

"I don't know, Henry! I had just gotten expelled, if you remember--"

"I remember, but--"

"In case I had to drop out? In case I didn't feel like going to school anymore?"

"Why would you drop out--"

"I don't know," Margaret says, again, listlessly, the lie burning the tips of her ears (she does, she does know) as she examines her cuticle bed, then, mutters, "if I got pregnant, or something."

"How would you-- what? How would you get--"

"The usual way," she says, swiveling towards him, finally, smirking at his shocked expression, his mouth agape.

"Please…" Henry trails off, pinches the bridge of his nose, and sighs.

It feels like there's no air in the car, suddenly, he cracks the window even though it's literally snowing outside, a typically cold December day in New York. He feels woozy, inhales, deeply, then exhales before saying:

"Please tell me," he clears his throat, fingers pressed against his right temple, "please tell me you're not having sex."

"Okay," she says, deadpan, "I'm 'not having sex'."

"Jesus!"

"Relax, like…who cares?"

"I care. You're way too young to--"

"And, what? You waited until the tender age of twenty?" she teases, staring at his neck with raised brows, which he feels getting warmer by the second…it's flushed, probably, if the heat is any indication.

"I don't-- we're not talking about me," Henry snaps, clearly flustered, tugging at his hair, "are you at least…being careful? Did someone…talk to you, about--"

"'The Talk'? Who, Dad? He would rather die. I would rather die. I'm sure Mom would've, but, you know…she died."

"Well, I don't--"

"Then don't. And don't give me any bullshit about my virginity being a sacred fucking vessel--"

"Margaret, stop--"
"Or something, because first of all, that ship sailed a while ago--"

"A 'while ago'?!!"

"Second of all, it's not like you'd care if I wasn't a girl--"

"That's not true, I care because you're my sister and you're too young--"

"And, like, I know you have sex, so stop being a hypocrite and stop asking if I'm 'careful' because honestly? I doubt you are."

"You said you're worried you might get pregnant, so of course I need to know if you're being careful, that doesn't sound like you're being--"

"I'm not 'worried', I just know it's possible, like many things are possible, and I want to be--"

"Margaret!"

"What?!"

"First of all: I'm an adult. It's not the same, so no, I'm not being a hypocrite. Especially because I am careful. Exceedingly so," Henry says, crossing his arms.

"How? How are you careful?"

"I…"

Henry trails off, then bangs his head on the side of the window, drawing his hand over his face and groaning.

"I don't want to talk about this with you," he says, closing his eyes wearily, as if he's in pain, "I really…"

"Good. Neither do I. Glad that's settled," she huffs, taking her phone out of her pocket and swiping it to the right, only to see it vanish before her eyes.

"Hey!" she snaps, "Henry, give it back--"

"I'm not usually in the habit," he says, smoothly, moving her phone to the inside pocket of his jacket, "of having the kind of sex that gets you pregnant."

"Because…you're…gay?"

"What? No!"

"Then how…oh. Oral?"

Henry nods, once, looking straight ahead, must see her hand coming from his peripheral vision because he blocks it almost immediately when she tries to reclaim her phone.

"But not 'usually'?” Margaret asks, using air quotes and tilting her head to the side, auburn curls tumbling over her shoulder as she smirks, delighted as she watches him squirm, his arms crowding the window, away from her.

"Not…always. But usually, yes."
"What's your exception?"

"If I or she have a condom and she's on the pill. Only if it's both, and sometimes I still…won't."

"I see. Well, sounds like you're paranoid, not that that's a surprise--"

"Do you use protection?"

"Yeah, sometimes."

"'Sometimes'?"

"I mean, if there's not a condom there's always the pull-out, it's effective enough--"

"Effective enough?" he says, voice imbued with cold fury, brow knitted together, and she's frightened by it until she's realized it's not directed at her, "who told you--"

"Ugh, none of your business, stop--"

"Siri," he says, now talking into this own phone, "what's the minimum sentence for manslaughter in the--"

"Why the fuck are you asking--"

"Because I'm going to kill whatever asshole told you that. Because the effectiveness rate of the…pull….out," Henry continues, rolling each syllable and enunciating slowly, carefully, like a foreigner might, hand tight over his phone, jaw clenched, "is something like 60%."

"No, not if you do it correct--"

"Sixty. Percent. That's a fucking 'D-' grade birth control method, not to mention that it doesn't prevent STI's…fuck…are you on the pill, at least?"

"No, it's too expensive."

"Excuse me?!"

"Well, it's not like I can get it with Dad's health insurance. He'd see it. And the retail price is really expensive…"

"So?"

Margaret shrugs.

"I'd rather spend my money on more important things."

"Like what? Clothes?" he asks with cool condescension, widening his eyes.

Something shifts, then, Henry feels it like a changing current. It was the wrong thing to say, impulsive, a knee-jerk reaction to her words. Her eyes, flashing before, go flat, every contracted muscle in her face goes slack.

"Fuck," she says, tonelessly, as she clicks her seatbelt open, "you."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that, but it's…"
But Margaret has already unlocked the back door, and he watches in utter disbelief as she pulls on the handle. He asks her to stop, wait, lunges for her so that he can pull her from leaving. But Margaret moves too quickly for him, has already closed the door behind her by the time he makes it over to her seat; his feet scuffing against the rubber pad against the floor of the car had slowed him down.

"Goddamn it…"

He jams on the button for the screen divider, barks at the driver that he's going to get her and to wait for him to text him an address.

"Mr. Tudor has said I'm not to let either of you out of my sight without his permission--"

"Well, it's a little fucking late for that, isn't it? In case you haven't noticed," he seethes, yanking the same door she exited out of open and following her through the cars, varying from inching forward to still, "Margaret! Get back here--"

"No!" she shouts, and cars are starting to honk at them, he shouts apologies as he weaves through them, he'd run after her if he wasn't in danger of being bumped, somehow she's managing to go faster than him.

"Tudor women," he mutters, as a cab driver lays on the horn when he tries to pass, "will be the fucking death of me, I swear to God…"

"You left!" he hears her shout.

"What do you mean I--"

"You left the fucking state!" she shouts, whirling around to face him, walking backwards now, hands in the pocket of her coat, "And you didn't tell anyone, how could you do that--"

"I told Esperanza, I thought she passed along the--"

"Oh, you told the help, did you?" she yells, still scornful, "well, you didn't tell me--"

"The 'help'? She practically raised us…after… you're better than--"

"You know who you fucking sound like?"

"I'm sorry if--"

"DAD!"

"HEY!" Henry screams, flipping off a driver on the way down the street (who flipped him off first, so, really, it's justified), "don't ever--"

"Just pass along the fucking message, just shoot a fucking email, who cares about letting--"

"Don’t ever say that! I am nothing like--"

"Stop acting like him and maybe I will!"

Snow gets in his eyes, melts on his eyelashes and he tries to brush it off once he's finally made his way to the sidewalk where she stands. Margaret's arms are crossed as she leans against the brick divider between the window of a bodega and a Chinese restaurant.
"What," he pants, unwinding the scarf from his neck, the nerves that ensued from the worry of her getting hit by someone on her storm out and the attempted quick pace to grab her have covered him in a sheen of sweat, despite the cold, "the fuck, Mar, you could've been hurt--"

"I hate you!" Margaret screams, holding her temples with both hands, and he startles, feels the stares of passer-by as she breaks down into sobs.

"Well," Henry says, softly, putting a hand on her shoulder and pulling her close as she continues to cry, big, shuddering, sobs; he kisses the top of her head and says, "that's just too fucking bad, then, because I love you."

And so they are huddled, against the brick of the wall, as she stutters, "you left, you left and didn't say anything, why would you--"

"I'm sorry, I didn't think you'd--"

"You know what happened the last time my brother left without saying anything he was leaving," Margaret says, "you know, you were there."

Of course he remembers. That day in 2011, when they were both on spring break, returning home, when they shared a taxi from the airport and arrived at the Tudor mansion. The day when Henry asked where Arthur was, casually, in the living room, puzzled by the way Esperanza had cleared her throat and left abruptly, muttering something about making them something to eat.

I don't know, his father had answered with a shrug, not looking up from his computer.

Oh, Henry had said, well, is he not home, or--

I don't even know if he's in the city, his father had replied, as his assistant stood behind him and helped him into his jacket.

That's not funny, Henry had said, confused, felt Margaret's concerned gaze, heard the way she dropped her suitcase to the floor with a thud as if it was a sound from very, very far away.

I agree, his father had said.

"I'm…sorry, I didn't…here, let's sit," Henry says, and he leads to her to a bench in front of the bodega. They sit, and he puts an arm around her shoulder as she sniffles.

The owner comes out as he's rubbing circles on her back, tells them it's for customers only. Henry nods, slips a ten dollar bill out of his pocket and asks for coffee if they have it, to keep the change.

The owner takes it and apologizes 'in advance' for the waiting time, explains that they're busy.

And yet you weren't too 'busy' to bitch at us about your bench, Henry thinks as he smiles and nods at the older man before he heads back inside.

Henry notes the address of the bodega and shoots a quick text to the driver, types in shorthand that there's parallel parking in front of it but that's it full, that he might have to circle around a few times.

"You were there for me, you know? When he was mad? But you're going to leave," Margaret says, voice small, her head resting against his shoulder, "I don't want to lose both my brothers, but you're going to--"

"I'm not going to leave," Henry says, placing a gloved hand over hers.
"You are. You're going to do something to make him mad, and you're going to--"

"I'm not."

"You're different. Even Grand-mere noticed it."

"She's into her own mystic fairy tale, she likes to play wise, you know she can't see 'colors' any more than we can see fairies, Mar, c'mon--"

"No, she was right. Something's changed. And it makes me think you're going to piss him off. And he'll make you, he'll make you leave. I don't think Arthur wanted to...I hope he didn't. I think he made--"

"I'm not going to--"

"Why did you leave, then? Where did you go?" she asks, challenging, lifting her head from his shoulder. Margaret faces him, meets his eyes (the eyes that reflect her own, her own color, and her mother's) in a stare that lasts even when the owner comes out and hands them two styrofoam cups. Still, her stare does not waver, penetrating through the steam that curls from their hot drinks into the frosty air, in between the two of them.

"It doesn't matter," he answers, when the man leaves.

"That means it does. Were you visiting someone?"

Henry ducks his head, peers into his cup, cheeks reddening beyond what's average for this chill.

"A girl?"

"You know I see other girls," he says, dismissively, taking a sip and wincing, "so does Katherine. It's not a big deal."

"It's different."

"It's not--"

"I know you see other girls. You don't go out of your way for them, though."

Henry grimaces, hands her a pack of tissues from his pocket without looking at her, even peripherally.

Margaret takes it, pulls one out, and unfolds it, carefully, on her lap.

"You're going to be gone," she says, plaintively, feels her chest tighten again.

"Margaret," he says, desperate that she believes his reassurance, "I'm not--"

"Promise me, then."

"What?"

"Promise me," she says, and tears slip and fall onto her cheeks, already dotted with red from before, "that you'll just do what he asks. That you won't-- oh my God, I don't want to be left again! I don't know if I'll be able to take it, I really--"
"Margaret, nothing's--"

"Promise," she says, again, firmly, blowing her nose with the tissue, "please, Henry, I know you never break a promise, please, please--" 

"Okay," Henry says, swallowing, he sets his coffee down next to the bench and holds her as her shoulders take, "shhh, okay, alright--"

"Promise you won't do anything to make him mad, promise you'll just do what he says, please, I don't want it to happen again--"

"I promise," he says, quietly, feeling her tears, damp against his neck, a heavy feeling settling in his chest (as heavy as the weight of what he knows that promise entails), "okay? I promise I won't."

---

From: The Sir Bastard

To: Henry Tudor

Sent December 20, 2016, 10:05 AM

I need to speak to you as soon as you are able. I'll be back tonight around 6.

---

Chapter End Notes

"sir bastard" is what Henry saved his dad as in his contacts, in case that was not clear

thank you for 27 subscriptions to this story! sorry it was so long in between updates. just school, work, and mental illness stuff kicking my ass as per usual, but this last month i've had a harder time dealing with all those things

but yeah, i appreciate all my readers so much! so thank you for sticking around with this story, and i hope you enjoy/stay for the rest ♥
kingdoms are but cares

Chapter Summary

He should remember (if he cares to remember) the temper tantrum that resulted when he read his paternal grandmother's baby book and saw that she had written Henry's birth year down incorrectly (and, to add insult to injury, Arthur's entry had been exquisitely detailed besides accurate, whereas Henry's was...sparse, to say the least).

Chapter Notes

the link in the text is just a song i listened to writing that scene that i thought was very fitting to it

the poem quoted is said to have been by henry vi of england.

for clarity's sake, in present day scenes with both henry and his father, henry tudor the i is referred to as "Tudor", and henry is Henry. When Henry is younger in flashback scenes, his father is referred to as "Henry" and he's referred to as "Hal", given that that was his childhood nickname.

december 2008 was two months before elizabeth york's passing, for reference to the scene that takes place there.

"i don't know a henry tudor"-- credit for this quote and kudos to her for saying i could use it go to the wonderful annie, elizabethschvylers on tumblr, laurelcastillos (read her fics, ya'll) here. thank you so much!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 20, 2016, 10:50 PM

Henry knows he can't put off talking to his father anymore. He'd killed time in every way he thought of already. He had gone on a long run, played about a hundred matches of table tennis against Marina and Elizabeth, Margaret as his partner. After that, he went to the gym and swam a few laps, sat in an empty weight room and ended up writing a letter he figures he'll never send.

Once the letter was folded up and placed in his duffel bag, he sat with his back against the mirror in the weight room. He received a text from Brandon, which he ignored. He typed out a message to Anne, and erased it.

Typed out a message to Katherine, and erased it.

Typed out a message to Brandon, and erased it.

Then, he had delved into true masochism and gone to his voicemail box and scrolled to the bottom, to one from 2011 that he still hasn't deleted. Henry pressed play and put it to his ear:

Um…I hope London is treating you well. The rain takes some getting used to after Los Angeles, I remember…well, Wales was rainy, too, so in that way I-- it's similar.

This is your brother, by the way. Call me back, you little shit…or text me back, at least. I hope you're studying and…I'm sure this thing will cut me off soon, so good night?
Morning, whatever it is there, and I love you. Bye.

He's since showered and dressed in clean clothes, so Henry supposes he's as ready as he'll ever be.

---

December 20, 2016, 11:01 PM

"I'm here."

Henry leans against the doorway to his father's study. It's smaller than the one at the Tudor mansion of Los Angeles, although sizeable, still, of course. A screen covers an entire wall, some new technology not yet released to the public, a giant touch screen, remote-controlled as well. On it now is a desktop background of a river with a bridge over it, trees surrounding it, with a castle in the background. The sky in the photo is a murky grey, and he realizes it's not a still. The clouds are moving, so slowly and subtly that it would take careful attention to detail to notice.

His father sits in his armchair, glances up at his son through spectacles, his hands templed under his chin, and nods, gestures to the empty seat across from him. The seat is a chair with a wide-set back, arms curled elaborately, swirls of gold around the wood. **It's so intricate and regal-looking that it almost puts Henry in mind of a throne.**

He settles himself in it, cautiously, lies his hands flat against the table.

"Drink?" Tudor asks, sotto voce, nodding towards the tumbler glass set out at the place across from his own seat.

Henry shrugs, grabs the glass, filled with cubes of ice and coke, and is about to sip when he almost chokes, coughs, overpowered by the potent smell and strength of it.

"This has alcohol," he says, the words sound dumb even to his own ears, but he sets it back down on the furnished oak, "I think this one was meant for you…"

Tudor shakes his head.

"But it has…alcohol," he repeats, slowly, emphatically, as if explaining this to a child.

"So?" Tudor asks, tilting his head to the side and squinting his eyes.

"So…I'm underage."

This feels…odd. It feels like a test of some sort, he recalls Thomas Boleyn's offer of a beer; but that had, at least, more clearly been one.

This feels like a grey area, murky as his father's eyes, obfuscated by the glasses.

"It doesn't matter in the UK," Tudor says, wrinkling his nose before rubbing it once, "I know you went to enough pubs in boarding school to remember that."
"Right, but...we're in New York."

"You're at home. I'm allowing it. Does it matter?"

Henry winces, unsure of how to answer, and then notices the tremor in his father's hand before he puts it back under the table. And the glass to the left of his own elbow, resting against what looks like a large day or calendar planner, possibly a record book.

"What is it?" he asks, coolly, regarding the glass.

"Rum and coke. Isn't that what teenagers are drinking these days?"

"I'm twenty."

"Oh...right. I always forget you took that gap year."

Ah, yes. The gap year his father had suggested himself, a way to 'let off steam and have some freedom before you propose', that he had 'known with certainty' that Katherine would say yes. Henry had been amenable, certainly, four years of boarding school had been rigorous and demanding and he felt he was due for a break himself, that he had earned one.

It was too much time for reflection, though. He had felt fake, missing out on the experience of hostels because he knew the conditions weren’t clean. Henry's companions during the year (which was not really a year, more a summer spent with Katherine in the states followed by the guest-house hopping throughout Europe during autumn and winter, followed by a preparation back home for university and being employed, shadowing his father at Red Dragon) were Nick Carew and Bryan Francis. The former was a boarding school classmate he had known since childhood, a family friend, set for a career as a professional athlete already, he was studying and training abroad with brief breaks. The latter was someone that had been notorious for debauchery and promiscuity since his teen years, frowned upon by the upper echelons of society that the Tudors circulated but still a permanent fixture within them.

Henry narrows his eyes. He honestly can't tell if his father seriously forgot his age or if he's fucking with him. He should remember (if he cares to remember) the temper tantrum that resulted when he read his paternal grandmother's baby book and saw that she had written Henry's birth year down incorrectly (and, to add insult to injury, Arthur's entry had been exquisitely detailed besides accurate, whereas Henry's was...sparse, to say the least).

According to Arthur's retelling, it was one of "epic proportions."

Tudor doesn't ask him to drink again, nor does he touch his own glass. As they sit in the uncomfortable stillness of the ensuing silence, Henry's gaze trails over the gas fireplace behind his father's seat, the portrait of his paternal grandmother and father on the cream colored wall.

Henry examines his father. In his memories he's a vibrant figure, someone who was always full of energy, though he always managed to rein it in (something Henry himself has always struggled with), keeping just enough on the surface for his magnetism (it's the strangest thing...journalists have described him as pragmatic, and magnetic, too, but never charismatic). His expression was stressed more often than it was relaxed, sure, but he never looked weary, tired at most.

In the present, the creases on his face are prominent, the lines on his forehead, obvious; his hairline (at least he hasn't opted for a hair piece, unlike some of his contemporaries, he's had to dignity to avoid that) recedes, his hair itself is now exceptionally thin rather than exceptionally thick. The silver hairs outnumber the black ones, and, well...he looks weary as hell.
He looks like 'tired' would be a relief to his present state; an improvement if anything.

When Henry was a child, his father's appearance was admired: his full head of thick, dark hair, the authority he commanded despite his middling height, the sharp edges of his features combined with the light blue of his eyes caused people to describe him as "ruggedly handsome" ('rugged' is, Henry thinks, really just a euphemism for 'rough'). But he aged, rapidly, after his wife's death.

Henry remembers a line from an article about his parents' marriage that he had tried to erase from his mind: "The heiress, Elizabeth York has had what appears to be a revitalizing effect on the previously reticent sobriety of Henry Tudor, a decade her senior. He seems not only enchanted with but invigorated by the youth and beauty of his teenage bride."

There was the sexual implication to that, of course, that had disgusted him, but Henry's disgust at the words ran deeper than that. Reading it had caused him to throw the old magazine, picked up in a doctor's waiting room, into the trash bin with such force and anger that it had startled the other occupants. The idea, the audacity to say that she had "revitalized" or "invigorated" him.... as if she were a vessel, and not a person. As if she was electro-shock therapy, a fucking Viagra pill, rather than a human being. As if it were any woman's responsibility to revitalize some older man; husband or no.

His father closes his eyes, his hand strays towards his glass but then he pulls it away, sets his mouth in a firm line. He opens his eyes and stares, blankly, over Henry's shoulder.

Henry is struck, sharply, with the reason Tudor made him an alcoholic drink. He recognizes the cause of the elder man's discomfort, and it's unsettling enough that his throat starts to feel raw, his mouth tastes of pennies, and he blinks back tears:

He doesn't want to drink alone.

Henry clenches a fist next to the side of his leg, looks away from his father and around the room for a distraction, and finds one:

A poem is written in calligraphy, painted, directly on the wall. Henry's never noticed it before, but then he hasn't been in this room many times. It's main use is solitary, or with business associates.

Kingdoms are but cares,
State is devoid of stay,
Riches are ready snares,
And hasten to decay.
Pleasure is a privy prick
Which vice doth still provoke;
Pomp, imprompt; and fame, a flame;
Power, a smoldering smoke,
Who meaneth to remove the rock
Out of the slimy mud,
Shall mire himself, and hardly 'scape
The swelling of the flood.

"Who's this by?" Henry asks, nodding to it.

Tudor grimaces, turns slightly in his chair, then settles back into it, sitting straight.

"It was written by a king who lost his kingdom. He wrote it when he was imprisoned," he answers, pushing a ringed hand over the leather-bound book on his desk, tapping his fingers against it.
"Isn't that...depressing?"

Tudor raises a single thick eyebrow, intertwined with silver threads among the darkness, matching the patchiness of his receding head of hair.

"It's a reminder," Tudor says.

"Of what?"

"That kingdoms can be lost. That those in history that were failures have a lot more to teach us than the victors do."

"Isn't it important to see how people won?"

"That can be either cunning or simply luck...you have to avoid losing whilst also reaching for victory. It's a tricky balance, Henry," he says, wringing his hands, "do you know how people lose?"

"By carelessness, I suppose."

"I'm glad you know that. I figured you did, after what you...did."

Fuck, Henry thinks, irritably, what is it now?

His father gets up from his chair, slowly, carefully, and picks up his drink. Glass in hand, he walks to the wall with the poem inscribed upon it, and faces it.

"Come here," he says, and Henry gets up from his own chair, reluctantly, walks over to where he stands.

Scans the poem again, crosses his own arms, defensive to what he expects is coming.

The way they're standing, he can see Tudor's profile out of the corner of his eye. Henry hates it, utterly, because it is utterly his.

Yesterday, his grandmother had said he was "lucky to get his mother's looks". He has them in every respect except the one: his large nose, distinctively his father's in both shape and size. Wide-set and Grecian, it is the one feature he has any insecurity over. He refuses to take any pictures that feature his profile, always makes sure the angle of the shot minimizes it.

"You told me I was wrong," Tudor begins, eyes roaming over the words on the wall, he drinks from his glass, deeply, draining half of it.

"With Margaret, yesterday," he continues, clarifying, "you told me I'd been wrong. You stood against me. It takes a lot of bravery to do that...that, or stupidity. They're often closely linked."

Well, there's that.

Henry walks away, back to the desk, because he has an inkling he's going to want the rum and coke for whatever's coming next.

"And the fact that you did, makes me think, more than ever..."

He drinks, the combination of the cold and rum numbing his mouth, bracing himself for the usual. Henry anticipates the plug, the way he'll be ending that sentence, with some phrases he's heard uttered before: about how massively disappointing you are, of the potential you waste...
"...that you have what it takes to run Red Dragon. That you have what it takes to inherit."

"What?" Henry asks, tongue feeling heavy in his mouth.

"You handled it very well," he continues, as if Henry had not spoken, swirling the remnants of his drink in hand, "you solved the problem. It was a small one, in the scheme of things, and it's possible I overreacted. But it makes me confident of your ability to handle bigger ones."

"'Bigger'--"

"You've never met a problem you couldn't solve, and you know guilt is a losing game-- Arthur didn't have that," he says, definitively, tonelessly, and the glass almost slips from Henry's hand at the casual mention, luckily he catches it and puts it back down on the table.

"I thought he did," Tudor says, hoarsely, shifting the portrait with his free hand, "but I was wrong. You have no idea how much I had to beg to get him to testify, no idea what I had to promise …"

"What does that mean--"

"It doesn't matter," Tudor says, quickly, turning around, he sets his glass down on the table on a spot by his armchair and walks over to where his son stands.

He's close enough to him that Henry can make out the fingerprint smudges on his glasses, and he takes one of Henry's hands in his own (it's freezing, is what he thinks first, that erodes the shock of the gesture, somehow).

"It's in the past. You are the future."

"I don't understand…sir," he finishes, carefully.

"I know you won't let me down. There will always be Warbecks, and I think, for the inevitable next one…you'll be able to handle it. As you handled this, so well."

"I didn't…I just wanted to help her."

"And you did! And you've displayed acumen besides," he says, briskly, withdrawing his hand, "in regards to your party…to pay the artists in exclusivity contracts and free advertising rather than liquid money…was brilliant."

"That was your idea," Henry says, slowly, still simultaneously confused and startled by the praise.

"Partly, but your idea to tie it in to the theme of your party…to hire musicians derided as has-beens, inferring they want exposure…that hunch was correct. And it'll popularize us, given that this irritating 'throwback nostalgia' track has become so pervasive, thanks to…"

Tudor trails off, suddenly looks into the distance, mouth twisting in irritation, looking like he accidentally ate something sour.

 Fucking hipsters.

"Fucking hipsters."

 There it is.

"In any case," Tudor continues, reestablishing eye contact with his son, "that was all you. And it was very good. I appreciate it, the sacrifice. I'm sure you would've rather employed someone edgy,
popular with your age group, like last year, that your friends would've liked...'Haley' or something."

"That's not...who? Hailee Steinfeld? She's not really 'edgy', but--"

"No, no, not her, I don't know, her name's an anagram or some such...I don't understand the appeal myself, but Margaret seems to like her quite a bit."

"Halsey?" Henry asks, incredulously.

"Ah, yes. That one."

"It's...fine, sir, I think it'll be a success anyway--"

"I'm sure it will be. Oh, and before I forget, I have something for you," Tudor says, clapping his hands together, he circles around the desk and opens the large leather book, flipping to the front. There's pocket in the front, and he slides an envelope out of it, holds it out to Henry, who takes it with a bow of his head.

"Open it...please."

Henry does (easily, it's not even sealed), pulling out a rectangular piece of paper. It's a check, signed by his father, and the amount written causes his breath to catch in his throat.

"That's...a lot of zero's," Henry croaks, flipping it over and back in incredulity.

"Well, it's certainly more than a drop in the bucket...although I think you and I both know it's not much more than a splash, for us. I detest those who pretend otherwise..."

"Who? Who do you--"

"Bill Gates, of course," Tudor scoffs, rolling his eyes, "all that pretension...'oh, I make my kids unload the dishwasher so they don't get spoiled...' as if such a thing makes a difference when your father's a billionaire, of all the stupid...don't even get me started."

"I won't," Henry says, discovering another piece of paper, this one bigger, he pulls that out of the envelope, too, "but--"

"He drank shit-water, for God's sake, like, what exactly is he trying to prove with that--"

"Dad," he says, laughing, suddenly, in bursts, the familiar phrase falling from his lips before he can process it, almost wheezing, "what the fuck, are you even--"

"Well, he did," Tudor says, broad shoulders now shaking with laughter, too, "there's a video of it and everything--"

"I think," Henry says, gasping, tears leaking from his eyes, "that it was purified, from a filtration system or something--what are you--"

"Well, it still came from shit, didn't it? The point of accumulating wealth is to avoid having to drink shit-water, so, really, it's very disingenuous of him to brag about such a--"

"Oh my God," Henry says, wiping a tear away with the pad of his thumb, "I can't talk about this with you anymore...is this...a lease?"

"Yes," Tudor says, clearing his throat, he puts his hands behind his back, "for the York Place apartment. It'll go to you after the party, for the year, if you ever need a place...off campus. I thought
it'd be nice. For you. It just needs to be signed."

"I'll need to have Cromwell look at it first," Henry says, tucking it back in the envelope, "I hope you're not offended--"

"No, that means I taught you well. Never sign anything without your lawyer looking at it first."

"Why this much for the check--"

"You'll still get trust fund deposits. But this way you have something that's yours, entirely. That no one can take away from you, not even me. That no one can take away from you…except for you. I think that's a lesson you're ready to learn. How to manage it."

"Thank you, I don't know…what to say, but thank--"

"Merry Christmas, Henry."

"And to you, sir," he says, with a single nod, turns around, ready to leave, but then he feels a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm proud of you."

"Thank you."

Henry turns back around, curious about whether this is the end of it (he figures it will be, "I'm proud of you" isn't a phrase he's heard from him in a while). His father places his hand on Henry's face, holding it steady, and Henry stills, rapt.

"I love you," Tudor says, solemnly, "I don't say that very often, I know. It's hard for me. But I do. I want you to know that."

'Very often'? he thinks, incredulously.

Perhaps he was right about the age error, perhaps his father just has a shit memory, after all.

While it might be a year or so since he's heard "I'm proud of you", it's been much longer since he's heard those three words uttered by Henry Tudor the I.

---

December 2008

"The Declaration of Independence got some stuff from the Magna Carta, did you know that?" Hal asks, flipping through his textbook on the desk.

He sits in a wheelie office chair and it's his favorite, because he can push the pedal up higher and if he spins around he can see the view of the entire city from his father's office.

There's a pool on the top floor, too, and the ceiling is glass, so when he swims the back stroke he can watch the sky.

It might be his favorite building, out of all the buildings in the world he's seen in person. Very few people have the key code to the floor Henry's office is on, so Hal always feels very important when they ride the elevator there. He likes to push the numbers in himself.

He'd still rather be at his mother's baby shower, though. 'Girls only' is a stupid rule. Margaret is there, which strikes him as terribly unfair, especially since he asked to go very politely. And his younger
sister was very impolite, and stuck her tongue out at him when she found out he couldn't go, and yet she still gets to go.

"You can come to work with me, instead," his father had offered, ruffling Hal's hair with one hand, "won't that be fun?"

"No," Hal had said, sullen.

Henry heaved dramatic sigh and passed him a cookie from a plate on the counter.

"I am taking this," Hal had said, pointedly, "to my room. It doesn't mean I'm okay with it."

"Okay, Hal."

"At all."

"Okay."

"Yes," Henry says idly, typing on his keyboard, squinting at the screen, "America stole almost everything from Britain."

"Sure…but, anyways, 1215 was a cool year and the 1100s were cool too, because--"

"And now Britain," he mutters, rolling his neck, causing an ensuing crackling, he rubs the back of it with his hand, "will suffer because they were stupid enough to enable America's brilliant credit default swaps, and the resulting recession means that right now I have to lay people off, so at the moment I'm really not too happy with either of my dual citizenship's countries--"

"Dad."

"Yes?"

"I'm eleven. I don't know what any of that means."

Like…hello.

"Right," he says, spinning around from the computer, he faces Hal instead, "sorry. Continue."

"Any…ways. The king, Henry II would ride his horse into a great hall indoors. Inside. In a castle. And he would jump over the table to join everyone at dinner!"

"I see."

"That's crazy. That's crazy cool."

"I agree."

"Since we are both Henry, I think we should jump off horses onto tables, too. I think that would be fun."

"Oh?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I wouldn't want you to get hurt."
"Oh," Hal says, worrying his bottom lip, he flips the book closed and then continues, "I hadn't thought of that."

Henry gives a toothy grin and crosses his arms, scratching the bottom of his sharp jawline, smooth-shaven as usual.

"I wouldn't want you to get hurt either," Hal says, solemnly, with wide eyes, "that would make me very sad."

His father continues to look at him, expression softening, the irritation that had gathered his brow while he muttered things under his breath as he read whatever was on his screen is gone.

"What?" Hal asks, pushing the book from left to right on the table.

"I love you."

"How much?"

"Very much."

"You better," Hal says, with a snort, wheeling his chair towards him, "I'm your son."

"Yes, you are."

"I love you, too. And also..."

"Yes?"

"I'm hungry."

___________________________________________________________

December 20, 2016, Hever House, 11:58 PM

Anne loves her sister. Really, she does.

But if she doesn't stop kicking the goddamn wall that separates their bedrooms (something she tends to do while sleeping and dreaming; as she always brightly, vividly recounts dreams the next morning to her tired and irritable younger sister), Anne is going to lose her sanity.

Anne knocks on Mary's door, firmly, to no response. She twists the door knob and opens the door. Mary is lying, very still, under a pink comforter, breathing deeply, neck relaxed against the pillow.

That better, Anne thinks, shutting the door, be the last of it.

"Do you still text Henry?" Lizzy asks, idly, rubbing strawberry lip gloss from a small pot onto her pert, pretty mouth.

Mary stills from where she stands beside her bed, caught off guard by the question, folding the clean clothes she retrieved from the dryer of the laundry room at Beta Thau house.

She's been talking to her more in the past few days, and Mary ended things with Francis Valois officially a while ago. With Henry things fizzled out, unofficially (which made sense, since it wasn't like they were ever official).
Lizzy had asked if she could use her vanity to put on make-up for the party, and Mary had agreed.

"Not really," Mary answers, rummaging through the pile of her clothes for the matching sock of her sushi pattern pair, "we're friendly, though, I guess."

"Oh?" Lizzy asks, in a higher pitch, before clearing her throat.

She opens a dark blue tin of Nivea cream and starts to rub it in circles over her hands, which are always smooth (Mary has noticed), so she's not really sure why she's being so careful in her application, rubbing it in so vigorously.

"You don't like him?" Lizzy asks, brow furrowed, she opens another jar she brought over, filled to the brim with a thick, rosy substance, presses the pad of her finger into it and starts to apply it to the left apple of her cheek.

"I don't know," Mary answers, tossing the sock to the side for now, as she can't seem to find its match, she starts to fold one of her sweaters, "he's...conceited, a bit."

"He is," Lizzy admits, starting on the other cheek, "he's a good kisser, though."

"I guess," Mary says, sharply, the jagged end of one of her nails catches in one of the threads of her sweater and she tries to unloop it, frustration mounting as it remains stubbornly stuck, "I don't really remember. What did he...how did he kiss?"

She assumes Lizzy wants to gush about it, maybe she thinks they'll be bosom buddies, gossiping about boys and their kissing techniques, and so had decided to open the line of conversation (despite the fact that it's really, really the last thing she wants to talk about; that considering the topic has created a sinking feeling in her stomach, for some stupid reason).

"Mm...let me think," Lizzy says, Mary hears the creaking of the barstool in front of her vanity, so knows she must be getting up from her seat there.

Suddenly she's grateful for her nail being stuck, it gives her an excuse not to look up. She fidgets with it, tries not to tear the thread.

She really doesn't want to think about Lizzy and Henry making out, hopes Lizzy at least doesn't go into detail about them having sex (she knows they had sex, always gets a strange, warm feeling when she remembers that she touched a person Lizzy touched, that in the chain of partners they are only once removed)...

Her train of thought is interrupted by the feeling of soft hands cupping her face, and then a whisper from the other girl: "Something like this." And then her thoughts fall straight out of her head, like so much rain, as she feels Lizzy's mouth, pressed gently against hers, silky like rose petals and damp from the gloss.

Lizzy's nose bumps against her, lightly, and she giggles, turns her head the other way.

Mary returns the pressure of the kiss, tastes strawberries and tangerines, pure sweetness, draws in closer, increases it from gentle to crushing, and feels the sweater fall from her hand (it wasn't so caught on her fingernail, after all).

It's the first time she's kissed a girl, but what matters more to her is that it's the first time she's kissed her...

Does that matter as much to her? She has to know before this continues, even though she doesn't
"Please tell me," Mary says, when she pulls away, voice wavering, "that you're not thinking about Henry Tudor right now."

**Oops.** She had planned on it being a question, but somehow it had come out as a plea instead.

"I don't know a Henry Tudor," Lizzy says, quietly but intensely, blue eyes glinting with mischief, before she tugs at the front of Mary's sweatshirt, pulling her in closer to her for another kiss.

*The image fades, the colors change, and then they are in a large, open room with big windows...*

"His Majesty has started to notice you," Elizabeth Blount whispers, casually, lying her cards down on the table, as if she is tired of the game.

Mary's eyes flicker upwards, she keeps her cards in hand, tilts her head to the side.

The queen has retired, citing exhaustion as her reason for doing so this early in the day, and so her ladies remain outside her bedchambers, some reading, some sewing, the two of them playing cards.

"I don’t believe so," she replies, coolly, examining her cards (Queen of Hearts…created in honor of the late Queen, Elizabeth of York, who Mary's own mother has often recalled fondly), although she has noticed this herself, felt his gaze following her through masquerades and pageants, "and I am married, besides."

The lady Elizabeth smirks, cants her head, holds her hand over her stomach with some meaning. Her own marriage certainly did not stop the creation of Henry Fitzroy, made duke by his father the King, so Mary supposes this is what she implies.

"No one notices me," Mary continues, shuffles her cards as if there is some purpose to the motion, glances around the room, the gossip of the other ladies is louder than theirs, so she does not believe anyone will overhear, "not with my sister by my side. Not my father, and certainly no other man. Marriage makes you all but invisible."

"I notice you," Elizabeth says, smiling kindly, a smile that lights up her whole face…*no wonder the King has chosen her for his mistress for so many years*, till now, at least.

"That is kind of you to say, but there is no need--"

"I will not speak unkindly of her, because she is your sister, and it is not as if I bear her any ill will. But I do hope you will not mind me saying that I prefer your company over hers."

"I…"

"Her wit is great, but I notice she is so eager to give a witty reply that it seems she does not always listen to what it is you had to say in the first place."

Elizabeth runs a hand over her pearl necklace, leveling Mary with an intense, azure gaze, as she continues:

"But you *always* listen. And that is a quality that should be valued; not discounted. And if your father does, perhaps he is short sighted. Or rather inclined to be that way himself."

"You are not listened to?" Mary inquires, cheeks coloring, and Elizabeth laughs, a sound like pealing
bells, before leaning forward, chin in hands.

"I find that no one listens to the mistress of a king half as much as they do to her son. But I suppose..."

Elizabeth trails off, looks over her shoulder at the closed doors, and then back to Mary, tone grave now:

"I suppose that is the way with all women. Even queens."

"Woe to Her Majesty," Mary says, giving a small nod of agreement, feeling a swell of sadness for the Queen's life, her lack of sons, the many miscarriages.

"And our poor Queen...does not even have that," Elizabeth continues, mirroring her thoughts, "and so...His Majesty has stopped listening to her."

That does seem to be the way, and the wave of the whispers that note how the King's smiles towards his wife have grown tighter and less frequent over the years suggest that, too.

"I will help you," Elizabeth says, suddenly, whispering more softly, the silk blue of the sleeves of her gown flat against the table, "if you'd like. I can tell you, somewhere more private...what it is like to be...with..."

She mouths the words "the king" without sound, afraid of being overhead, perhaps, then continues:

"It might help to know, I'm certain he will approach you soon," Elizabeth says, a smirk twisting her full lips.

"I think you flatter me--"

"You are the very opposite of invisible; you are among the most beautiful ladies at court, and I am certain I am not the only one who has noticed this," she says, color rising to her round cheeks, "but it was only an offer--"

"Where?"

Fades, fading, fading until they're the same, it's night time and they're not in the large, open room anymore....

"He's a kind lover, you truly have nothing to fear...he takes things slowly, starts with just kisses. And he is not poor at them, either."

"No?" Mary asks, crossing her arms, leaning against the stone wall of the empty corridor, "my husband does not bother with them."

She wishes, bitterly, that he did not bother with anything, truth be told.

"With kisses?"

"No. What are they...like?"

Elizabeth reaches out, takes a curl from behind Mary's pearled hood, smoothing it in between her the pads of her thumb and forefinger.

"From the King?" Elizabeth inquires, expression dreamy and distant, as if she is recalling it.
"Yes," Mary says, throat dry, she feels like this is some sort of test she's failing, watches the light from the candles bounce off the walls, how the other lady in waiting's features are lit with the soft glow.

"They felt something like this," Elizabeth says, eyes wide, then, lowering her lashes, she presses her mouth against Mary's with a gentle but sure touch.

Nothing that could be an accident, Mary thinks, hands trembling, nothing like an accidentally tilted head turning a kiss on the cheek to a meeting of the lips…it is purposeful, and she returns the purpose with enthusiasm.

---

From: Mary Boleyn
To: Lizzy Blount
Sent December 21, 2016, 1:00 AM

Lol…I just woke up from like…the weirdest dream.

From: Lizzy
I only want to hear about it if it's about me.

From: Mary
It was, actually.

From: Lizzy
Yay! What was it?

From: Mary
I don't totally remember…it started out with a memory, from before we started dating

From: Lizzy
Yawn…

From: Mary
And then it like, shifted, and we were in gowns in a castle? We were ladies in waiting or something.

From: Lizzy
Oh, how fun! ~roleplay ideas

From: Mary
I don't remember anything else, though.

From: Lizzy
Oh, it would be a forbidden love thing for sure…I have so many ideas…

From: Mary

Really? Like?

From: Lizzy

Like…I could have status because I had the king’s recognized bastard son? And I could use this status to mask our affair…

From: Mary

That's…oddly specific. And how would having a bastard increase your status?

From: Lizzy

Idk, maybe he doesn't have any legit sons or something. Oh, and maybe YOU flirt with the king so everyone thinks YOU'RE his new mistress and no one ever suspects…

From: Mary

Do you read historic romance novels or something? How are you coming up with all of this?

From: Lizzy

Yes! I used to all the time, they were always like a dime at garage sales. So…no one EVER suspects that actually, you're ~my~ new mistress. Ahaha, ha, ha!

From: Mary

Okay, so I'm not telling you any of my dreams ever again…noted…

From: Lizzy

Does this mean you don't want me to send you a Snapchat of me in a tiara?

From: Mary

You have a tiara?

From: Lizzy

Are you dumb?

From: Mary

Excuse me?

From: Lizzy

Like, do I have to spell this out for you?

From: Mary
I don’t...we were ladies in waiting, not princesses. You didn’t have a tiara. You were wearing a hood or something, in your hair.

From: Lizzy

A tiara. And??

From: Mary

???

From: Lizzy

Oh my God?? Never mind!

From: Mary

I do not appreciate or deserve this hostility.

From: Lizzy Blount

To: Mary Boleyn

Sent 1:30 AM

And NOTHING ELSE, Mary.

From: Lizzy

Sent 1:31 AM

And nothing. Else

From: Lizzy

Sent 1:33 AM

GOD.

From: Mary

Sent 1:39 AM

Oh my God, please send that.

From: Lizzy

Nah, I guess I should just order a HISTORICALLY ACCURATE FRENCH OR GABLE HOOD OR SOMETHING...ffs...

From: Mary

I don’t care about historic accuracy, I thought we were talking about the dream!!

From: Lizzy
It's too late.

From: Mary

Please?

From: Lizzy

No, like, I'll do it.

From: Mary

You will??

From: Lizzy

Of course I will, like... who do you think I am? Honestly.

From: Mary

Merry Christmas to me~ What did you mean by 'it's too late', then, tho?

From: Lizzy

I meant I already ordered one online.

From: Mary

How much was it?

From: Lizzy

Idk. Merry Christmas to ~me. It's blue. Hopefully it brings out my eyes.

Chapter End Notes

anyways... lizzy/mary owns my ass

source for the quoted poem: http://englishhistory.net/tudor/monarchs/henry-vii-ancestry-youth/

there might be timeline issues? i recently realized that IRL Henry Tudor was 11 when his mother died, and i've said he was twelve in this story. so, sorry for any continuity errors (they're hard to keep up with in a story this long, ngl), and i'll try to iron that out and make it more definitive. i wrote a timeline for the birth dates specifically somewhere and i think i lost it... oops.

"I don't know a Henry Tudor." I liiiiiiiiiive.

A quote that will live in infamy, tbh???

henry, somewhere:... rude
December 26th, 2016, 7:00 AM, Monday, Hever House, Washington D.C.

Thomas Boleyn's gifts to his daughters were checks to help with school, and plane tickets home for the 26th: I'm sure you'd rather spend New Year's with your friends, and have time to settle in.

His gift to George had been an extension on his stay. When George had thanked him, but rejected it, using the opportunity to announce his new job in Los Angeles, his father had been flustered but congratulated him, although Mary and Anne had drowned it out with crows of delight, smothering their brother in a group hug that bowled him over onto the couch.

As an alternative, Thomas had gifted him with his own plane ticket there, and a connection to to his brother, Norfolk, as a place to stay before he found an apartment of his own.

The Boleyn sisters' bags are packed and a car is on the way to drive Mary and Anne to the airport. George leans against the couch near the front door, Anne lingers in the doorway, purse over her shoulder.

"Bye, Daddy," Mary says, kissing either of his sand-papery cheeks, but he pulls her in for a hug and she hugs back, tightly.

"Hey, Dad?" she asks, casually, as George swipes left on Grindr (tribal tattoos? no, I don't think so).

If he were thinking about it (and he's not, just preparing to give each sister one last hug before they leave, for whenever the Uber they ordered arrives), the way George would assume her next sentence goes would be "thanks again for the gift" or "have a good holiday" or "I'll email you my class schedule if you'd like to see", some sort of vague pleasantry.

So, when he hears what she says next, it doesn't totally process at first (given that he's only overhearing idly, rather than listening intently):

"I'm gay," Mary says, tone still light, as if what she just said was "I heard it'll snow here tomorrow", although when George looks up, wide-eyed, her expression doesn't quite match the lightness.
Mary's gaze meets his over their father's shoulder (a panic, he notes, flickering across her dark blues) her head resting against it. Thomas pulls back a bit, as if to end the embrace, but she holds him, tighter, as if refusing to let him go.

Ex-fucking-cuse me?

George decides to deduce as much as possible in the next few moments, as he feels they could be crucial. He sweeps his gaze over to Anne, who shrugs, although there's a tight 'yikes' expression on her face, a tense smile. What are you gonna do? she mouths, and George is fucking floored, if he had to describe what he is, that's the two words he'd use, because oh my God she already knows?

Rude. No one ever tells me anything.

"I don't want you to say anything," Mary continues, eyes squeezed shut, "like, literally never say anything about it, actually? Unless I ask you to? Because I feel like you're not going to say anything good, and honestly I just…don't want to hear it. I'm not telling you because I want to hear your opinion. Or because I like, owe it to you or anything? I'm just telling you because I know you hate surprises and I don't want you to be surprised, or find out from someone else, or accidentally… yeah."

"Mary--"

"No, like don't say anything, I'm not kidding. But…yeah, so we're a statistical anomaly, I know, because I'm gay and George is gay--"

"I'm bi, actually," George interrupts, because that's who they are, the Boleyns, they're interrupters, they're over-talkers, and it's an important distinction, damn it.

Mary talks over their father and George talks over Mary and that's the usual chain of interruption, and usually what's next is that Anne talks over George with some snarky remark.

But, oh, no, no one has yet, so he's going to take the silence of this rare opportunity (when has the Boleyn household ever been silent, it is either filled with energetic debate or unending monologues or over-sharing) and take it quickly:

"Like, did you all just assume that? So rude."

Anne doesn't vocally snark at him, but crosses her arms and gives him a scathing look that clearly demonstrates "not about you right now".

"Yeah, anyways," Mary continues, glaring at George over Thomas' shoulder, to demonstrate the same sentiment, probably, "Anne is straight, I think? Pretty sure? So, you have one. One out of three is not…terrible? I don't know, I don't know how else to reassure you, so I'm going to let you go now," she says, easing her arms from around him, she turns around and grabs her suitcase.

"Bye, George," she says, cheerily, blowing him a kiss, then nodding to Thomas, "I love you."

Mary opens the door and George notices, before she leaves, that the way the light hits the tawny waves of her hair is...ethereal, almost like a halo.

Anne makes a similarly quick goodbye, and Thomas turns around, stunned, blinking owlishly behind his glasses.

"Well," George says, pocketing his phone, he maneuvers around his father and pats him on the
shoulder, once, "sorry, but I definitely need more information regarding that, so I'll be back in like," George cranes his neck to the clock above the coat hooks near their front door and squints, "mmm, an hour or so, I'll just take the train back from the airport once they got dropped off."

"Did you know--"

"Dad, if I had known, I wouldn't be crashing their Uber right now," George says, pulling his gloves on, "oh, and also," he adds, snapping his fingers, "you might want to join, like, PFLAG or something? After two no-hetero kids I think that's pretty much like…a requirement. Just a thought."

"'No-hetero'…"

"Oh, y'know," George elucidates, wrapping his scarf around his neck, "like, annoying high school jocks say 'no homo' so we stole it and…"

"What?" Thomas asks, pinching the bridge of his nose and exhaling heavily (so dramatic, this one).

"It's like, a joke, sort of, I don't have the time to explain the facets of the culture right now! I gotta go," he says, giving Thomas a quick peck on the cheek, then yells "Love you, bye!" before he opens the front door, swinging it shut behind him.

George runs outside, grateful the back door to the car is still open, he jogs down the steps of the porch and slides in next to Mary, shoving her over to the middle seat.

"George! What the hell!" she exclaims, screeching in protest as he unfolds his long legs, crowding her.

"Me what the hell? You what the hell," George responds, "honestly, what a way to say adieu to our Catholic-guilt-ridden father, though I can't say I blame you, coming out on Christmas would have been awkward as--"

"George, are you even allowed to ride with us," Anne interrupts, making eye contact with their driver and mouthing an apology, but he shrugs as he pulls out of their driveway, "Mary and I split the payment--"

"Three riders is the limit, Anne. You don't have to pay extra as long as it's-- you think I don't get drunk with friends and order Ubers? You think I don't know-- whatever," he continues, turning back to Mary, "so you're a lesbian?"

"I am that," she says, typing something out on her phone with her thumbs, gaze down, "why do you sound so shocked?"

"Um…because no one told me?"

"I kind of assumed you figured that out. You met Lizzy."

"What does that have to do with--"

"She introduced herself as my girlfriend."

"You didn't introduce her as such! I thought you two were friends!"

"We kissed goodbye!"

"So?"
"On the mouth, George!"

"I don't know...I thought you were trying to be fashionably European or something."

"Oh my God," Mary groans, rolling her eyes, she knocks one of her knees against his, "how are you this dumb?"

"I'm not-- whatever! I thought sorority girls were just, super weirdly close and...default homoerotic with each other. I thought that was like...a thing."

"It might be. But we have sex in private, rather than making out at parties to attract boys. So, no. It is not a thing, with us"

"I could not be more surprised. Really. If one of you was going to be Sapphic inclined, I always had my money on Anne."

"Why?" Anne asks, leaning her head from across the row of seats to look at him, brow furrowed.

"Psssh. So many reasons. You said no to every guy that asked you out, for starters...Mary was the one that had a different boyfriend every month."

"Hey!" Mary protests.

"Mary, literally the only month you didn't have a boyfriend was when you were out of school for two weeks with strep throat," George says.

"Well...still."

"And of course, there were the tree-house sessions with Matilda Navarre."

"The what with Matilda Navarre?" Mary asks, incredulously, turning her head to face her sister.

"How did you know about--"

"I was friends with her brother. I was over at their house all the time. Like, please," George scoffs, running his fingers through his hair as he checks his reflection in the driver's rear-view mirror.

"You snoop!" Anne snaps, mouth dropping open.

"What the fuck," Mary snaps, heatedly, holding her hands, palms out, towards both her siblings' faces, "happened with Matilda Navarre, if you're saying what I think you're saying, one of you tell me right now--"

"Navarre and Boleyn," George sings, folding his hands on his lap, "sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N--"

"You made out with Matilda Navarre? She was hot!" Mary exclaims, hitting Anne on the arm. Her younger sister scowls and rubs the spot she hit, "That is honestly so unfair."

"I kind of forgot about it," Anne admits with a giggle, "honestly."

"I hate you," Mary pouts, crossing her arms.

"So, yeah. Anne had two for two on lesbianism. Thus my shock."

"It was just practice. For kissing boys," she mumbles, tugging on the end of one of her braids.
"Yeah…I don't think she felt that way," George crows, smiling, "poor thing. She moved to California, if you recall…you probably broke her heart."

"Oh please," Anne scoffs, gnawing on a thumbnail, "and…didn't she move to France?"

"Oh," George teases, "keeping tabs on her, hm?"

"Shut up," she says, heatedly, reaching over Mary to swat him on the arm.

"But yeah," he continues, tapping on his phone, Mary puts her head on his shoulder and looks over at the screen, "you're right, she moved to France, then Los Angeles."

"She's still hot," Mary comments, scrolling down his screen herself, she starts to swipe profile pictures, rapidly, to the left within the Facebook gallery, "do you think that's her real eye color? Maybe she wears contacts--"

"Oh yeah, they're like a violet blue, huh," George says, squinting, "yeah, probably--"

"She doesn't wear contacts," Anne interrupts, crossing her arms, she turns to face the window, "I remember now, actually, and I saw her eyes pretty up-close, so--"

"Literally," Mary says, chin still resting on George's shoulder, "hate you."

"Don't hate me," Anne says, "that's rude--"

"No offense," their driver says, suddenly, and all three Boleyn siblings startle at the outside interruption, "but do you guys like…ever shut up?"

"No offense,'" George says, pointing to Mary, and then Anne, circling his index to gesture to all three of them, "but this is a private conversation. So," he continues, turning back to Mary, "congrats, by the way, your girlfriend is really pretty, holy shit--"

"That you are having…in my car."

"Dude," George says, turning back around, "you know we can rate you, right?"

"I can rate you, too," the driver responds, easing on the brakes as they hit a red light.

"Drivers can rate customers?"

"Yup."

"Oh, shit…I must have, like…a star," George says, grimacing. Barely suppressed laughs roll off of Mary's shoulder, pressed into his, it vibrates, and he pushes her off; which pushes Mary into Anne, who starts to laugh, too.

"You don't say," the older man deadpans, shaking his head before flicking the turn signal.

December 26, 2016, 5:00 PM, Monday, New York City

Henry feels his phone vibrate in the pocket of his winter coat. He sighs, watches the cloud his breath makes in the air, like a puff of smoke, before slipping it out of his pocket and checking it.

From: Charles Brandon
Hey, everything okay? Haven't heard from you in a while.

He sent a 'Merry Christmas' text last night, too, which so far tallies up to six unread text messages, the number nagging Henry in its little angry red circle above the green message box. Probably a record, considering Henry and Brandon tend to go back and forth rapidly, like two codependent preteen girls in a chat room, Henry thinks, snidely, before swiping his phone to silent.

Truthfully, he doesn't know how to respond, but takes a sick, dark sort of pleasure in the fact that he's pretty certain Brandon's too proud to ask why he hasn't been invited to the New Year's Party, or to even mention the fact that he hasn't been. He's sure he's noticed.

Lost in thought, Henry spins around, and squints at the sun in the sky, partially obscured by clouds. It might be later than he realized, maybe he should start walking home, and it's with that thought that he feels himself colliding into someone as he walks backwards.

Henry turns around, quickly, trying to right himself. He views a book and art supplies strewn across the pavement, a man kneeling down and scooping them up, quickly, his dark hair falling in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Henry stammers, "I didn't see you."

The man draws himself up to full height, book and box in hand. He tugs the strap of his backpack, slipping, back up his broad shoulder, and glares at him.

"I'm sorry," Henry says, again, "really."

There are people gathered at the fountain, sitting on park benches. Some clutch paper cups, some have phones pressed to their ear, but Henry doesn't see or hear them anymore. They fade, as he feels continually scrutinized by this man's singular focus.

He continues to glare, his green eyes are bloodshot, large and wide-set especially set within his thin, gaunt face. Purple circles of exhaustion lie deep under his lower lashes. His hair is dark and messy, unkempt, his sweater sleeves are pushed up to his elbows, revealing track marks.

"Are you?" the man asks, voice a wavering timbre, almost akin to a boy going through a puberty change.

He appears around Henry's age, perhaps a few years older if anything. He looks like he was very handsome, once, and Henry bets that he probably was, before stricken by poverty and addiction. He is tall but broad-shouldered despite his lack of weight, his frame is broad in general, despite it not being filled out with weight or muscle.

Actually, he reminds him of someone...strikes some sort of resemblance to someone he's seen before, although he can't quite put his finger on who...

Oh.

Edward York, his maternal grandfather. Who he's only seen in pictures; most recently at Elizabeth's Woodville's apartment. This man has similar features, and the height.

"Your Highness," he says, mockingly, bowing, before drawing up to his full height again.
Equal to Henry's, actually. They are eye to eye, and it unnerves Henry both because he's behaving strangely; of course, but also because he's not accustomed to being equal in height to anyone.

*Perhaps it's just a sarcastic dig, a comment on the way he's dressed, the 'Your Highness'. He's heard similar things before from homeless people…maybe he's too proud to ask for change?*

"Do you need anything?" Henry asks, uncomfortably, "um…I think I only have a $20 on me, but--"

"I don't do charity," he interrupts, tilting his head to the side, "but I'll make you something, if you buy it."

There's a circle of benches behind the fountain, and the artist sits on one of them, sketchpad balanced on his knees, feet resting against the bench Henry sits on, arms crossed.

He had asked if Henry had wanted anything in particular drawn, and Henry had shrugged, said 'surprise me'. The man had laughed for a solid minute at that, before shaking his head and taking his sketchbook out.

"What's your name?" Henry asks, watching as the older man uses a ruler against the page, tracing charcoal against the straight edge.

"Osbeck is my…last, so I went by Beck. I kept it. It's easier to remember," he answers, with a shrug, then, sets the pad down. Rummages around in his backpack, finds a grey beanie, and shoves it over his head, before continuing with the page.

"Oh. I'm--"

"I know you," Beck interrupts, lashes lowered, he switches the ruler to the other side, "Or I did…know you. I should say."

"I don't remember you…did you go to--"

"I didn't know you the last one, personally," he continues, as if Henry hadn't spoken, his hand splayed flat against the page, Beck stares at it, intently, as if it shows him something no one else can.

"The last one…?"

"I saw you at banquets, though. When you were a child, although you probably didn't…remember me. I tried to escape, and then…well."

"I…don't recall," he says, carefully. Henry's certainly been to his share of banquets since childhood, charity and otherwise, the circles his family circulate insist upon attendance (it was one of the few perks of boarding school, the avoidance of them, but in summer they reigned full force). *That* part sounds plausible.

*Escape what?* he wants to ask, but at the same time he's not really sure that's a can of worms he wants to open. Every neutral thing Henry says seems to elicit some rambling from Beck.

"Of course you don't," Beck says, knees pulled closer to himself, now, he starts to make light marks on the paper, "I bet you don't even know who you are."

"And you *do*?" Henry asks, rolling his eyes, he sees a food cart roll up across the green and nods toward it, *not really in the mood for any more weirdness*, "Hey, you want something to eat--"

"No," Beck replies, shortly, then, closes his eyes and says softly, "I just want…to *sleep*. They won't
"let me, though."

"Who won't?"

"You. Everyone else that was...someone else. Before."

*Maybe if I just leave this bill, Henry thinks, and get up, he'll keep talking, and maybe he won't even notice me leaving...*

"I'm surprised you haven't noticed. Yours is a clear anagram. And your first is symbolic. It's one of the ones I noticed first...well, I first noticed it with your father. He was in the paper a lot. I would get the newspaper from the neighbors' recycling bin, I remember...my foster parents didn't get it, they had nothing to read. I was always bored."

"You know my father?"

"I knew of him, and then I knew him...but his was the first I...noticed. The first name."

"The first name of--"

"Oh, for God's sake," Beck snaps, putting his sketchpad down on the bench, he lifts his backpack, unzips the top and looks through it, unearthing a plastic bag.

"Here," he says, lifting the first item from it, a wooden block, and setting it next to him on the bench. He switches the sketchpad to his lap, puts the plastic bag down, and looks through it, unearthing more wooden blocks. They have letters on them, *they're children's toys*, Henry realizes, they're scuffed and scratched; fairly worse for wear.

Beck rearranges them, carefully, until they spell out Henry's last name:

**T U D O R**

So he does know his father. Or, from the newspaper, like he said. He's a fairly public figure, although Henry himself isn't...as much. But it's plausible he's seen him, in pictures, online.

Beck rearranges the letters, then...he switches the D to the front, the R in the third space, the T to the last:

**D U R O T**

"Who's Durot...*do-rot?*" he pronounces, phonetically, wrinkling his nose at the ugliness of the name.

"*Dur-oh,*" Beck says, with a hearty laugh, shaking his pen up and down, "it's French, or Welsh, or maybe both..."

"And I was supposed to know that...*why?*"

"You're not well-versed in history? *That's* ironic," he says, wryly, plucking a colored pencil from his box of supplies.

"I *am,*" Henry says, indignant, "actually, I very much am, I'm just not sure why you're insisting I'm--"

"The *House of Durot*? You don't know it?"

"*Oh.* No, of course I do. The king that ended the War of the Roses, and then the notorious one; the
one with the six wives," Henry says, watching Beck as he smirks, gaze rapt on the page as he makes broad strokes.

"'The one with the six wives'…yes. Although everyone is someone else, before they become 'the one with..'…before anyone knew him as that, he was known as 'the golden prince'. Much as you are now, I assume."

Everyone else that was someone else before….what does that even mean?

"It's funny," Beck continues, "you tell people the similarities…and then they tell you that you're crazy. Eric Durot, when Eric means 'king', and Henry Tudor, when Henry means 'king' as well…and then, they say, if you know people will call you crazy, why not just shut up about it? As if they would let me!"

"As if who would--"

"The voices. They only stopped screaming at me, they only stayed quiet when…I gave voice to them. So I couldn't keep them to myself, of course. Medication quells them, but doesn't kill them."

The water that runs in the fountain somehow now sounds like it's roaring in his ears. Henry winces, glances on the other side of it. A mother and her child stand, holding hands. The boy tugs his red knit cap over his ears before throwing a coin in. His mother laughs, then kneels down, and lifts him up. He wraps his arms around her neck and they walk from the square back to the pathway that snakes through the grass of the park, disappearing from view.

The quiet pang arrives, as it usually does, settles itself in a tightness in his forehead. Henry used to throw coins in fountains, too. Always the same wish: to hear something from his mother. Anything, anywhere at all: in a dream, in a vision, within the confines of a prayer...

But he never has.

He stopped throwing coins in fountains when he was fourteen.

"Here. Done," Beck says, tearing a page of the thick paper from his sketchbook, carefully, and handing it over to Henry.

Henry thanks him and slips the twenty dollar bill from the fold of his wallet, handing it over to him. Beck nods and pockets it.

Now that he has a chance to look at the drawing, Henry does and is…stunned.

There's so much detail to the picture that it's what catches his eye first, so much intricacy developed that it seems almost impossible-- but maybe their strange conversation, drug addled on Beck's side, clearly, simply lasted longer than he realized.

"This is…amazing," Henry says, "I can't just pay you twenty dollars for this--"

"It'd be better," Beck says, capping his pen, "on a computer. I made some...good stuff, back when I had one at my disposal. But, y'know," he continues, with a shrug, closing his box of art supplies, "what are you gonna do?"

"What's-- 'P.W'?'" Henry asks, brows furrowed, he squints at the two letters, tiny, in all caps, on the back of the picture.
"My initials," Beck says, swinging his backpack over his shoulders.

"I thought your last name was Osbeck."

"One of them is. Happy New Year," he says, with a nod. Beck tucks his pen on top of his ear and leaves, abruptly, walks off the square until it connects with the concrete path, arms crossed.

Destiny, now awoken.

The quote written in the middle of the page, in huge, fairy-tale style lettering. It's a sort of calligraphy, thick and black and curving.

He had drawn the frame with a ruler, sliding charcoal against the sides, with a steady hand. Designs run along the rectangles of it like embroidery, but four main symbols are in each corner of the drawing:

A crown in the top left corner, a lion in the top right. Roses, red and white, laced with threads of green stems and thorns, intertwined as the frame between the lion and crown on top, horizontally.

A curtain of dark hair, the back of someone, on the bottom left corner. On the bottom right, a falcon.

Vertically, honeysuckles and acorns, intertwined, run from the lion to the falcon. They also run a line from the crown down to the inky hair, pieces of blue drawn in the black, the waves like curls of smoke.

On the bottom of the frame, in between the dark hair and falcon, are red and white flowers, not roses…poppies and daisies, perhaps, though generic enough that he couldn't really say for certain.

P.W.

What does that stand for?

Why does it sound so familiar?

Who does he know that--

Henry stops drumming his hand against the leather seat of the town car.

Slowly, he pulls his phone out of his pocket and pulls up a search engine.

New York Daily News: June 24, 2011, Friday

…Percy Warbeck, who spent the majority of his youth in foster care…was admitted to an in-patient psychiatric unit from the time he was sixteen until he reached maturity…

…Warbeck says he's endured humiliation, invasion of privacy, emotional distress…and claims that the waiving of doctor-patient confidentiality for an intellectual property and theft lawsuit has done nothing but "reaffirm the distrust that those with mental illness have in the judicial system of this country"…

…John de Vere, the lawyer who successfully sued Warbeck, told the Daily News that he no longer works for Tudor and declined comment.

(photo gallery, Warbeck during trial, click here)
Is your Los Feliz guest house still available, darling?

Um…hi? Mom?

Let me know this is you and not a fan of yours, please.

When you were seven you pushed John Welles into our pool fully dressed and he got angry.

Back in…2003, I think, you told Hal and Arthur they could each say one swear word each, Arthur quietly said "damn" and Hal stood on the table, screamed "FUCK", ripped his shirt off, and dive bombed to the floor.

Arthur shook his head very solemnly, cleaned his glasses with his shirt, put them back on and said, "Honestly, what did you expect?"

If I recall.

Elizabethwoodville was taken (by fans, already, I assume), thus this username.

OMG.

I didn't know you had email. Or a computer. I'm floored.

And yes, it's not being rented out right now. Why?

Anthony's Christmas gift to me.

Considering a move…apparently the elderly need warmer weather for their joints. Who knew?
okay. kind of hard to explain, and i'll probably explain more in the end notes of the next chapter, but a quick summary:

everything that's happened in history (with a few liberties), or should i say everything we know or think we know about what's happened in history, has already occurred. the only difference is that the names of the historic figures are different.

so, for all intents and purposes:

the name of Henry VII of England, historically, in this story, was Eric Durot the I of England
Henry VIII was Eric Durot II

sorry if that confuses anyone! if it does, hopefully it'll make sense later

matilda navarre = marguerite de navarre
hedonism

Chapter Summary

It's hedonism, pure and simple. Not hedonism as Anna's seen it before, not tacky, or gross, or gaudy. The vibe is ethereal, instead, the land of the fae meets the medieval pageantry of a royal court: glittering, youthful vivacity intertwines seamlessly with unadulterated joy.

Chapter Notes

htgawm style: there will be a flashback, later, from the time in between the last chapter and this date, that explains some of a certain character's behavior.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

From: 326-55

To: Charles Brandon

Sent December 28, 2016, Wednesday

Charles, you have 2 messages, 1 invite and 11 new notifications on Facebook: [link]

December 29, 2016, Thursday, 10:21 PM

Brandon’s been sitting at Lilac (the most popular bar among Whitehall students, given its lax carding policy) for ten minutes or so, watching a football game on one of its many TV screens.

Anna Seville has been sitting, two seats away from him, for five minutes. She didn’t say hello; but she did give him a quick nod before ordering a drink.

She’s spent most of those five minutes sneaking covert glances at a lanky guy standing by the pool table, his arm slung around some petite redhead.

It's odd. Not like he expected a "Missed you" or anything, but…they've exchanged hundreds of text messages, and the number of times they've had sex is nearing the triple digit mark as well (which is fucking...incredible, honestly).

They didn't plan to meet here-- mere coincidence, but still.

Whatever...if she's not going to acknowledge him beyond a fucking nod, then he's not going to, either.

Except...he's curious.

“Who’s that?” he asks, eyes still on the screen.
“Who?”

“The guy you keep looking at. You’re being a bit obvious.”

“Ex,” she says curtly, gulping down the rest of her rum and coke.

“With…?”

“His girlfriend.”

“Sensing a bit more to it than that.”

“Yeah, and what do you care?” she snaps, slamming her glass down on the bar, swiveling around to face him.

“I care.”

Maybe he does. He’s looking at her like he does; his wounded expression, the fragility of the way his hand traces an invisible pattern on the wood suggests that he’s maybe even hurt by her outburst.

Anna supposes she can cut him some slack, just this once.

“She’s…his girlfriend. Whom I found. In his bed. When I was his girlfriend.”

“Yikes,” he says, wincing.

“Yup,” she says, pulverizing the wedge of lime with her fingers, “wasted my entire Senior year on that asshole. And he doesn’t even go to school here…apparently he had to pick this bar for his night, even though he lives all the way in fucking Pasadena.”

“Is that where you’re from?” Brandon asks, smirking, "Fucking Pasadena?”

Anna realizes she doesn't know where he's from, either. Such things are not often discussed among sex friends, she supposes, but she feels a twinge of guilt at the realization nonetheless.

“The one and only.”

“Well…shall we make him jealous then?” he asks, moving a seat closer to her.

“He doesn’t even know I’m here.”

“Nope. I’ve been watching him. Every time you look away, he looks at you.”

“Oh. Is he looking now?” she whispers, close to his ear.

“Most definitely,” Brandon answers, sneaking a look out of the corner of his eye.

“You don’t have to,” she says, withdrawing, suddenly shy.

“Seville,” he says, putting a hand on her knee, “thing is, I want to.”

“Okay. I’m down.”

“How jealous,” he whispers, close enough to her that he can count every freckle on her nose, “would you like him to be? Scale of one to ten?”
She ponders this, as if it’s a serious question of academic nature, bites her thumbnail and smiles as she does so– Brandon thinks it’s possibly the cutest thing he’s ever seen.

“I want him to cry,” she decides, “I want him to regret ever being born.”

“Christ. Remind me not to get on your bad side.”

“Oh, Brandon,” she says, fluttering her eyelashes, “you already know better than that.”

He crushes his mouth to hers, swiftly and surely, left hand cupping her face, right hand holding hers. Anna scoots from her bar stool until she’s literally straddling him, and he switches his hands to grab her waist accordingly.

Missed this.

It’s been weeks since they’ve kissed, but it feels easy to do. Muscle memory, or some shit like that.

They make out until the bartender clears his throat and says, “Guys. Guys!! This is a family– okay, I can’t lie, you guys know this isn’t a family establishment, it’s a fucking college bar, but you need to chill! I don’t want to have to kick you guys out.”

“Sorry,” Brandon says, pulling a bill out his wallet and pushing it towards him, “her ex is over there, can we go on for a bit?”

“No, Brandon, it’s okay–”

“Two minutes,” the bartender says, putting the money into his apron pocket, “seriously, though, that’s it.”

“And can you tell us,” Brandon says, eyes never leaving Anna’s, “if the tall, skinny guy in the glasses at the pool table is watching?”

“Looks furious,” he says mildly, “and his girl stormed off a bit ago.”

“Good.”

They keep at it, and politely end the make out session within their time limit, just in time for the redhead to storm over, arms crossed.

“Anna,” she spits out.

“Can I help you?” Anna asks, sipping on Brandon’s beer.

“Who are you,” she asks scathingly, scanning Brandon up and down, “her escort?”

Anna’s face flushes, the tips of her ears turn pink, and Brandon takes her hand in his.

“I’m her boyfriend. We’ve been together for three months. Who the fuck are you?”

“No,” she insists, blushing herself now, “no, you’re like a model–”

“Definitely a Whitehall student,” the bartender chimes in, cleaning glasses with a cloth, “definitely her boyfriend– they come in every Saturday night.”

Ah, the power of a cash-slide. It always makes people nicer than they’d be otherwise, a la this man’s sudden improv abilities.
He's seen Henry do it often enough, the cash-slide, successfully. Brandon's not really cash-flush enough to be able to emulate it often. And he rarely (well, never, actually) does it for the benefit of anyone other than himself, and yet…here he is, doing just that.

Douchebag's New Girlfriend is speechless, and Brandon turns away from her with a shrug, as if she's irrelevant.

It's not hard to act that way, because to him, she is. Ask him and Anna's ex downgraded, *majorly*… she looks like a less cute version of Anna, plus cheap red hair dye (her roots show, *yikes*) and minus the effervescence, the coyness, the cleverness.

“Where’s Jeff,” Anna asks coyly, eyes sparkling, “he didn’t come with you?”

“No, he was here,” she insists, huffily, crossing her arms, “he just went to fill the meter–”

“Who’s Jeff?” Brandon asks, brow furrowed, a ridge between his eyes, brushing his thumb back and forth on the back of Anna's hand.

“Nobody important,” Anna says, grinning and *oh, God, does that feel good to say*, because… she actually believes it.

For the first time, she really does.

*He's nobody important. Nobody to her, at all.*

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**December 31, 2016, New Year's Eve, Saturday, 9:45 PM**

"I feel kind of bad," Anne whispers, her arm linked with Anna's, as they walk past the long queue that snakes down the sidewalk leading to York Place Apartments, "like…they look like they've been waiting a while--"

"Don't feel *bad*," Anna says, with a snort, "feel awesome. We don't have to wait or pay."

Anne shrugs. It's a bit of a rush, she must admit, to be able to stride in front of everyone else, just because her name's on a list. She imagines it's something akin to what it feels like to fly first-class, the heady privilege of getting to enter first, above everyone else.

Nerves flutter as she gets her hand stamped alongside Anna after giving their names, under the white tent set up in front of the entrance.

The stamp, they're told, displays a series of unique security codes: the first, for the entrance of the building, the second for the elevator, the third for roof access.

Anna Seville is like, five days *past* ready for an epic blow-out. Given the rumors about the wildness of Tudor parties, she doubts tonight will disappoint.

Her family's *fucking annoying* and apparently she's unable to tolerate consecutive days with them anymore (or maybe college and consecutive days without them have just spoiled her) and she *missed school*.

*Whatever.* She *likes* structure. Free time makes her anxious. Lists, planners, a set schedule and places to go, calm her *immensely.*
So, anyways. She's in a great fucking mood.

For one, the last time she saw Brandon she was sitting on his face. And, honestly, it's pretty awesome to not see someone for a few days only to see them again and know they're thinking about that, too. So there's that to look forward to.

Anne's still obsessed with Tudor (unfortunate, given the circumstances, but what can you do), and Anna knows she is by the way she's talking deliberately about literally everything but him. Mary and Lizzy are apparently ditching the party, going to what Anne called an "ah…independent…club" (whatever that means, she said it all hesitantly like she had accidentally spilled some sort of secret), so Anna's selfishly happy that she gets her roommate all to herself tonight.

Because Anna is shy (with strangers, anyway) until she drinks and Anne captivates without even trying to, so she's perfectly content to coast on her laurels until she gains enough liquid courage to dance.

They walk to the elevator with a flock of other girls, impeccably dressed, their long hair blown out in waves, all clutching smart phones with elaborate, custom-made cases.

There's a bouquet of flowers set on a marble table to the right of the elevator doors, the scent of lavender wafting from the dried stalks. A cluster of bottled waters sits on the table to the left of it, and they all grab one. Anna watches as the supply is promptly replaced by a woman wearing black and white, a clipboard in her hands, a walkie-talkie clipped onto her belt loop.

Security or…is refreshment supply just taken that seriously?

Anna recognizes only one of the group, a tall, willowy girl with platinum hair, the ends curled around her shoulders (more or less the doppleganger of Clemence Posey, because that's fair…). She doesn't have any classes with her, but Brandon apparently had a thing with her (really, who posts those kinds of comments on Instagram, for God's sake…have they never heard of text messaging or…?): Ella Carew.

"God," one of them whines, "I blew everything I got from my parents for Christmas on this."

"I know," Ella coos sympathetically, giving her friend a squeeze on the shoulder, "five hundred's a bit steep, but…"

Anne turns to her with wide eyes, mouths "five hundred?" and Anna shrugs. She had heard the cover was a hundred, but apparently she was mistaken.

"…you can easily make it back, though, if you hock all the stuff in the dorms next week. A lot of girls did that last year. If you're lucky, you can actually make money."

"And it's not like clubs," someone else chimes in, "where the gender ratio's way off and all the girls are hot and most of the guys are eh. It was pretty fifty-fifty at least year's."

"This one in particular is…fine," Ella sighs, fixated on her phone, her friends looks over her shoulder and sigh in agreement, "I would give anything…like, look. At. Him."

Well, he wouldn't even let me one-night stand him, Anna thinks, imperiously, as she powders her nose in the mirror of her compact, so give him whatever you want. Won't beat that.

"My friend said he's like, amazing in bed, too…which you wouldn't think, because usually the good-looking ones think they don't have to try that hard."
"Please quit while you're ahead."

"He hasn't dated anyone since like, September, though? Which was not like him last year at all."

"Didn't he have a thing with Mary Boleyn?"

Oh. Not Brandon, then.

Anne bristles, winces and closes her eyes. Anna imagines astro-projecting out of this elevator, out of this incredibly awkward and tense moment, made even worse by the blasé ignorance of the other party guests.

"Henry said they're just friends, I asked, but--"

"Didn't he and Lizzy Blount have a thing, too?"

"Also, apparently, 'just friends'. But, anyways, my friend--"

"Which friend?" someone interrupts Ella, again.

"Gemma Popincourt? She's a senior. Apparently the first time he went down on her she came, like… three times."

Anne coughs, violently, her open bottle of water slips from her grasp (Anna catches it, luckily, screwing the cap back on as a girl cries are you okay?, the others cooing sounds of concern), face turning beet-red.

"Down the wrong pipe," she wheezes, massaging her throat, "I'm fine."

In what feels like literally the second they step out of the elevator (really, probably like within the first ten seconds), they're whisked away in a cloud of violet perfume by a flurry of well-dressed ladies (all wearing black), who usher them to the hallway (magnificent in its own right, a chandelier hangs from the ceiling, marble floors, and garden arches covered in roses and fairy lights adorn the walls). Next to the single door on this floor, is a row of changing screens, littered with rows of racks of clothing, that the women lead them towards.

"Pick one," a woman says, her accent musical and lilting (Russian, maybe?), sweeping a hand over the table, covered in tiaras, headwear, and masks, "one per person."

"I…excuse me?"

"Nice," Anne says, immediately reaching for a strand of rubies that connects to another row of pearls.

One of the women assists her in putting it on, murmuring compliments about how nicely the white of the pearls complements her black hair.

"Do we have to give these back at the end of the night," Anna asks, examining the rows, squinting, "because I'm planning on dancing, and I don't really want the pressure of--"

"Oh, no," the Russian woman says, laughing, "yours to keep, darling. Here: you seem like a Lord of the Rings girl."

The woman holds a silver circlet of simple design out, a red gem in its center: "To match your friend."
"I'm not even wearing glasses," Anna grumbles, "how can you tell I'm--"

"You have the look," she says, with a shrug, easing it over Anna's head, "it's not a bad thing, to look smart."

Anna looks over and sees a makeup artist at work on Anne's eyelids, closed, slipping a thin, delicate liquid line of gold over each, little angelic wings that bring out the flecks of hazel in her eyes.

"Swimsuit?" the stylist asks.

"Pardon?"

"There's a water activity -- would you like a swimsuit?"

"No, thank you."

"Can we interest you in a 2007 style scarf?"

The stylist gestures to posters on the screen: one is of Ed Westwick and his character's 'signature scarf' on Gossip Girl, the other is a horrendous photo of Ashley Tisdale at the a Disney premiere.

"Ah…no. Thank you."

Anna feels like she's stepped into a portal, a rift in time (apparently Tudor took the party theme, 'Party Like It's 2007', very seriously). She's on sensory overload, honestly, is tripping the fuck out because, besides Anne, she recognizes literally no one except oh…my God…she thinks the woman singing into the mic on a low, small stage is Ashlee Simpson, holy sweet hell, and not only is she the cover girl of her old Tiger Beats come to life, but she's also singing that song that's always on her sex playlist, the track Brandon rolls his eyes at but probably secretly enjoys, a real head-banger if there ever was one and she is so overwhelmed that she makes a mental list of everything she notices immediately as she passes through:

1.) There are people with their heads bent over Sidekicks and pink Razrs (which they're giving out at a table, along with Polaroid cameras, the banner above it reading "Scavenger Hunt Rules: sponsored by Verizon Wireless). Yes, Sidekicks, cell phones with buttons that clack. She feels like she just walked into an episode of Gossip Girl.

2.) The ceiling is really, really high for an apartment (well, this is a penthouse, really, and it's huge), high enough that there's a waterslide that leads to a slip-n-slide, and the slip-n-slide ends in what looks like a huge game of Twister.

3.) There is Dance, Dance Revolution.

4.) There is a pinata in the shape of a star. A blindfolded guy hits it, and instead of candy, different brands of condoms and gift cards fall out. It seems the rules, to prevent mobbing, are that the person that hits it can only grab what they can hold in two hands, and have to stay blindfolded whilst doing so. As such, there's a line winding towards it.

5.) The bar is huge and the bartenders are wearing long, dark robes? Which doesn't make sense until she hears "Your Butterbeer" and oh my God all the drinks are Harry Potter-inspired. The most obvious conclusion being that all the bartenders are wearing wizard robes. And, also: there is an ungodly amount of food spread out on a buffet table, extending from the bar.
6.) There are piles of glitter on the floor. *Who knows why.* But there are.

7.) There is a wall with canvases covered in what looks like full water balloons, but when she sees a girl in line throw a dart that hits one, glittering, gold paint leaks from it, staining the white. So the aim seems to be a Jackson Pollock-esque creation, and people take photos after their turns in the various lines.

8.) There is a wall covered in different projected screens, people in bean bag chairs sit and watch with over the ear headphones. One plays old music videos, one plays *the O.C.*, another *The Devil Wears Prada*.

9.) There is a face painting and flower-crown making station.

10.) There is *a throne, A fucking. Throne, Of gilded silver and black.* The line for that one is probably the longest, and people have their friends taking photos of them as they pose on it on their smartphones and Polaroid cameras alike.

It's hedonism, pure and simple. Not hedonism as Anna's seen it before, not tacky, or gross, or gaudy. *The vibe is ethereal, instead, the land of the fae meets the medieval pageantry of a royal court:* glittering, youthful vivacity intertwines seamlessly with unadulterated joy.

It feels like a warm embrace that goes beyond the warm crush and humming heat from the crowd. The warmth is the feeling that this is every party you've never been invited to rolled into one, the warmth melts any lingering chill from those rejections away: they become more and more insignificant as the seconds pass because you know, *you know* that none of those parties were better than this one.

*So, basically…suck it, Alicia Hall. I bet your ballerina birthday cake wasn't even that great.*

With that sentiment in mind, Anna leans across the bar and orders a 'Hufflepuff' cocktail. Anne orders a 'Ravenclaw' and they sit and wait on the chairs at the bar, miniature, wheeled versions of the huge throne people are posing on.

Once they get their drinks, they spin around together, legs crossed, facing the exhibitions and main dance floor.

"Honestly," Anne says, "I think I would have an amazing time even if all I did was people-watch."

"Right?"

"Thanks for making me come."

"You're welcome."

Anna surveys the crowd and finds Brandon, unsurprisingly, ensconced with a group of tall girls with high cheekbones(*models, probably, or model-types, at any rate*).

One of the girls pulls something from her clutch, then puts a cigarette between her lips. She nods towards the balcony and most of the others follow, filtering out. Anthony Knivert and Will Compton walk over to Brandon, and they're all doing that weird back-patting bro-thing that always makes her cringe in second-hand embarrassment when she hears a loud thump against the bar, then a male voice, shouting over the music, coming from the left of her:

"Here, this should about do it on the Bailey's!"
"Thank you, sir!"

"You don't need to...Henry's fine," he shouts, backing up from the bar, hands in the pockets of his jeans.

And there he is, shuffling his feet backwards, all six feet (plus?) of him, red hair tousled around a silver crown with sapphires (a crown that looks...eerily fitting on him, really, the dark blue of the gems are almost identical to the color of his eyes), wearing a black t-shirt with '2007' emblazoned across the front in silver lettering. Giving a nod to the bartender.

Becoming absolutely, rigidly still as soon as his gaze settles on the two of them.

*Awkward.*

Anne gives a little wave, and Henry smiles.

There's still the raucous sounds of partygoers, but the musician on stage is switching with another. They do a sound-test, and in between the live music, a track plays on the speakers, the noise level's lower than before in the meantime.

Enough so that she hears him, despite the fact that he speaks softly, looking at Anne alone:

"You...came."

"Well," Anne says, tilting her head to the side, tone playful, "I was invited, so...why, was I not supposed to come?"

"No, I just didn't expect-- Seville," Henry says, abruptly, actually (imagine that) noting her presence and existence, "you look nice."

And Anna expects that to be the last of the acknowledgement, his focus to switch right back to her friend (if the past experience has taught her anything, it certainly will), but...

He's staring at *Anna*.

Actually, if she didn't know any better she'd think he was hitting on her, waits for the inevitable turn of the head back but...

*Nope.*

She still hasn't responded, and *did his gaze just-- what the fuck.*

Lingered over her cleavage in the most unsubtle of manners.

*Yup. That...happened.*

"Fuck off, Tudor," Anna says, rolling her eyes.

If he's trying to make Anne jealous, it's a bad move. Anne's not into games, she knows, or any of that Neil Strauss, "negging" bullshit. Mary told Anna that when Anne was interested in a guy, and he so much as flirted with someone else, she backed off immediately. Never fought for any of them if another girl so much as showed interest.

Rendering her seeming sort of still into Henry despite the fiancee factor...somewhat extraordinary.

Still...he hasn't, actually, Anna's noticed. So much as flirted with any girls at Whitehall, besides her
dormmate, that is. Unusual, for him, Mary informed her. Brandon had commented on the strangeness of that occurrence as well: no overnight guests throughout the entirety of November (save Anne herself, which she knew already), or December.

According to Brandon, before that, and freshman year, Henry had never gone a week without sex. How he knows this so intimately she's not sure, perhaps word alone, given that they weren't roommates back then.

"You do, though," he says, coyly, with a shrug.

And here's the thing: like, she knows she looks nice (she's wearing a low-cut, bandage-style dress, her hair down for once, mascara and eyeliner also done for once, since she's sans eyeglasses and, well…it's hard to look bad in a tiara, as it turns out), but Anne looks amazing.

She's wearing a turquoise dress, turtleneck (but not in a nun-like way, for once, given that its sleeveless and short) that hugs every curve paired with white, thigh-high platform boots. It's like…Sabrina the Teenage Witch meets Charlie's Angel and if she had a gun in a holster strapped to her leg under the dress you wouldn't even be that surprised? That kind of amazing.

So what is he even doing?

Anne won't be jealous (she knows Anna would never, because, ew, even if Anne didn't like him herself), just hurt. She hasn't bristled, all that's happened is her expression's gone from playful and teasing to blank, disbelieving, perhaps. This'll push her away, if anything at all.

He is…honestly…the weirdest dude.

Anne gets up from her chair, and Anna follows her line of sight to Jennifer Parker, who's waving her over.

She leaves and Henry takes her previous seat, asks the bartender for a glass of water.

What the fuck in the ever-loving fuck is going on?

"This is a good look," he says, then, laughing, cups her face in his hand (she's too stunned to recoil), brushing his thumb over her cheek, "eyelash, sorry."

He withdraws his hand, blows on his thumb, but there is…no…fucking…eyelash…there.

"You look…different. Where are your glasses?" Henry asks, smirking.

She's not into playing games, or whatever this…is. Not into the hurt look Brandon throws her way (is he catching feelings...for the love of God, please no), ducking his head down, quickly, when he sees that she sees it, and him.

So:

"They're up my ass," Anna says, deadpan, as he chokes, spits out the sip of water he just took, back into his glass, "why?"

He doesn't seem to have an answer for that.

"Anyways," she says, brightly, taking her own glass and lifting it in the 'cheers' salute, "don't touch my face, ever again, because, uh…you don't know me like that. So…peace…the fuck out."
She takes her drink with her as she leaves the bar, downing the rest of it as she walks towards the flower-crown station.

Anna’s not really sure what constitutes a good reason to make a flower-crown, but she hopes making one will distract her and erase the weirdness of all...whatever that was.

Chapter End Notes

the party will be continued next chapter! stay tuned!

thank you for the inspo:


and other whitehall inspired/and other mood boards:


just because ~
Chapter Summary

"Did I ever say quote, I have a crush on you, unquote?"
"Not 'quote unquote', no, but--"
"So. There you go."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Henry pulls the velvet rope over the doorway of the kitchen closed, nodding to a security guard on his way inside.

For a while it's just the thud of plastic bottles thrown in one of the recycling bin, glass placed in another with a clink, more gently, until:

"Is he alright?"

Henry looks up and sees Brandon, arms crossed, side-eyeing the security guard and his inquiry in the doorway.

"Yeah," Henry says, with a shrug, holds his stare as he throws an empty bottle of vodka into the blue bin, (the accompanying clang from the force of the throw earn him an eyebrow crook from Brandon), "he's fine. Let him in."

He breaks his stare as soon as the security guard moves the velvet rope before walking over to the sink.

Henry's leaned over it, is unlocking the window and sliding it open, back to Brandon, when he hears:

"Don't you pay people to do stuff…like this?"

"They have other shit to do," Henry says, shaking his hand, sore from trying to force the screen on the window open, "and best to get a head start on it. Before things get really crazy."

"Oh," he says, nodding, "sure."

"You need something?" Henry asks, leaning against the counter of the sink.

"No," Brandon says, wrinkling his nose, "I just…wondering what that was all about, I guess."

"'That' being…?" Henry asks, crossing his arms.

Brandon touches the bronze crown on his head with shaky hands (why they shake, he's not sure, perhaps the amount he's already imbibed…it's not like he's a small guy or anything, or like he hasn't built something of a tolerance throughout Whitehall and its several parties, but those 'Gryffindor shots' are no fucking joke), adjusts it, slightly. The metal feels cool against the clamminess of his
And there is his friend, standing with what looks like nonchalance but feels like anger. The blue-black sky (the color between civil twilight and moonrise) behind the glass of the window, render him the subject of some Waterhouse painting: the crown, the clenched jaw, the shining blue eyes, chiseled face, rosy cheeks.

It's intimidating, to say the least, although he hasn't found Henry intimidating for a while, not since the soccer training camp they were both enrolled in at Whitehall, summer before their freshman year. When he took up the mantle of power with ease, displayed casual, easy sarcasm but familiarity, a kindness and generosity that was hard to reconcile with his name and wealth.

Brandon had grown up resentful of others that were on the other side of the delineation of the haves and have-nots. They never let him forget which side he was on. He had never met one that hadn't, at any rate.

Even when he drove to pick his mother up from the various estates she worked at, even when the princesses of said estates would emerge from behind their gilded doors and catch his eye…quickly slip their phone numbers, written on slips of paper, through his rolled down window…

Even they wouldn't let him forget, held a certain smugness. Pick me up at school on your motorcycle, yes, let me show my friends how dangerous I am, yes. Holding hands in public was a no, kissing at galas and parties was reserved for behind closed doors, and only when he was working catering besides. Come over, swim with me in my pool, my parents aren't home, yes, meet my parents, no. Come over to my pool, my friends will be there, bring yours, never.

Henry was different. Around his friend, he forgot all the time. He never reminded him, never even came close.

"Anna?" Brandon asks, scratching the nape of his neck.

Henry shrugs, walks over to the island, pulls a case of glass bottle cokes to the edge of it. Opens a drawer on the island, on the side of the kitchen with the sink, separated by the piece of furniture, pulls out a box cutter.

"Well, you were there," he says, twirling the metal tool in his hand.

"What?"

"Nothing," he says, shaking his head, "forget it. It was stupid."

"Why'd you blow me off for two weeks?"

"I told you, I had family stuff."

"That all?"

"No. Look, I invited you, didn't I?" he asks, pushing a hand through his hair.

"Yeah, but--"

"I was mad."

"About fucking what?"

"About stuff I decided…didn't matter so much. In lieu of things to come. So. Don't worry about it."
"You know," Brandon says, as his friend crosses to unhook the velvet rope on the doorway, returning to heft the case of drinks from the island, "when someone tells you 'don't worry about it,' you do the fucking opposite--"

But he's already leaving, striding out, and Brandon feels totally, utterly dismissed.

Dismissed and desperate to fix whatever this is, because the awkwardness of that 'conversation' (if one could call it that, really) has left him feeling imbalanced.

Henry deposits the case of soda onto the floor of the balcony with a thud, next to the open cooler, filled with ice.

He unsheathes the box-cutter from its metal case, feels the satisfactory give of the plastic on top as he slices through it. The resistance of objects meeting force, a visceral pleasure not unlike that of squeezing bubble wrap till it pops.

He thinks of the montage of simple pleasures in the film Amelie, her crack of a spoon against crème brûlée, and smiles, depositing the bottles into the cooler.

"You know, if you're looking to hook up, there are quite a few girls here that actually like you."

Henry laughs, doesn't stop moving drinks, doesn't look up to follow the voice he recognizes well.

"I'm aware," he says.

"I overheard some in the elevator, on the way up here. Ella Carew, and her friends, for starters. But maybe you like a challenge?"

"Not particularly, no," Henry says, "I have enough naturally occurring ones in my life, so… I don't seek more."

Henry pulls out a bottle of coke, frees it off the cap with a mini-bottle-opener on his ring of keys.

"So then your reason for flirting with my friend who obviously, vehemently dislikes you was…?"

Same question in the span of ten minutes. Delightful.

"Maybe," he says, slamming the lid of the cooler shut, "I was just testing to see if you'd care."

"Maybe," Anne mimics, back to him, long hair flowing against the fabric of her dress, shoulders pulled forward and hands on the small of her waist, in a way that lets him know her arms are crossed, "that'd be a shitty thing to do if that's what it was."

"You're right. It would be."

He gets up from his knees, stands and crane his neck, looking at the sky. Smog obscures stars, a typical Hollywood night and view. The air smells of blossoms, and something burning (firecrackers, perhaps, would match the popping he hears).

"I wasn't," he says, walking over to the railing, two feet from her, setting his drink down on it before holding it with both hands, "but…sorry."

Not that it matters.
"Nah, it's good. You got over your crush."

"My crush? On who?"

"On me," Anne says, tone heavy with incredulity.

"Who said I had a crush?"

"Uh…you did."

"No I didn't."

"Okay…sure," she says, smirking.

She turns to face him instead of the view of the horizon, rests her hip against the railing, arm on top of it.

Henry remains standing, squints. His gaze roams over the park, below and across the street, the empty benches.

"Did I ever say quote, I have a crush on you, unquote?"

"Not 'quote unquote', no, but--"

"So. There you go."

"You came to my house."

"I took the train," Henry says, shrugging, "it only took a few hours…it's not like I flew cross-country or something…not like I declared my undying love or some shit. Did I?"

"No, but--"

"Right. No. So…let's not get ahead of ourselves."

Anne can't decide what would be more insulting: him outright pretending it never happened, or downplaying the fact like it did; what he's doing right now.

She considers leaving. Waits for him to.

It's never easy for her to leave, when he's around. Even when she wants to. It's never easy to watch him leave, either. She's not sure which hurts more.

So, she stays with him. Even though he hasn't turned to face her yet, still scanning the park, as if waiting for something to emerge from it.

Henry looks heavenwards, towards the sky, but still not at her.

Their silence doesn't feel uncomfortable to her, strangely enough. But she's tired of it anyways, so tries to think up some small talk to break it.

"What's the deal with the crowns?" she asks, touching the strand of pearls on her head.

Henry grins, moves his stance towards her, mirroring hers, elbow resting against the railing. Facing her, finally.
"Well… I figure everyone wants to feel like royalty. And everyone should get to. Even if it's just for a night."

"And this," she teases, pointing to his own crown, "what, custom-made? To match your eyes?"

"No," he says, rolling his eyes, "I don't know, I just…liked this one."

"Is it heavy? It looks like it is."

"Not as much as you'd think," Henry says, easing it up and off his head, "here, see for yourself."

"What, do you want to trade?" Anne asks, giggling, unclasping the hook on hers.

"Nah. Rubies clash with… y'know," he says, tugging on a lock of his hair, crown in his other hand. He puts it back in both hands before placing it on her head, gently. Her eyes close as he does.

He feels the strangest tingling sensation in his hands.

Finds it difficult to breathe, is overtaken by the image of her (sloe gaze intent on him, silver against her forehead, the metal pale next to the glossy black of her hair, skin the cool radiance of moonlight), is swept away in another, bright and vibrant as his dreams as of late:

He views her from behind a lattice: Anne, exuding triumph and an angelic glow, wearing white and gold… a crown is placed on her head…

The first line of the poem. The strange one, that his grandmother recited with a vacant stare a few days ago, on the morning he awoke with the dreams remembered and visited her, alone:

"The first you give a ring, the second, you give a crown made for a man-- a king…"

"You're right," Anne says, effectively snapping him out of reverie, "it's not as heavy as it looks."

"Keep it. It looks better on you, anyway."

Oh.

She really, really wishes he would stop saying shit like that.

"What's with… the set list?" she asks, nodding towards the sliding glass doors, the stage, the crush of dancers near it.

"Well, it's 'Party like it's 2007'. So… no songs that were after that, obviously, and there's breaks in the live music with recorded stuff, so the artists can take breaks. I managed to get… off the top of my head… All American Rejects, Ashlee Simpson, Lifehouse, Hilary Duff… although she didn't like, 'get it', she wanted to do her new stuff."

"Avril Lavigne?" she asks.

"Ew, no."

"'Ew'?

"All her 2000s hits were emo, I'm not looking to bum people out. Please. It's a party."

"Is it," she teases, eyes wide, "huh. I hadn't noticed."
"Yeah, Boleyn," he says, bumping his shoulder into hers, grabbing his open bottle and taking a swig, "it is."

Is he…for real?

"Okay, Tudor," Anne says, sarcasm imbued in the last word as she punches him on the shoulder.

"Ow," he says, laughing, rubbing the spot she hit, "that hurt."

"No it didn't."

"No," he admits easily, with a shrug and a smile, "it didn't."

"It… didn't?" Anne asks, softly.

Brow furrowed, she fiddles with her folded hands, looking down at them as she fidgets.

He doesn't think they're talking about his shoulder anymore.

"No," Henry answers, equally soft, "it wasn't so…bad."

People start to filter from the living room to the balcony, through the open door. Anne gives him a nod before leaving, moving around the others and going back inside.

Will Compton, Anthony Knivert, and Charles Brandon have been playing a drinking game with a group of sophomore girls at a round table covered in reject flowers from the crown-making station.

When it comes to a group of coeds, though, well…as far as the guys go, *two's a company, three's a crowd* (or it is when one of three is as physically attractive as Brandon, at any rate), so neither Compton nor Knivert voice objection when Brandon abruptly shoots up from the table and leaves.

He pushes through the throng until he reaches Henry, standing in the corner with a guy in a denim jacket, hand on his shoulder.

"No, well you can't drive…no, you can't drive right now, man. I'll show you how you to how use it: here, you don't even need a card, just use the promo code you got on the invite…put your pass-code in for me, it's locked."

Brandon waits, leans, back against the wall, as Henry helps his inebriated guest get sorted and orders the ride for him on his phone.

Once he leaves with a hired employee Henry gestures over, Brandon turns to his friend.

"We need to talk."

"I'm not really in the mood, Brandon--"

"Where's your crown?" he asks, distracted by the absence of it.

"Is that what you needed to talk about, or…?"

"What? No. I want to know why you're…"

*Mad*, he was going to say, but he has a shitty attention span on his best of days, and this isn't one of
those. Nor is he even slightly close to the horizon of sober at the present moment, and the crown of silver and sapphires glints under strobe lights, on the dark head of Anne Boleyn.

Anne Boleyn, currently sitting on the picture throne. Her long, bare legs are crossed, posture perfectly straight, poised upon it like she was fucking born there.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," he snaps, rolling his eyes, and Henry turns to his line of sight, then back to Brandon, frowning.

"Problem?" Henry asks, voice light and sweet.

"No," he says, rubbing a hand over his face, "she's just...annoying. Whatever, it doesn't matter, but why are you mad at--"

"If you liked her, you could've just told me, you know."

"What? Liked...you think I like her," he scoffs, juts his chin towards the throne, gesturing to her, "why?"

"Can't think of any other reason you said what you said to her, so. Correct me if I'm wrong."

Oh, shit.

He was worried it might be that.

"No, it wasn't because I...look, I can see how you'd think that," Brandon says, and somewhat fuzzily, he sort of does (hypothetically, you tell a girl you like that the guy she likes is taken, it'd clear the path or...whatever), "but it wasn't that. I only told her about Katherine because, like...I don't know, man, I thought I was doing you a favor. I mean...you could do better. Honestly, have done better, so--"

"Katherine?" Henry asks, softly, blinking owlishly, as if he just stepped into harsh light, as if Brandon had just said something confusing (which...huh?).

"I know, it was shitty, and I'm sorry, but--"

"You told her...about Katherine."

"Yeah," Brandon says, glaring at the subject matter, tossing her hair till it frames her daintily pointed face, still having her photo taken on the throne (no one taps their feet impatiently, waiting for their turn, as it usually is when someone takes their time, almost everyone is taking a photo of her themselves, actually), "should've known she'd fucking tattle, I guess, but I didn't think she'd have the game to just sit on that for months and then--"

"She didn't," Henry interrupts, eyes bright, "you just did."

Jennifer Parker is extremely bored by the conversation occurring in the group she's ensconced with (and she's drunk, things are supposed to be more entertaining when you're drunk), and is considering deserting the group and getting her face painted instead when she overhears a conversation that's way more interesting.

Some people say they have "gay-dar"(which, ew, no you don't), but Jen has drama-dar. Like, she has a Sense of when things are about to go down in a major way.

And right now, her spidey-senses are tingling into overdrive re: Henry Tudor and Charles Brandon,
the words she can pick out from them, exchanging heated words in a corner:

*Wow, I didn't even think it could be you... even though you were the only person that knew...God, am I a dumbass.* (Tudor)

*Listen, I just don't get what you see in her...like, she's not even that hot* (Brandon...who the hell are they are talking about? Intrigue...)

*Why? Because she wouldn't sleep with you?* (Fucking...savage...Tudor.)

*No, because-- God! You mooning after her was kind of getting pathetic, honestly, like I said, I thought I was doing you a favor, and I'm sorry--*

*How is that doing me a favor, I think I could respect you more if you could come up with a better reason than that--*

*Because she's irritating! And weird, like...who the fuck wears an ankle length skirt and a turtleneck to a college party, in August, in LA, like...high maintenance, and pretentious as shit, like...the fucking necklace she wears? The fuck's that about? Like what does that even mean... ('what does that even mean', Lord, he may be drunker than she is)*

*It stands for her name, I think.* (Tudor...thinks. Oh.)

*Oh. My. God.*

This is going down for real (Tudor's been into her since like, early November, he texted her to find out who Perseverance was and she blew him off because Anne was dating Percy and Tudor's like...a fuck-boy but Anne and Percy broke up shortly thereafter anyways so maybe it wouldn't have made much of a difference anyways? But whatever), and *oh my God* Anne is walking around to meet her with Anna Seville, this is getting realer and realer by the second.

*Can think of a few other things it might stand for* (grumbled, barely discernible, Brandon).

Even the song changes, and it's like the lyrics and the universe know shit's going down, too:

*Oh? Like?* (Tudor)

And now Anna and Anne are in earshot of this conversation, too (although they don't seem to be paying attention to it, don't seem to realize that Shit's Going Down in the same way that she does), have pulled her away from the group to put a flower crown of bluebells around her head.

*Well, 'bitch', for starters--*

Jen hears a dull thud (a sound she recognizes, a punch doesn't sound like it does in the movies, it's a terrible noise, like a watermelon rolling from your grasp and hitting the floor, the resistance of muscle against bone) and spins around to see Brandon cradling his jaw in one hand, mouth agape, Tudor shaking his hand, gaze cool and bemused.

The crowd quiets, from raucous to stunned silence to murmurs, though the music continues.

"You did not," Brandon says, "just hit me."

*I didn't? Huh. Well, I'm certainly willing to give it another go --"*

Brandon pushes him until his friend's back hits a table, covered in discarded Polaroid pictures and
It's a ridiculous sight, but they don't seem to care...Brandon doesn't seem to realize or care that at some point his crown's been knocked off his head during their exchanged punches.

"Give...me...my...fucking...friendship...bracelet...back!" he grunts (they don't seem to care much about holding any semblance of dignity together, either), tugging at the leather band on Tudor's wrist, Tudor pushes his face away as he does.

"No, it was a gift, asshole, do you know how gifts work--"

"Yeah, 'coeur loyal' my fucking ass, I'm taking this the fuck back--"

"I've been nothing," Tudor yells, turning and blocking a blow with his arm, Brandon slammed against the wall, the collar of his shirt now fisted in his hands, "but fucking loyal, you're the one that--"

"Guess what? Guess fucking what," Brandon shouts, shoving an elbow into his shoulder, "I'm the hotter one, yet somehow you still get all the girls, and I've figured out that's just your trust fund--"

"You are not better-looking than me, you stupid fucking--"

"You have a gay mouth, I'm not the only one that's said that, you know--"

"Is that the best you can do, Brandon, really--"

"1.) You're a fucking ginger, 2.) You can barely grow facial hair, 3.) Angelina Jolie called and she wants her pout back--"

"Joke's on you, my 'gay mouth' and I have already given more orgasms to the fairer sex than you will ever elicit in your lifetime, so--"

"Fuck you!"

"Fuck you!"

And those are their parting words: Knivert and Anthony Denny (a Whitehall junior and part of Tudor's inner circle) have finally managed, after several attempts, to wrestle Tudor away from the brawl. Likewise with Compton and Erik Norris (Whitehall sophomore and, likewise) with Brandon.

"Get out," Tudor says, panting, wiping blood from his (to be fair, rather sumptuously large) mouth with the back of his hand, "of my fucking apartment."

"Henry--"

"Door's there," he says, pointing towards the direction of the entrance to his place, "get out. Enjoy your fucking New Year."

"You're an idiot," Anne says, easily, dabbing a cotton pad, soaked in rubbing alcohol on one of the cuts on Henry's face. He flinches, but remains stoic otherwise, has been pretty quiet throughout the tending of his wounds.

The crown is resting on one of the chairs set up on the rooftop, near the open door that leads to the stairwell. Henry's cordoned it off, changed the pass codes on the elevator for it, instructed the
security guards to not give it out to anyone. If anyone complains, tell them there's the balcony and downstairs, and remind them what the swag bag's retailed at, he had instructed one of a seemingly endless supply of employees, before Henry and Anne took the elevator together, alone.

They sit on a picnic blanket; it was already set up when they came up her. Or, he's been sitting, while she's been kneeling and maneuvering around him, squinting and pressing gauze wherever there was blood, holding his chin still.

Fireworks explode against the sky, a kaleidoscope of colors that brightens the kaleidoscope of bruises on his face. Music drifts up the stairwell, faded but hearable, in waves.

She had grabbed her sweater from coat check and then the hand of a rather shell-shocked Henry, without thinking, and he had followed her easily enough. Answered her questions as quickly as she asked them: do you have first aid kit (yes, in the bathroom)/ where is your kitchen/ do you have a freezer/ do you have a bag of frozen peas/ was that really worth getting hurt over? (his answer: 'it wasn't…not worth it') / did he really make you a friendship bracelet? when?

"Why did you hit him in the first place? Like, what made you think that was a good idea--"

"He called you," Henry says, sulkily, still holding a bag of frozen peas to his black eye, "a bad word."

'A bad word', said with all the solemnity of a five year old that would use the very same turn of phrase.

_God._

"Ah, I _did_ catch that," she says, smiling, "figured it was about me, given that it was from him. But… I've been called worse, you know. It wasn't really necessary."

"Who? Who's called you worse?" he demands, heatedly, moves his hand from his face, causing the bag to drop to his knees.

"What?" she asks, laughing, bottling the rubbing alcohol and putting it back in the case, "You want names so you can beat them up, too?"

"Yes."

"Oh my _God,_" Anne mutters, handing him a tinfoil packet of ibuprofen.

Henry takes it with a swig from his water bottle, wincing before capping it.

"What's your resolution?" he asks, idly, standing up as she snaps the plastic kit back together.

"Ah," she says, softly, takes the hand he offers to help her stand, too, "to stay away from you. I'm not a doing a great job, so far. Clearly," she continues, clearing her throat and withdrawing her hand from his.

"Oh," he says, quietly, lashes downcast, tucking the same hand in the pocket of his jeans, "I see."

"Yeah."

"Well…you should probably go in that case," Henry says, pushing the sleeve of his leather jacket up his arm, revealing his watch, "it's a minute or so till midnight."

"I should."
Henry nods, his lips pressed tightly together in a strange smile, gaze fixed above her head.

Voices wind up the stairs, the countdown begins (60...59...58...) and she nods back, turns and walks to the door.

35...34...33...

She turns back around.

Henry stands near the edge of the roof, watching the fireworks, head tilted upwards. Back to her.

30...29...28...

Anne runs, as fast as her party shoes will allow, towards him.

"On second thought," she says, once she's behind him, voice raised to compete with the sounds of entertainment, nearly out of breath, "resolutions are stupid, no?"

He turns around, unblinking, settled into an unrelenting stare: "Anne?"

9...7...8...

Anne puts a hand on his shoulder; more level with his face than she normally would be, wearing boots with a platform, doesn't need to stand on her tippy-toes to slant her mouth over his, she's able to rather easily, in fact.

It's a faint brush, really more a question than a kiss, but his answer is warm and welcoming, braver than hers and twice as insistent. She mirrors it, easily.

7...6...5...

She feels him sigh into her mouth. Her hand is tucked behind his hair, pressed firmly against his neck, the other squeezing his shoulder.

4...3...2...1...

Anne tries to be gentle, (really, she does) knows his mouth is newly bruised, takes fragile little sips from it… but he's not having any of that. Instead, he pulls her closer, his hands on her hips, thumbs digging into her sides while he kisses her with a quiet ferocity. She yields, easily, squeezes his shoulder with one hand, rubs the back of his neck with her other, still cupping it.

Happy New Year! and the sound of whistles and noisemakers, in unison.

It's a weak in the knees kiss (a cliché, one she thought didn't exist, reserved for rom-coms and not applicable to real life, but no, she loses feeling in her knees for real, it's like they're not there), she sways and he seems to realize this, moves his hand from her side, places an arm around the back of her waist, holding her steady.

His hand twines in her hair, his thumb brushing the side of her face. It continues to, the softest whisper of skin against skin as his mouth plays the loudest song against her own, and the thought plays in the back of her mind: that old tale, the person you kiss on midnight on New Year's is the person you end the year with.

And she pulls away, a sob escaping from her mouth, an ugly sound. She covers her mouth with her hand because that's not true, is it? And nothing's actually changed, has it?
Everything is the same: he's still engaged and she still wants to kiss him anyway and she really, really hates herself for wanting to. Nothing's changed at all.

"That didn't happen," she whispers.

He wipes her tears away with the back of his hand, the brush of it so tender that it almost breaks her entirely. His stare, soft and the blue-grey of dreams, unrelenting, the dip of his head.

It's not an answer, just evident disappointment, a touch of understanding, perhaps, in the gentleness of the gesture: the wiping away of tears, spilling more quickly than he can collect. Pity or sympathy, maybe, in his frown, is what she thinks at first; but when Henry says, please, don't cry, his voice breaks and she's not really sure if he's asking for her or for him.

She needs an answer, confirmation that he heard, that he understands.

"That didn't happen," Anne says, firmer, "okay?"

"Okay," he says, softly, hanging his head.

The sound of people shouting and cheering hurts, their happiness and celebration feels like a knife.

Anne starts to back away, I'll see you at school, is what she says, as she tugs the sleeves of her sweater over her hands. I guess...bye, is the last thing she says (lamely, she thinks, she's not sure if it was yeah, bye actually or bye, I guess; but it doesn't really matter either way), before she turns and leaves.

---

January 1, 2017, After Midnight, New Year's Day

The clod of her boots sound against the pavement, echoing behind her as she disappears from view, through the open doorway and down the steps.

"Happy new year," Henry says, pulling a flask out of the inner pocket of his jacket, "to me."

The whiskey burns on its way down (although, not as much as she did).

He fumbles with a pack and lighter for a few moments, head ducked as he places a cigarette in between chapped lips.

"This yours?"

Henry tilts his gaze, slightly upwards, not all the way. Enough to see a hand, manicured, smooth and pale and freckled, holding the crown Anne left behind (add it to a list of rejected gifts, behind the locket).

He pulls himself up to his full height, removes the cigarette, throws it on the ground on reactive instinct (she hates it when he smokes).

"Katherine?"

Chapter End Notes
was the friendship bracelet somewhat perhaps inspired by That Scene in 21 Jump Street?
probably.
'Of course', she had said, easily, as if what she really meant was 'of course two circles, spheres of lives intersect in ways you don't realize or consider'.

Chapter Notes

In {Catherine's} youth she was described as "the most beautiful creature in the world" [78] and that there was "nothing lacking in her that the most beautiful girl should have." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_of_Aragon

New Year's Eve 2016, before midnight

"Sweetheart! Oh, yes, of course I remember you…"

Brandon shifts his gaze from the television screen in the lobby of York Place to the voice. It's a female security guard, hugging what looks like a…child?

No, just kidding, it's a young woman, probably in her twenties, he reckons, by a quick view of her facial profile, just hella short.

He squints, makes out waves a color somewhere between reddish gold and auburn that spill down to the small of a slender back.

"I wanted to surprise him…"

"Oh, well wait down here, I'll have someone get him for you--"

"No, then it wouldn't be a surprise!"

"I think he's on the roof, I haven't received a text for the code for the floor, though…why don't you wait here while I get it?"

"Okay!"

Brandon turns back to the television, not wanting to be caught staring. She sits down on the couch in front of him, looking at her phone.

Notices her in his peripheral, anyways, sneaks glances throughout her preoccupation: the pale green dress with the white collar, the cross necklace, the soft ends of her hair winding down past her chest, shining. She sits up straight, posture perfect, except she looks so comfortable and at ease with her shoulders back that it's almost…queenly. The vibrant color of her hair puts the flames behind the glass screen of the gas fireplace behind her to shame.

She's vaguely familiar to him, in a way he can't really place-- a model, maybe? She's certainly pretty
enough to be one; her skin so fair and clear it almost glows, freckles placed like stars over the expanse of it.

She's so beautiful, in fact, that under other (soberer) circumstances, he'd probably be too intimidated to talk to her (and that's rare, for him). But, carpe diem and liquid courage has its upside, he supposes, speaking before that thought really finishes its trajectory:

“Y’know,” Brandon says, tapping a finger on the tip of his nose, and then pointing it at her, “you are hotter than any,” he then points it at the ceiling, though what he means is the top floor of the building (how would she know that? eh…whatever), “of the girls, up there.”

The red-haired girl lifts her gaze from her phone, held out in front of her (she didn't bend or hunch at all to look at it, rather reads it like a book in front of her face), to Brandon. She squints at him, expression incredulous.

“You’re drunk and you have a black eye,” she responds (not unkindly, strangely enough, her tone is more matter-of-fact, a faint foreign accent to her voice, so light that most would probably miss it but Brandon grew up in a Spanish speaking household and as such he'd recognize those rolled R’s anywhere, subtle or not, hidden as they are within the crispness of English diction or no), “you’re not exactly my idea of a catch.”

“Psssh…no I don’t.”

“You do. And are you seriously– hitting me?”

“Hitting you? No, I’m not ‘hitting you’,” he drawls, touching the bruise under his eye tenderly, “honestly, why would you…say such a thing.”

“No, the…the American expression. Are you– 'hitting me'…it means–”

“Do you mean ‘kidding you’?”

“No…well, that too, but it means, to flirt?”

“Oooh. 'Hitting on you'?”

“Yes, that,” she says, crossing her arms.

“Yes,” Brandon says emphatically, nodding, “that I am most definitely doing.”

“Well,” she says, displaying her left hand, the diamond on the ring sparkling, huge, big enough to knock a man out, probably, “you shouldn’t. I’m engaged.”

"Aren't you a little young to be engaged?"

"I'm twenty-three. Aren't you a little young to be inebriated?"

"No," Brandon says, rolling his eyes because she's boring and this is boring and he's over it.

"No? Isn't the legal drinking age here 21?"

"How do you know I'm not twenty--"

"Immaturity when faced with truth," she says, at the same time her phone starts buzzing, then emits a high-pitched, robotic voice:
"Isabella…Aragon…calling. Isa--"

The girl presses the left bottom corner of her screen (‘ignore’), phone now on her lap, without breaking her stare, cool and green as a moth's wings.

Aragon.

"Oh, shit. You're her."

"Pardon?" she asks, brow knit together.

I haven't received a text code for the floor.

"Katherine, right?" he asks, although, upward inflection aside, it's not really a question because he's seen unexpected pictures. Knows it's her, only didn’t recognize her out of context, couldn't piece together the unexpected appearance.

She's separate but integral, part of his friend's life that he'll get to, some day, he knows, but removed by thousands of miles. The connection between them wedged by Henry's various flings, like some sort of fucked-up conga line across the country and the Atlantic that she's supposedly somehow okay with.

Except that she's not removed, she's here and it's the last thing he'd ever expect, and he'd hazard a guess that when Henry sees her it'll be even more so for him.

"Yes. How did you--"

"The pass code to the roof was Henry's birthday," Brandon interrupts, showing her the back of his hand, covered in the stamp of numbers, "so, if he changed it, I'd bet you anything he changed it to…"

"His mom's," they say, in unintended unison, both startling when they do.

"Yeah," Katherine says, eyes narrowed.

"Yeah," he mimics, dragging the syllable out.

She smiles, expression a tad softer than before. Taps the pearly ends of her manicured fingers against each other as she considers him, mouth quirked to the side.

"You're Charles, then, I assume?"

"No, Brandon, but how--"

"He's talked about you, of course," Katherine says, with a shrug, "besides, you'd have to be his best friend, to know such a thing so instinctively. And…isn't that your last name?"

Of course, she had said, easily, as if what she really meant was of course two circles, spheres of lives intersect in ways you don't realize or consider.

"It's what I go by. When did he--"

"Are we buddies? 'Bro's'?"
The sheer incongruity of such an improper word falling from such a prim mouth makes him laugh, though he tries to keep it to a low chuckle when he sees her scowl.

"Ah, sorry I don't follow--"

"Are we on a football team together, hmm? Teammates?"

"No?"

"Will you be calling me 'Aragon'?"

"No, why would I--"

"Great. Then I'll stick with your Christian name, I think," she says, scathingly, before bending her head down to unclasp the front of her purse (a pomegranate emblem is what holds it together, split into two red halves as she rummages through it).

"O...kay."

Brandon can tell it's not exactly something that's up for debate, so he just...leaves it at that.

"You hurt his feelings, you know," Katherine says, casually, eyes on her compact mirror as she pats powder on her button nose.

"What? When?"

"When he asked if you wanted to hang out last summer and you said no. He was very disappointed."

He'd felt too embarrassed by the invitation to say yes, or rather too proud to say that he couldn't afford a ticket. Made an excuse, said he should stay in Texas, visit with his family while he could before sophomore year started.

_You sure? Not even for a couple days? Doesn't have to be a week_, Henry had said.

_Nah, I better not. Sorry._

_I'll get you a ticket, of course. Did I not say that? It's no problem._

_No, it's not about the money, I can swing that, I just..._

_I can drive there and pick you up! Summers are for road trips, after all._

_I don't want you to see where I live! Just fucking drop it! Fuck!_

Brandon hadn't said that last bit, of course, but was tempted to scream it into the receiver of his phone at that point in the conversation.

_In any case, he'd made some other excuse for that one, too, although right now he can't remember how or what. Maybe he'd pressed the family thing again?_  

_Well, whatever it was...he hadn't thought Henry would care, much. They were similar in short attention spans, and Henry went through a linear list of things to do quickly, usually not even pausing for breath in between the bullet points. If something didn't work out, well, then, on to the next._

_Such was the discrepancy between them...the very reason he admired and tried to emulate and also_
kind of hated Henry was this: he never took anything personally.

Henry was polite to girls on the rare occasions he was rejected, on the rare occasions the girl was the one to end a liaison. Knew when to back off, never persevered to continue it. Even if Brandon hadn't liked a girl that much in the first place, he was still annoyed when the same things happened to him. He could never manage to muster politeness, much less friendliness, up, even through gritted teeth. Couldn't let the rejection go, picked at the wound until it festered (fucking tease...you're not even that hot...I was the one doing you a favor...bitch).

Could't let go of things he didn't care about, while things he did care about slipped all too easily from his grasp...

Anna and her crossed arms and Brandon's quick, needy gesture, jutting his chin towards the door while Anne and Henry had their backs turned away from them, she pulling him by the hand and away from the fray...Anna's equally quick one, a shake of the head, mouthing the word 'no', hazel eyes wide and sad before she left the fray, too...

It hadn't bothered him that much, her not wanting to be seen with him, banning PDA...he'd felt offended at not wanting to be shown off on a shallow level, mainly. At first the request had stung a little, hit a little too close to home and his history of hooking up with girls of the elite and being made a secret, again and again.

But, Brandon came to the realization that it had nothing to do with not wanting to be seen with him because of class. She legitimately didn't want to be seen with him because of his personality. Despite his appearance.

And that...struck him as pretty fucking hilarious, actually.

Although less so, lately.

"That's how I knew you were important to him," Katherine continues, snapping him out of his reverie with the snap of her compact case, sliding it back inside her purse, "because he was hurt."

He's not really sure what to do...apologize? She's looking at him all expectant-like, but Brandon doesn't have a clue what it is she expects, so he just shrugs.

"Except," she says, gaze sweeping over his face (a slow study rather than a quick one); he bristles as he tries to bear the weight of her obvious scrutiny, "he's up there, and you're down here...and you look like...that. So. Maybe he's the one that hurt you, this time?"

"Something like that."

"Why did he?"

"Because he's a dick."

Katherine throws her head back and laughs, claps her hands together in unabashed delight. It's almost childlike, her reaction, the way she giggles against clasped hands at his remark. Almost as if she's so sheltered that the use of coarse language shocks and amuses her in a way in doesn't for most their age.

Or, maybe she just thinks it's true.

"He does things on impulse sometimes, yeah," she admits, pushing her hair behind her left ear, revealing a diamond, cross-shaped earring as she does, "but never without reason. Do you know why
he…caused *that*?

Katherine gestures to the black eye. Brandon grimaces before trying to school his face into something more stoic than self-pitying. Responds with nothing but silence, until she shrugs and speaks again, hoisting the strap of her purse over her shoulder:

"Well, you should ask him. For the reason. Because with him…it's not always what you think it is."

"Maybe you're making him more complex than he is," Brandon says, twirling his lighter through his hand, watching her as she gets up from the couch.

"Trust me," Katherine says, ruffling the top of his hair before she walks to the elevators, "I've known him for longer than you have."

"Did you just *touch,*" he calls out, smoothing his dark strands back, flat onto his head, "my hair?"

"Yes!" she yells back, pushing the button for the elevator and looking up at the lit up arrows overhead the top of it.

"So I can touch yours, then--"

"Touch my hair and I kill you. Happy New Year!"

---

**New Year's Day 2017, after midnight**

Anne pushes through the crowd in the apartment once she's made her way down the stairs, trying to get to the coat and bag checking station. She's ready to grab her purse and get out of here, but she stumbles and feels her head knock into something solid, *someone,* instead.

"Sorry!" she yelps, rubbing her temple as she straightens herself, vision blurred by tears, she brushes them aside, is about the maneuver around whatever person was unfortunate enough to happen upon her path.

"It's alright…hey, are you okay?" the person asks, sounding concerned (girl, from the voice, like wind chimes, the long tresses and dress that slowly comes into focus as she blinks).

The girl tucks her hair behind one of her ears and the diamond ring on her left hand catches the light, glinting.

A diamond…*big enough to sink the Titanic.*

"Okay, I found something really interesting…back in August, she posted engagement photos. One photo of him kissing her cheek, another one of this, like, ridiculous, could-sink-the-Titanic ring, and an announcement. But they were deleted on the same day they were posted."

Her heart drops to her stomach as she takes in the rest of the familiar features, the entirety of Katherine's beauty, the poet-inspiring kind.

"I'm fine," says the brunette girl, with a shrug, golden tears leaking down her face like some kind of Greek myth (although, Katherine realizes that's probably the makeup, colored eyeliner, some of which still remains on the top of her eyelids).

"You sure?" Katherine asks.
The girl seems elfin, almost, physically, in the harshly defined cheekbones and almost-black eyes. But there's something fae-like about her; something impossible to pin down or define about her in her very aura, too.

"Yeah, sorry," she mutters, turns to the table they stand next to, pushes a card towards the coat check girl, gaze downcast. 

*She doesn't seem fine,* but a girl that must be her friend has sidled up to her, is rubbing her arm and speaking in soothing tones.

So she figures that's her cue to leave, that the friend can probably take it from here better than she'd be able to. And leave she does: the security guard in front of the door to the stairwell recognizes her from Henry's summer parties, much as she expected. They open it for her, and she walks up.

---

**New Year's Day 2017, after midnight, Rooftop of York Place**

Katherine brushes his bottom lip with the back of her thumb, which has, in the past, always been a prologue to a kiss. With this in mind, Henry jerks backwards, flinching from her. The reaction's automatic, he didn't mean to do it, and he's sure it looks harsher than what he feels towards her by the way she bristles in response to it.

She pulls her hand away from his face, slowly, places it flat on her stomach. It displays her engagement ring, bright and sparkling against the tiered waist of her dress.

"Nice greeting," Katherine says, coolly.

"Sorry, just," he stammers, pointing to the cut above his lip, "I can't, it's still tender. It hurts."

It's not really that. It's more that the idea of Katherine putting her mouth where Anne's was mere minutes ago causes immediate recoil (he still tastes cherries, for God's sake); makes his brain feel like it's on the verge of explosion, it would be…disrespectful, to both of them, or something (right? to not know? such an immediate chain, to not know what had just happened before) and it's too much, it's *all too much.*

"Oh. Lightly, then," she says, stepping forward, then her breath warm on his cheek before she kisses it gently, feather-soft.

The gesture comforts him, its familiarity and sweetness like a salve to the sting of earlier moments *(that didn't happen,* Anne said, but if it hadn't he would've let Katherine kiss him, easily, wouldn't have immediately hurt her feelings). He feels his mind unwind as she takes his hand in hers, asks him if there's somewhere they can sit.

Henry nods, and leads her to a spot where they can: on a chaise lounge surrounded by potted plants. They settle in together with ease, he puts a careful arm around her shoulders and she rests against him, closes her eyes.

"You smell nice," he says.

"What?" she asks, laughing.

"Like pomegranates."

"I smell like airplane. Shut up."
"Didn't know airplane had a smell."

"It does," she says, he hears the vowel stretch on the last word by her yawn, "even in first-class."

Henry plays with a lock of her hair, incandescent in between his fingers, fingers which are almost wan in comparison (even his hands look tired, how is that possible?).

"I missed you," Katherine whispers, "did you miss me?"

It's vulnerable of her to do so, not just by the nature of the question but because he knows she waited to say it until she couldn't see his face.

He hasn't asked why she's here, but he supposes that's her answer to that question anyways.

"I missed you," he answers, easily, "very much."

He feels no guilt for saying it, because it's the truth: dreaming of someone else didn't stop him from missing her.

Usually he feels happy around her, and it's easy to spend time with her. She's easy to love. So easy, in fact, that sometimes he forgets they're to be lovers instead of friends. But then, that line's supposedly easy to blur. Maybe it blurs both ways, but usually the warmth feels more like friendship than anything else.

Kisses sweet but not passionate, embraces likewise. Their embraces are never tight, they treat the other like they're made of glass. It's a fragility neither is willing to break, among touches, anyway: they exchange barbs and give each other shit with the best of them, not unlike the camaraderie he has with Brandon.

Had with Brandon, he corrects himself, sternly, but then, no, that doesn't seem right, either.

Has with Brandon?

Fuck if I know.

"I have a plan," she says, "or, an idea. For us. I'll tell you what it is…later. When…less jet-lag."

"Tomorrow?"

"Don't you have to clean up after your party? Tomorrow? Will you even be awake?"

"I should be awake by noon," he quips, kissing the top of her head, "but you can come over anytime."

---

**December 27, 2016, Tuesday, 1:00 AM, apartment of Elizabeth Woodville (six days before)**

“I see…dark hair…a falcon…”

Henry resists the urge to roll his eyes, his grandmother’s hands holding his across the table. He only agreed to this to humor her; he believes in the occult no more than he believes in the Tooth Fairy.

So he had a weird dream. So he woke up and didn’t forget it. He shouldn’t have come here; it was an overreaction, his chest pounding from adrenaline when he realized the spoken words in the dream were the same as the picture Warbeck had given him. But, really, if he dreamt the words it's only because he read them today (destiny, now awoken) and they probably embedded in his subconscious
or some other such psycho babble nonsense….

“The letter B…”

_Huh…that’s weird. Still, it doesn’t necessarily mean…_

“…B, in gold, hanging from a necklace…”

_…what?

“…on a rather pretty neck, actually– oh!”_

Elizabeth gasps and yanks her hands from his as if she’s been scalded, blue eyes suddenly bright and _wild_ with– _terror? What does she have to be afraid of?_

"Grand-mère? Are you alright?"

She walks towards him, grasps his hands again, over the table, kneeling. Scrutinizes him, her brow furrowed.

"I don't understand," she whispers, "I don't see that in you. Anywhere, at all."

Elizabeth squeezes her eyes shut as she squeezes his hands and _is this what Alzheimer's is like or…?_

"It's not coming to me," she snaps, impatiently, pushes his hands aside, "do you…do you have a pen, Henry, something else is…"

"Uh," he says, brushing the sides of his coat pockets, feels a lighter and his wallet before pulling one out, "yeah, here…"

She takes it from him and uncaps it, sits down in the chair across from him. Rummages around the table before her hand lands on a receipt, she flips it over and begins to write, reciting as her pen moves, tonelessly:

_"The first you give a ring, the second, you give a crown made for a man-- a king."

_You destroy the one you love the most and that; in turn, destroys you.

_And when this he knew, the heart of the lion died, and the falcon: she flew.

_The cub survives, then thrives, and thrives: let gold light sing."

"
Chapter Summary

Holding a corner of his heart, as it probably always will.

Chapter Notes

kind of a short chapter but...i wanted an update! ⭐‿‿❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

January 1, 2017 (New Year's Day) 1:04 PM, York Place Apartments

Katherine's back rests against the wall. A small bed-in-breakfast tray is propped up on its legs, in between she and Henry. They sit atop padded cushions on the floor as people clean up the remnants of the party. The glitter is what remains the most persistent, it seems, even as it's swept up and put into Ziploc bags like crime scene DNA.

She fiddles with the paper tag that hangs from the string on the side of her cup of tea, not knowing how to begin what she came here to say. Eventually the silence between them becomes uncomfortable enough that she decides maybe there is no 'right' way to begin, so she just says what's on her mind instead:

"Do you remember what it was like to be without...the pressure we're under?"

Henry turns his head to look at her, a single eyebrow hooked upwards over the rim of his cup of coffee as he drinks.

"Alright," she says, laughing, holding a hand out, "I don't mean the pressure in general. That's always going to be with us. I know, always has been with..."

"People like us?" he offers, quietly.

"Families like ours," she says, wryly.

"Legacies to maintain," he says, smirking, matching her wryness.

"Expectations to meet."

"Bullshit to carry."

"Right," Katherine says, then whispers as if this a secret to share, "but specifically, I meant...you know, when we started spending time together. At first, that first summer we did. Do you remember?"

"Yes, of course."
The recollection is faded, but there, still. Holding a corner of his heart, as it probably always will.

"I liked that," she says, resting her head against the flat of the wall.

This is where he always gets stuck. He'll notice things about her, like right now, the side ponytail her hair's in, a straight line down the front of her white dress. He can imagine playing with her hair, but can't picture sliding off the hair band. Appreciates the way the fabric of it hugs the curve of her chest, but can't imagine easing one of the pearly buttons that hold it together.

*Not that it'd be an appropriate moment to do so,* given both the present company and the reality that the moment is too emotionally intimate for any sort of physicality, but regardless: he's never dreamed or daydreamed of any undress.

So she's lovely and pristine, as usual, while he looks like garbage, he's sure. There's the hangover effect, of course, but that coupled with the dark circles that occur after a few nights in a row where the minutes tossing and turning exceed the minutes spent asleep = *not a good look.* His clothes are clean, but that's about all the good that can be said for them. His blue sweater is worn threadbare, with long sleeves and hipster-esque holes on the ends. He keeps poking his thumbs through them, through his nerves, in and out; rabbits out of the hats of magic tricks. The jeans he's wearing have seen better days; he thinks he bought them in high school (they don't even cover his ankles when he stands) and packed them accidentally last summer instead of throwing them out.

"I liked that, too."

He gets the inkling that this is the sort of moment where he should hold her hand, which curls at her side. But somehow the partition between them, small as it is, feels like a great distance. Too great to breach.

"But then my parents pushed me to spend more time with you. And suddenly…I liked it a little less. I thought that maybe it was like that for you, too."

He nods, because her truth is one that rings familiar to him.

"So…I think we should be friends again," Katherine says.

A wave of intense nausea sweeps over him, another of dizziness comes next… he squeezes his eyes shut against it.

That's what hope, hope and possibility is beginning to feel like: nausea. A sickness for which there is no cure.

Hope is more dangerous, more powerful than anything, he's discovered. More than curses, or promises, or prophecies. More than his own resolve and resistance, *that's for sure.*

"No, wait," she coos, he hears the rustling of her dress, "that's not what I meant…*Henry,* I wasn't finished. Let me explain."

He hears her sit next to him, feels her hand brush against his shoulder. Opens his eyes and finds hers as his vision clears, kind and warm.

And as the kindness and warmth from her eyes hold him steady, he's violently aware of how little he deserves either of those things from her. She's assumed the intensity of his reaction to her words is pain and it *is* but… *not in the way she thinks.*

"I'm saying that…we just forget that we're engaged for a while, maybe? Or *try* to forget, I know it'll
probably be in the back of our minds no matter what we do. And be friends. Build to it, on our own, I thought maybe that would stop us from feeling so…”

"Pressed?" he asks, pressing his upper lip to his lower, cracked and dry, against each other.

"Yes. I've been thinking about it, ever since your text about how…you're not in love."

She's omitted her part in that, curiously enough. He's reread the conversation, more than a few times, since its beginning (Are you in love with me? I don't know).

"Friends, though," Katherine says, slipping her engagement ring off her finger, "fall in love all the time, don't they?"

"They do," he says, cautiously, enraptured by the movement of her hands. He follows them, when she places the ring on her lap, and when they move to the back of her neck and she unclasps her necklace with the crucifix, slips the ring onto the chain.

"So," she says, with a shrug, as she slides the necklace, its crucifix and new addition, back under the scooped curve of her dress, "maybe if we stop worrying about getting there so much we'll just…get there. On our own. I figure it's worth a shot."

"And it's hard to get there with…distance," Henry says, nodding, "I get that. Is that why you're here?"

"Yes. And because I missed you."

"I'm glad you're here. I missed you, too."

"Well, I have to try. And I have to be here to try. And I have to..."

She pauses, face pensive as she glances upwards, before settling back on him. Her thumb brushes against the crucifix, which she's pulled out, as she speaks:

"I have to believe that God wants what's for best for us. That when He pushes you towards someone, it's for a reason. Even if we don't know what it is. Regardless if that person leaves or stays."

Henry's thoughts drift to Arthur. It's the first person he can recall who left him of his own volition. There's his grandmother, too, of course, and the soft and strange and distant memory that holds, the last time he saw her before December was the reception of his mother's funeral.

And perhaps, before that, there's his father's closed door, the ignored knocks Henry left, desperation swelling in his chest like a balloon until it popped and left numbness in its wake. He'd knock until Arthur pulled him away with soothing words, tugging him away with an arm around his waist. If Arthur wasn't there, he'd knock until he slid down the length of the door on the other side of it, in the hallway, or the wall next to it, and wait.

Wait with hands clasped in prayer, or arms held tight around his knees or waist, rocking back and forth. Wait with angry tears. Wait until he fell asleep. Sometimes he'd wake up in his own bed (put there by someone….Arthur of Esperanza, probably, if he had to hazard a guess), others he'd wake up on the floor, with a sore back.

Eventually he stopped trying. Stopped knocking. Stopped waiting.

There was also the way Henry the I would walk away from questions he didn't like, and as Henry
tallies all these recollections up he supposes there's more than one way to leave someone. **A myriad of ways to leave, a myriad of effects the leaving causes, rippling outwards in an immeasurable circle, widening and widening.** Touching far more people than the leaver ever realizes, but that the left know all too well.____

* _A butterfly flaps its wings; and someone drowns._

"I'd like to believe that," Henry says.

"Then what's stopping you?" Katherine asks, nudging his shoulder with hers.

He's startled by the touch, looks down and sees that the tray is pushed away, that they sit closer together now. She must have done so during his reverie without his notice, or *maybe I did*, he feels such a disconnect between dreams and reality these days that it's hard to know.

Time has felt fractured to him lately, moments piecing together in a crooked line. Moments have been like mismatched puzzle pieces frayed at the edges; overlapping each other and *almost* fitting but not quite.

"The fact that God fucks up all the time."

Henry had fallen asleep at eleven years old and woken up to a world shattered. Slept soundly while the person he loved most in the world died.

* Catholics hate God and then atone for that very fact, right?*

He'd asked the question at his last confessional and the priest had laughed at his bluntness.

* _Hating God is more common that most think…even among the Catholic, yes. Perhaps it is why confessionals were created. But, my child…God loves you, even if you hate Him._

* Well, He has a funny way of showing it.*

"Yes," she says, with a shrug, "but then…so do we."

"True…not you, though," he says, laughing, still somewhat shocked by her easy agreement of his earlier assertion.

"What do you mean?"

He crosses his arms, annoyed by her request to elaborate. Because, *really*? Henry can't see how she needs an explanation.

This is Katherine Aragon, after all, who does everything by the book. *Hell, she practically wrote the goddamned book._ A dutiful princess who has never even chanced rebellion, all her choices perfect as her handwriting: never smudged, elegantly legible letters always between the lines. Katherine, who reserves the word 'fuck' for the most sporadic of occasions, *but has never actually fucked up herself._

And, so he scoffs:

"When have *you* ever fucked up?"

"Plenty of times."

"Oh? Name one."
Her bottom lip juts out and she nods, slowly, rises from her seat on the floor in a kneel and grabs her purse.

"What are you doing--"

"Leaving, fuck you very much," Katherine says, tonelessly, as she stands.

*Occasions like this one, apparently.*

Except it's not the front door she storms out of, not the front door's handle she yanks open, but rather the doorknob of the door that leads to the stairway that leads to the roof. Everyone else that's been intent on clean-up (familiar and accepting as they are of the way the incredibly wealthy pour their hearts out in high volumes as if *they're* nonexistent) turn to watch her, the few that are near the doorway part for Katherine's strides towards it.

And stay parted (smirking at each other with glittering eyes, anticipating the allowance of gossip once they're both gone) as Henry follows her with murmured apologies (*pardon me, excuse me, sorry*) cast their way.

---

**From: Anna Seville**

**To: Anne Boleyn**

**Sent January 1, 2017, 2:00 PM**

Honestly? She's not even that hot.

---

**From: Anne Boleyn**

**To: Anna Seville**

If you're talking about who I think you're talking about…don't be fake.

---

**From: Anna**

Ugh, fine, whatever. They're both redheads, though. They look weird together.

---

Anne winces at the reminder of last night (*or, technically this morning*). She and Anna had left shortly after she…‘met’ (not really, *saw and knew with no introduction is probably not meeting in the traditional sense of the world*, but Anne can't think of another one) Katherine, waited for an Uber across the street from *York Place Apartments*, on a bench.

Anna had started talking faster, rambled about photos she had taken at the party, all but shoving her phone in Anne's face. The attempt at distraction hadn't worked: she had still seen them, holding hands on the other side of the street.

She breaks the sugar packet over the cup of coffee she's ordered at Crave café with such force that grains explode, several missing the drink and raining on the table instead.

Anne sighs, stirring her drink with a spoon, before responding to her friend.

---

**From: Anne**
Meaning?

From: Anna

Like...they look related.

From: Anne

St-aahp. You're just trying to make me feel better.

From: Anna

Maybe. Is it working?

From: Anne

...kinda.

From: Anna

They probably are. Cousins, or something. You know rich people...all about keeping it in the fam.

From: Anne

Oh my God...Anna...

From: Anna

What?

From: Anne

I almost spit out my coffee!

From: Anna

Preserving the bloodline and whatnot...

From: Anne

Stopp, omg...and anyways, I'm pretty sure that sort of thing was left in the Middle Ages. With the monarchy, etc.

From: Anna

There are still monarchies!

From: Anne

Just figurehead ones.

From: Anna

Well, who knows. Given that they're trying to impeach the Pres, maybe that'll make a comeback here.
From: Anne

Given the tumultuous 2016 election, I almost expected impeachment, honestly. A monarchy, tho…

From: Anna

Run by our lord and savior Beyoncé…who people already call queen…

From: Anne

If Trump could run, why not Beyoncé?

From: Anna

Shit, I'm starting a petition rn.

From: Anne

You are not.

From: Anna

I totally am. I'll send you the link! ♥

Chapter End Notes

aaah, i know that was weird, that I left the conversation between them unfinished. i wanted to leave it for another chapter, though. and balance something on the heavier side with something on the lighter side.

moodboards i've made for the verse, and other fics, here:

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148623054177/hal-who-is-sensitive-intelligent-loud-and

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148612444242/no-offense-their-driver-says-suddenly-and-all

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148611878877/mary-is-really-not-a-morning-person-anne-is-once


http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148565283057/whatever-im-burning-all-of-your-turtlenecks-the


http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148521132700/when-life-bottoms-out-the-tudors-
bounce-back-no

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148458118347/what-is-the-basis-for-this-argument-poor-word

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148509367797/she-wonders-if-hes-saved-french-phrases

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148112867384/on-the-night-they-sit-on-the-balcony-together-the

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148407898142/her-brother-hal-henry-tudor-the-ii-twenty-years

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148365329502/elizabeth-york-her-babies-modern-tudors-au

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148361211552/he-could-tell-her-that-a-week-after-her-mother-had

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148479907292/pretentiousness-suits-her-though-and-the-b-is

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/148459720132/margaret-levels-him-with-a-steely-gaze-singular-to

if you have any requests for them if you follow me on tumblr, let me know! i love making them. i have a few queued and a few in drafts, including Elizabeth Blount's. trying to think of quotes to accompany them with, so if you have any faves, let me know!

I didn't mention WHO the president is because we Don't Know yet...but I might add it in later! That would be Wild tbh.
three summers

Chapter Summary

"We are so very much alike, you and I. Or, I should say: we started out very much alike."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

January 1, 2017 (New Year's Day), York Place Apartments (Roof)

Katherine sits at the infinity pool, shoes already pulled off, her feet in the water.

"So, 'fuck me', huh?"

She ignores Henry, but when Katherine ignores you it's like a kind of art: she does it with grace and unspoken yet clear words. In this particular instance, in a manner than rings familiar to him, she turns her head away from where he stands, as if his voice is a breeze she doesn't care for.

"Do you want me to leave?" Henry asks.

Katherine clacks her tongue against the roof of her mouth, a sound that grates like nails on a chalkboard.

Henry sighs, bends to take his own shoes and socks off, tossing them near the chaise lounge. He sits next to her, rolling the ends of his jeans up before putting his legs in.

She scoots away from him, causing ripples on the surface.

"Your feet," she says, looking straight ahead, "are disgusting."

"Thank you."

Henry leans towards the water, dipping his hand in. Curving his hand to the shape of a 'c', he pushes his hand, roughly, splashing her from the side.

She gasps, paws at the splotch of dampness now on the front of her dress.

"Do you want to die today, Henry?" Katherine asks, finally turning to look at him (well, to glare at him, of course, but still...success).

"If you want me to die," Henry says, pulling his sweater up and over his head, "you're going to have to kill me yourself."

"You're not worth the effort."

"Interesting," he says, hoisting himself into the water, cool and bracing through his tee-shirt, "and why's that?"

He stands, feet on the surface of the pool, water only up to his waist, eyebrows raised.
Katherine kicks, hard, against the water, droplets of it spray his face.

"Already wet, princess," he drawls, hands on hips, "Why are you mad?"

"Some things are private," she snaps, "alright?"

"Okay…fine."

"I respect that. You don't, apparently."

"You respected…what?"

Katherine sniffs, mouth in a firm line as she loosens the elastic from her hair.

"Katherine? You respected what? What does that mean?"

Henry takes advantage of her turned line of vision (chin pointed away from him, again), splashing her.

"Stop!" she shrieks, kicking water back.

"I have contacts, Katherine! Stop kicking chlorinated water at my fucking face--"

"Well, close your eyes! And stop--"

"I'll stop splashing when you answer my question, I am trying to have a mature discussion with- -goddamn it, Katherine," he yells, spitting out a splash that ended up in his mouth, mid-speech, "that was gross, oh my God."

"Don't," she says, slipping into the water herself, "fucking swear."

"I'll stop swearing," Henry says, ducking his head from another splash as she inches towards him, "when you tell me what the fuck you're talking about--what are you doing?"

What she is doing, apparently, is some sort of ambush. After disappearing from his sight with like, what can only be described as ninja speed, her legs are now wound around his torso from his back, arms around his neck.

"We're not playing chicken, there's no one here to play against--"

"September was good!" she yells.

He freezes, trying to keep his back straight so as not to drop her, his fingers interlocked behind her so that she doesn't fall; an effective piggyback.

"October was good! We talked every other day, you even had a trial run on fidelity," she whispers, now, close to his ear, "that made me…that buoyed me, honestly, that gave me faith that you could do it, even if I wasn't there--"

"Then what's the problem, I don't--"

"And I'm not always going to be there when we're married, and you're not always going to be there, because we're both busy people, and we'll probably travel a lot--"

"I know that, Katherine--"
"But that doesn't mean you can fuck someone else!"

"I know--"

"I'm not my mom! I'm not going to be like my fucking mom!"

"I know," he says, quietly.

Her insistence clicks for him, more clearly than it ever has: the beautiful Isabella Aragon has never been able to keep her husband from straying. Nor has she ever managed to keep him from recognizing the offspring of such extramarital unions; he provides for them emotionally and financially, hush-moneying them into the best boarding schools and universities Europe has to offer.

"And then November," she murmurs, chin against his shoulder, "something changed."

"Yeah," Henry says, a flutter of nerves climbing up his throat, "mid-terms and finals happened."

"No, don't bullshit me. Something else made you more…distant."

"That was on both sides--"

"You used to call every week, text every other day. And then that was less and less, and…I could feel you," she whispers (and he thinks perhaps this move was calculated, hidden as a random act of anger, when it was really Katherine's intent all along: to literally grab him, make him unable to move, force him to listen, but not have to look him in the eye as he does), "I could feel you missing me less. I could feel you pulling away, letting go, so…something happened. I started to miss you less, too."

"I…I don't--"

"Don't you dare say you're sorry. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty, Henry. I'm just trying to get my point across. Did I ask you why? Did I ask you what changed?"

"No," he admits, lowly.

"And I won't. Because I know some things are private. So don't ask me about how I fucked up."

December 28, 2016, Wednesday (five days before), 11:49 PM

And when this he knew, the heart of the lion died, and the falcon: she flew.

Henry hasn't been able to get those words out of his mind for the past two hours. He hasn't been able to fall asleep because of them, and he's exhausted.

He rests his forehead against the window of the plane, watches the clouds below, the billowing dark purple of some Grimm's fairytale. Little patches of land peek through them every so often.

Sighing, and admitting defeat, he rummages around the duffel bag in the seat next to him, pulling out a Ziploc filled with pills and various medications.

He passes over ibuprofen, aspirin, anti-nausea meds, until his hand finally closes over what he's looking for: sleeping pills.

Henry places takes two of them, bitter against his tongue, washing them down with greedy gulps of water. Turns the overhead light off and grabs a blanket, grateful for the effect of the drug, already lulling him to towards peace…peace, and then, the strangest dream:
A boy, whistling a tune as he whittles away at a piece of wood. Rays of sunlight dancing against the stone floor, through the window. The view from the room is a river, wide and grey.

Then it is darkness: his features (the angular cheekbones, the heavy-lidded eyes) are illuminated by moonlight alone.

"Who are you?" Henry asks, voice distant and wavering.

"A king."

His voice is high, thin, like a flute-- still unchanged.

The boy does not look up. The soft, scraping sound of knife against wood continues.

"You look a little young to be a king," Henry remarks.

"I am not too young," he scoffs, with the sort of indignant air only a child can muster, "my nephew's son becomes king when he is only nine. And I am far more able than he was."

"How old are you?"

"I did not survive twelve summers. My eldest nephew did not survive fifteen. My second eldest lived eighteen summers before he was crowned. It seems it goes: plus three, plus three…and then, my brother did not survive nine summers, and so minus three…"

"Three…years?"

"Exactly!" he says brightly, laughter as musical and high as his voice.

The boy gets up from his perch on a lavishly embroidered pillow, leaving the piece of wood behind.

"Think of three summers," he calls out as he grabs and pulls a chair to the center of the room, "as a theme that repeats! My nephew's wife did not survive three summers as his queen! She lived her last day in this very tower, and it was that day…that very same day of that very same month, fifty three years before…that I was brought here for my coronation."

He climbs atop the chair and stands on the seat of it, so that he is tall enough that his gaze, grey as the river outside, is level with Henry's.

"Pay attention to numbers, nephew: they are more important than you may realize. I, for example, was fifth. Oh!" he says, clapping his hands, "And before I forget…the sixth of my name, my nephew's son? He does not survive fifteen summers. So: nine, twelve, fifteen, and fifteen again…But I shan't bore you with numbers anymore. You may call me 'Five'."

"Five?" Henry asks, puzzled (though not alarmed) when the boy gently cradles his face in his hands (nephew…why, then, does he speak of him as if he is not there?).

"We are so very much alike, you and I. Or, I should say: we started out very much alike. I miss my mother…and my brother," Five says, lower lip trembling, "very much."

"I know you miss yours, too. It is an unfathomable grief," he continues, and Henry doesn't realize his face is slick with tears until they are wiped away by soft, small hands, "to so many. But I understand."

And then they are at an arena, seats and poles adorned with fluttering colorful ribbons, but they are
"We are alike in happier ways, too! Listen," Five begins, walking across the grass, hands clasped behind his back:

"In word and deed he gave so many proofs of his liberal education, of polite nay rather scholarly, attainments far beyond his age; ... his special knowledge of literature ... enabled him to discourse elegantly, to understand fully, and to declaim most excellently from any work whether in verse or prose that came into his hands, unless it were from the more abstruse authors. He had such dignity in his whole person, and in his face such charm, that however much they might gaze, he never wearied the eyes of beholders. 'That was me!'

An older man appears wearing robes of a rich blue, hooks his arm through Henry's, and speaks:

"In the midst stood the prince, then nine years old, and having already something of royalty in his demeanor, in which there was a certain dignity combined with singular courtesy'...sixteen years after I write the account, an ambassador repeats the sentiments, tenfold: 'The handomest potentate I ever set eyes on; above the usual height, his complexion very fair and bright...He sings from book at sight, draws the bow with greater strength than any man in England and jousts marvelously...a most accomplished Prince.'"

The man dissipates into the air, leaving Henry reeling, with no one there to hold onto as he walks.

"And that," Five says, stopping to sit cross-legged on the grass, "was about you! We were so alike, like I said...well, similar beginnings, anyway. You, and my father, had similar beginnings as well. Both lusty, handsome...marring for love, against counsel, against the advice of shrewd men...charming, strapping, and so tall...I wonder if I would've been as tall, had I reached maturity," he whispers, wistfully, gaze vacant and open, poring over the scenery that surrounds them.

"Dissimilar endings?" Henry asks, kneeling next to him on the ground.

"Oh, very much so!" he crows, plucking a daisy from the tufts of green, "See, you had the life I was supposed to have."

Then Five laughs-- a haunting, discordant laugh, it trickles as a babbling brook might, but one from very far away...the sharp sound of it cuts through Henry, he winces, putting his hands over his ears, but it isn't enough to block what the 'king' says next:

"You had my life, and you took it for granted. You ruined what was to be mine. You had all the years, the reign that was written and meant for me--and look what you did with it!"

That eerie laughter, again, except now it peals against high walls and ceilings, as they have reappeared inside a church. Sunlight pours through stained glass windows, refracting colors upon the mahogany floor.

The boy leans against the pulpit, as a priest might, while Henry sits on a pew covered in dust. Five recites:

"You destroy the one you love the most and that; in turn, destroys you...and when this he knew, the heart of the lion died, and the falcon: she flew."

"I don't know what that means. Tell me."

"Oh, don't play the fool," Five says, grinning, "you know who they are. Tell me: who paces and roars and runs? Protects family above all else?"
"I--"

"And who has wings like an angel's? A gaze as sharp as Gabriel's? Who is that person, the person you know, who misses nothing, absolutely nothing--"

"I don't! Know!" Henry screams, hands fisted in his hair, panting.

"Do not," Five says quietly, fingers templed, a triangle pressed against a red mouth, "sew the thread of your life with hers."

"Who's--"

"She dies young. Give her distance, so that she does not, this time. You set across a dark path-- not because of her, not towards her, but away from her. You walk towards her first, so now you know to stop where you are: the beginning. Do not begin at all, and she is safe."

"This isn't real...you're not real," he says, shaking his head, he gets up from his seat and walks towards the curved arches of the church doors.

"And if I am?" Five asks, appearing in his path, blocking him, "Are you willing to risk--"

"I don't know what I'm risking--"

"I'm not sure how much clearer," he says, between gritted teeth (a sight in juxtaposition with the ringing clarity of his choirboy voice), "I can be! Her death...is your cause."

"You're not real."

"You are willing to," Five says, voice awed, peering up at him, head tilted back, "extraordinary. I see you do not care for her half as much as you claim...I suppose some truths remain the same."

"This isn't a 'truth', this isn't real--"

"It isn't?"

And now they are in a hall with marble floors, standing in front of a mirror that takes up the entirety of the wall they face, spotted and distorted with age.

"Tell me," Five says, his hand upon the tempered glass, "is anything that happened five centuries ago any less real that what happens today?"

"I don't--"

"Is this real?" Five asks, abruptly, pulling back from the mirror to snap his fingers. An image appears across it:

"Behind a throne, an empty black-draped bed, kneeling beside it is a boy in a green tunic, his red-haired head buried in his arms."

"What is that?"

"Or this?" he asks, snapping his fingers once again:

Henry, the same age, in pajamas, head buried in his arms, kneeling outside the door of his parents' bedroom.
"Are the things that happened in a palace-- the people who sketched the designs-- any less real because all that exists of it today is a cellar?"

Henry has fallen to the floor, hands trembling. Five joins him there, and kisses him on the forehead before saying:

"No, nephew…I thought not."

Chapter End Notes

honestly, i'll update a timeline soon in the end notes! hopefully tomorrow.

thanks for reading! ✨﹏❤️
That one could meet someone; and that that meeting could feel like waking up from a long sleep. That moments spent with them thereafter felt dreamlike, suspended in time; rendering time itself totally meaningless.

January 2, 2017, Monday, 5:08 AM, Whitehall University

Awoken by the steady tapping on the door of her dorm, Anne shifts in bed with a groan, pushing her hair out of her eyes.

"Anna," she croaks, waving a hand towards her roommate, sitting in bed and curled up under her own covers, paper bowl of Captain Crunch in hand.

Anna doesn't glance up, gaze still fixed to the tablet balanced on her knees.

"ANNA! The door-- goddamn it," Anne mutters, pushing her bedcovers off with great reluctance and swinging her legs over the mattress.

Tap! Tap! Tap-tap-tap-tap--

"What? Do? You? Want?"

Lizzy Blount stands in the open doorway, fist still raised mid-knock. She uncurls it, turning it into a wave.

"Good morning!"

"Sorry, I didn't know it was you…"

Lizzy shrugs, smile still sweet and unaffected by Anne's previous brusque inquiry; sidling past her and walking over to Anna's side of the room, setting two Gatorades down on Anna's bedside table.

Anne shuts the door behind her, turns and watches the ensuing exchange with crossed arms:

"Would you like to come?" Lizzy asks, stretching her arms above her head.

"Come…where?" Anna asks, eyebrows raised, pushing her over-the-ear headphones off.

"We're going on a run!"

"We're going on a what?" Anne asks, wiping sleep from her eyes.

"A run!" she chirps, turning around to face her, now stretching her arm in front of her chest, through the crook of the other elbow, "remember? I texted you my New Year's Resolutions because I want to actually keep them this year and needed accountability, and you said that was a great idea and texted me yours and one of them was to exercise more!"

"Vaguely remember, yeah, but--"
"So do you want to go, Anna?" Lizzy asks.

"Thanks for the offer, but I'm, uh… strongly against exercise that doesn't involve orgasm," Anna says, shrugging and clasping her hands, "sorry."

"Suit yourself! Anne?"

"I didn't really exactly mean," Anne says, rubbing her temples, "you know, that I wanted to work out today, I meant more as like a general--"

"I bought Gatorade," Lizzy says, pouting.

"And that was…nice, Lizzy," she says, walking back over to her side of the room to take a seat on the edge of her bed, "but--"

"Anne…did you or did you not fail one of your resolutions literally the first minute of 2017?"

_Do I regret kissing Henry Tudor more than I regret telling Lizzy I did? Is it a tie? Either way…it's too early to be dragged this hard._

"I…did," Anne says, crossing her arms, "but--"

"So! Do this resolution instead."

---

**January 2, 2017, 6:00 AM, Santa Monica**

---promises, swear them to the sky---

No.

Henry's hand hasn't left the button on the wire of his earbuds for a few minutes. He runs and skips songs in tandem, all the lyrics eventually lead to him gritting his teeth and pressing the button to the next track.

This song, and the build of the instrumental intro hurry his pace, so he raises the volume enough that the music feels more immersive than background noise:

_all the lights go down as i crawl into the spaces…_

Running is a visceral enough experience that his mind wanders in waves as his feet hit the packed wet sand below, sunrise warm on his back.

He hates competing with bicyclists for space, and keeping a look out for them. So, by late December Henry started to run close to the ebb and flow of the ocean instead of the trail. This was the first morning he drove his car (modest, but safe, and purchased yesterday night) here and learned of the exorbitant rates at the Santa Monica Beach lot (not that such things affect him-- they're amusing rather than annoying, as they are to the majority).

Brandon's absence besides Henry's footprints feels like a ghost, and as he sees two familiar figures ahead he wishes he was there. Shielding him, distracting him, someone to shout _race!_ to.

But Brandon is _not_ there. He _was_ at their dorm when Henry deposited his textbooks on his desk last night. Brandon said nothing, and Henry said nothing before leaving and going back to his apartment.

Nothing divides them more than an absence of words, and all Henry knows is that he doesn't _want_ to
be the first one to speak. But given how unanchored he feels lately, he fears he will be the first to speak if for no other reason than the warmth familiarity can bring.

Ever since late December, Henry's felt a coldness that has an edge of desperation to it.

_Don't wave, don't wave don't wave don't wave--_

He waves.

_Oh my God._

He's close enough to see the difference in the colors of their eyes-- the light blue of Lizzy's and what (from the distance) _looks_ like the black of Anne's.

Henry changes course, turns his heel and breaks into a sprint.

---

**6:10 AM**

"Did he just…?"

Anne is still holding her ankle up in what Lizzy told her was the 'flamingo stretch', dumbfounded as she watches Henry's retreating figure.

"Yeah," Lizzy says, shielding her eyes against the glint of the sun against the ocean, one hand on her hip, "he just did."

---

**6:11 AM**

_'Her death is your cause.'_

Henry quickens his pace, winces at the dull pain that throbs around his temples and the pain that stings his calves.

_'You destroy the one you love'…. _That didn't happen, okay?'_

He runs faster…

_'Promise, please Henry, I know you never break a promise…promise you'll just do what he says, please, I don't want it to happen again.'_

..and faster still.

---

**6:21 AM**

Henry finally stops at his car, practically falling as he places his palms against the window, resting his forehead against the metal (desperately and with much relief, like a man claiming sanctuary during war in medieval times). His lungs feel like they're on the verge of bursting.

He unlocks the door, slamming it shut behind him as he takes a seat. Yanks his headphones out of his ears, untangling the wire from around his neck and tossing it and the cell phone it's attached to from its armband holder, onto the passenger seat.

_'I have to try.'
He grabs the water bottle in the drink holder, slick with condensation (he had packed it with ice before he left, and it's mainly melted to cold water), and drinks from it. Empties it totally (half down his throat, the rest pours over onto his shirt) before he throws it against the glove compartment.

It gives a dull thwack before falling on the vehicle mat, a sound and image that strikes him as so *stupidly* futile that he hits the steering wheel with an open palm.

"Fuck!"

---

*January 2, 2017, Monday, 9:01 AM*

**Whitehall University, Student Log-in Homepage**

Hello, **BRANDON, CHARLES**!

*Class Schedule*, Winter Trimester 2017:

[empty]

What…the fuck.

---

*9:30 AM, Whitehall University Courtyard*

"What are you doing here?"

Brandon turns his head, slowly, to the questioner.

"I just figured I'd stand here for fun," he drawls, waving a hand and gesturing to the queue that extends ahead of him towards the administration building, "why, what are **you** doing here?"

"Mapping pathways and timing the minutes it'll take for me to walk to each class this semester," Anna says, hand tight on the strap of her backpack.

*Unbelievable.*

*Except…not really.*

"What's the line for?" she asks.

Brandon smiles, then holds an index finger up, the 'wait' gesture, as he pulls a folded piece of paper from the pocket of his leather jacket.

---

He hands a piece of paper to her (*still with that weirdly bland smile*, matched as it is with an otherwise utterly dead expression…Anna's joked about Brandon possibly being a sociopathic narcissist before, *of course*, but *he's never looked more like one more than at this moment*) and Anna takes it, brow furrowed as she carefully unfolds it and smoothes it out against the hardcover of the planner she's been holding.

"'Class schedule, empty,'" she reads aloud, then asks, "What happened? Did you forget to register before the deadline or--"
"No," Brandon scoffs, snatching the paper back from her, "I'm not an idiot. It's like...an error, or something. Clearly," he continues, jutting his chin in a nod to the people lined up ahead of him, "I'm not the only student whose schedule was fucked up."

"Oh," Anna says, squinting at him (she feels kind of...mad, although she can't really put her finger on why), "okay, well...good luck."

"Thanks," he responds, curt, in a tone that is anything but thankful.

An equally sarcastic you're welcome is on the tip of her tongue, but she swallows it down instead of voicing it.

It's as she's walking away from him without so much as a goodbye, wind stinging her cheeks, that she realizes: he was rude.

Except, they're usually rude to each other, so that shouldn't bother her... except that usually, underneath the rudeness, Brandon's actually, usually nice to her.

And Anna never realized he was until she had this interaction to compare to all their other ones.

And that realization smarts more than it probably should, honestly.

December 26, 2016, Monday, 11:21 PM, New York Tudor Residence (seven days before)

Henry frowns as he studies the piece Beck (or Percy Warbeck, or...whoever the fuck he was) drew him, flat against his desk.

The acorns and honeysuckles sketched in charcoal bring a pang of familiarity. He tries to think of why that might be, and while he comes up with a few logical reasons (honeysuckles line the trellised archways of the gardens at the Tudor home in Los Angeles, and as they fill the Erasmus Rose Garden, the air at Whitehall University is often sweet with the scent of them), none ease his...strange feeling of unease.

He flips the piece over, revealing its blank side.

Yawns, stretching his arms above his head, before getting up from his seat and settling into his bed.

Sunlight streams through, illuminating the maps set on Henry's desk. Books line the shelves of the walls.

He sits at his desk, peering down at them as he strokes his beard, trim and neat, a golden brown. An older man, large and dressed in robes of red, stands, hands folded.

"Majesty, I know you ask for my advice in this matter, but I estimate it will not be to your liking--"

"As if that's ever stopped you before. Tell me," he demands, folding his hands, turning his head to look out the window towards the river.

A heavy sigh, and then:

"End this courtship with the Lady Anne. It will be too visible to the Emperor. And I believe, truly, that it is for the best considering all things: it drains you, Majesty. Terribly so."

Henry leans over his desk, pulls a gilded leather box towards him, to the edge of the desk where he
sits. Fiddles with the latch on it.

"I could not do that, Wolsey," Henry says, flicking it open, "even if it were something I wished. And she does not drain me. Fear for the future of my country does. She," he says, quietly, almost as if to himself, "fills me with lightness during my darker days."

The darker days have been increasing in number, as of late. That old, drowning feeling from the turbulent years of his childhood visits him more often, the tightness of the chest, the heaviness upon it, feeling unable to breathe. The nearly unbearable weight of those that depend upon him, a constant crush.

The old, troubling, warring teenage thoughts circle around him almost every morning when he wakes:

*It was supposed to be him.*

*But God chose you.*

*What if He chose wrong?*

*He didn't.* That was what he had to tell himself, at thirteen, to get out of bed.

And then, as king, trying to prove that thought, every day: *He didn't. He chose you.*

To try to not be like his father, reverse his choices. To be generous where he was miserly, to err on the side of risk rather than caution. To be warm and familiar with subjects, where his father was cold, distant. He was even familiar with the common people, let them rip off his clothes for amusement on one occasion, laughed when they did.

He knows his father would never have done such a thing; he was too determined to convince everyone that he deserved kingship, in the same unerring way the people believed Elizabeth of York deserved to be queen (something he never entirely accomplished, by his son's observations).

"Your Majesty--"

"She," he continues, raising a hand, index and middle finger held upwards, others folded, a silencing gesture, "has awoken something in me."

It is so endlessly difficult to explain. In letters (although he has tried, and tried, and tried, writing in long, looping and winded sentences, in his own hand, the nibs snapping against the parchment, the stem on the quill cracking in his hand), in any other way, with words alone.

How it has proven possible things Henry thought were not, things he believed only existed upon the pages of poets, the tellers of tales and epics.

That one could meet someone; and that that meeting could feel like waking up from a long sleep. That moments spent with them thereafter felt dreamlike, suspended in time; rendering time itself totally meaningless.

"And that is…lust, I imagine, perhaps infatuation--"

"No. Something else," Henry says, running a hand over the inside of the box, inlaid with velvet, "I see her and feel…as if my destiny is…so now awoken."

"Is it not possible that lust can be misrecognized as love when it is--"
"I have felt lust towards women before. This is something else. More."

"Then, as you show her affection, it is possible to conflate the two, to believe this to be something different, I am certain--"

"I am not confused by my kindness," he snarls, "it does not cause me misrecognition…and have I been unkind to any mistress? Do I bed them and then call them mares, allow that sort of speech at all? Am I the king of France, hmm? I gifted Mistress Popincourt with funds before she returned to France. To the Lady Elizabeth Carew, I gifted jewels, I arranged her marriage and gifted the couple with land at their wedding. My son by the Lady Elizabeth Blount is called His Grace! I know that lust and affection together do not equal love alone; this is not a matter upon which you are educating me, Wolsey! I know what that is, this is not the same."

Wolsey sighs, glances heavenward, hands still folded.

Henry lifts a pendant from the box, twirling it between his fingers.

"Perhaps," he murmurs, voice scarcely a whisper, "I can get an annulment."

Wolsey blanches at this utterance.

"That would mean forfeiting the alliance with--"

"Yes, it would. Is it so valuable? The Emperor is demanding dowry already, and Mary is still a child!"

"Be granted an annulment and…what? Marry a courtier's daughter? Her Majesty will not step down for that. She may not even step down for another princess-born, which England would need for a foreign alliance, as we have discussed, Your Majesty, but I cannot imagine--"

"It is not so terrible an idea," Henry counters, arms crossed, "the last time there was a foreign queen consort she and her husband were overthrown. Margaret du Anjou. The 'bad queen.'"

"Yes, but--"

"And what of my grandfather?" he asks, with a shrug, placing the jewel back in the box, "He married the daughter of a knight. No 'princess-born', certainly --"

"A baron. And a title given to alleviate the scandal of the marriage between him and a noblewoman besides, Your--"

"But she was English," Henry continues, eyes boring into his, blue as restless skies and flashing like the lightning of a storm, "no alliance."

"Yes, and they were constantly in danger, in part because of that very thing."

"Well, it was a different time," he says, with an indifferent wave of a ringed hand, "and kings always risk danger, it is part of our--"

"The nobles rebelled against it, their heirs were disinherited, and then disappeared--"

"But the people…loved them. And it's not as if the marriage ruined him, he was king for--"

"The people love Her Majesty."

"They would love a prince, more," Henry counters, pacing, now (though he cannot recall when he
He had agreed to marry Catalina (now, Catherine) Trasmatara when he was younger than seventeen. Changed his mind at the last moment, holding out for romance, clinging to idealistic notions of it, clinging to hope.

She was pretty enough, but he didn't love her then. Hardly knew her, really. And she had married his brother. Dispensation or no, consummation or no, the idea hadn't struck him as a terribly romantic one.

Then he had become a king, at barely eighteen, and by then he knew Catherine better. Adored her at the very least, even if he had not quite met love for her yet. Loosened the reins on his idealism, or at least tried to, a little bit. Expected to grow to love her, to fall in love with her, as time passed.

Knew she had watched her parents tend to the plant of their country, watering and growing it until its wealth and power were immense, vast. So much so that it eclipsed England's, and he had hoped she would assist him in the gardening of his own country.

"The usurper Richard married an Englishwoman. Do you need reminder on how that ended--"

"My father didn’t conquer him because he had married Anne Neville, Wolsey, for God's sake--"

"No, but he realized his mistake after her death…he was set upon marrying a Portuguese princess! And might have remained on the throne had he already had their support, because such is the benefit of foreign alliances--"

"My mother was an Englishwoman, too. No foreign alliance, there, either and she was adored."

"She was a York princess, and could count on adoration. And that was also a strategic alliance, just not a foreign one. It was to unite the two houses, it was to put civil war to rest--"

"Yes, I KNOW!" he shouts, "this is my ancestry, trust that I am well-versed in it, do not speak to me as if I were a child--"

"I am simply talking numbers, Your Majesty. Even if you wish to ignore the fact that no alliance is to be made from such a match, I would advise you against it for this truth: a king who married with no foreign alliance had his heirs meet a terrible end. His brother perhaps paid the price for none with his life, and his own son died before him. Even ignoring strategy, to do such a thing seems to lead to very bad luck indeed."

December 27, 2016, Tuesday 12:05 AM (six days before)

Henry wakes with a start, immediately strokes the side of his face with his hands.

He's surprised that his skin is clean-shaven and not bearded.

He's surprised when words (complete sentences, even, which has never happened before) of the dream don't leave his mind.

He feels a strange pull towards the piece of artwork on his desk and gets out of bed to walk towards.

Carefully, he flips the blank side over, and reads the same words spoken in the dream:

Destiny, now awoken.
From: Henry Tudor

To: Margaret Tudor

Sent December 27, 2016, Tuesday, 12:20 AM

I checked to see if you were awake and you weren't, so I'm sending you this instead: I'm taking the train to Brooklyn tonight. Will be at Grand-mère's apartment, probably be back home in time for breakfast.
Chapter Summary

"Are you going to leave me?"

"No."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

January 2, 2017, Monday, 3:30 PM

Whitehall University, Student Log-in Homepage

Hello, TUDOR, HENRY!

Class Schedule, Winter Trimester 2017:

ENGL 210, MODERN POETRY
ECON 159, GAME THEORY
PHYS 200, FUNDAMENTALS OF PHYSICS I
HIST 251, EARLY MODERN ENGLAND: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND SOCIETY
FREN 145a, INTENSIVE INTERMEDIATE FRENCH
POLS 203, INTRO TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

January 3, 2017, Tuesday, 5:00 AM: Whitehall University Gym C

Henry's really, truly not a morning person.

But the earliest, darkest hours of the day have the benefit of solitude. He used to not think of solitude as a benefit at all. He erred on the side of study groups, ran and worked with a partner, or multiple.

As of late, though, being around people has felt lonelier than being alone.

There's something stupid playing on the televisions mounted to the wall facing the treadmills and other machines (he faces away from them as he does sit-ups on the gym mat in front of them), a reality show of some sort. He doesn't care enough to change it, though, the shrill voices fade in and out but don't detract his focus, somehow.

The sweat trickling down his nose is enough to distract, however, so he stops and rests on his back.

Henry wipes at this face with the clean towel he brought and startles at the clang he hears, shooting...
straight up on instinct.

Brandon sits at a seated shoulder press, gaze fixed on one of the television screens as he pulls the handles up and down.

It flits to Henry, briefly, mid-pull, before returning to the screen.

A few minutes later and Brandon continues to ignore him in favor of a Kardashian, and honestly, what kind of Machiavellian tactic is that and when did Brandon become capable of it and stop staring and I walked across campus to avoid this shit, he followed me, or he chose the gym in the building farthest from our dorm for the same reason I did and actually why did I come here when there's a better gym at York Place anyways...

He lies down on the mat again, shoves earbuds in, resolving to pick up where he left off.

...along the staircase, I dream to hear you/in a whisper-quiet room/space the thinking, space to scream to/but the echoes sound like you...

And it's the same song that was playing right before midnight when…. and what the fuck is he even supposed to do about that and Brandon would know.

Brandon would know, but he can't ask.

He really, really wants to ask.

Do not ask for advice. You're mad at him. Do not, do not, do not--

"Hey, so, what do you do when…you need a girl to leave you alone?"

Brandon leaves his arms up, fingers curled over the equipment.

Henry asked the question like they were in the middle of a conversation. Except that right after saying it, he turned his chin to the left, immediately, as if he were talking to someone else (even though there's no one else in the gym; there's nothing to the left of him but a water fountain, and unless Henry's developed schizophrenia or some shit, the question has to have been yielded to Brandon…right?)

Here's what he figures: there's really two courses of action here. He can a) fuck with him, or b) answer the question as if it's cool that the way the Henry started the first sentence he's spoken to him in days was with a 'hey so'.

And as gratifying as the former would be, the latter is more likely to give him an in.

"What," Brandon says, worrying a spot on his shoulder, brow furrowed, "like, a girl I hooked up with, or…?"

Henry heaves a sigh of relief before sitting upright, folding his arms over his knees.

"Sure…let's say that."

Brandon smirks, crossing his arms:

"What have you tried so far?"
He's always seen through his friend's 'hypothetical's', and calling them out turns out to be a habit that still feels as natural as breathing.

He considers guessing whom, but Henry's hooked up with so many girls that it's hard to narrow down. Especially since Brandon hasn't been out with him since December (the brief encounters at their dorm don't count); can't even make a decent hypothesis as to who's been doing their best impression of cling-on wrap (it's definitely happened before).

"Friend-zoning," Henry admits, shrugging, "I hit on someone else, and then the shoulder--"

"Shoulder punch?"

A classic.

"Of course, what else?"

"And, what…it didn't work? Why?"

Henry shrugs, again.

"It just didn't, so--"

"How do you know?"

"Well, we kissed --"

"Jesus Christ," Brandon snaps, rubbing his temples, "okay, well…have you tried like…ignoring her?"

"Sort of."

So that's a no.

"How bad is it? When's the last time you…y'know…"

Brandon knocks his fists together. Henry squints, makes a what the fuck are you doing face, so Brandon ups the obscenity of the gesture so that there's no mistaking his meaning.

Henry's face turns a color that rivals his hair (he is honestly the strangest dude-- you'd think promiscuity would imply like, not blushing at dirty jokes, but in the case of Henry you would be wrong). Brandon groans, figuring that means he and 'Hypothetical' Coed have banged recently…

"So, damage-control: try ignoring her. And if that doesn't work…you have to be mean."

Brandon starts to pull the equipment again.

"Mean?"

"Yeah…mean. Of course, if you were never very nice to her to begin with, that's easy-- you just take it up a notch. But this is where I excel, honestly--"

"You don't say," Henry scoffs, mouth twisted in a wry smirk.

"No, don't get it fucking twisted," Brandon says, letting go of the handles (the sharp sound of the machine snapping back ringing in his ears), "not because I like being a dick, but because I never fall into the trap so many college guys do. Because, like…if you lie and tell a girl you like her it's…sure,
it'll get you laid, but then you have to deal with the fall-out later."

"Or you could just," Henry makes an expansive hand gesture, frowning, "not lie for the sake of not lying --"

"Yeah, Mr. White Knight," Brandon says scathingly, "or that."

"I don't know--"

"God forbid you tell her you're in love with her or some such bullshit, because it just makes being mean that much harder. Because then she's not going to even believe you if you're mean to her afterwards! She's not going to buy it, like, you'd have to be really, really awful to her, to sell it. So I never make that mistake."

Henry laughs.

Except it sounds less like laughter and more like jangling nerves, twisted and loud. He stands, holding his stomach with one hand, shaking his head.

"Did I say something…"

Funny, he was going to say, but Henry's already on the other side of the exit door.

"You're welcome…asshole."

When Brandon heads back to the dorm, he finds it empty.

He's about to throw his sweatshirt onto his bed but pauses when he sees something black and circular on his comforter.

From a distance he thinks it's a hair tie (he thought he washed his comforter before he left for winter break, but maybe not), walks to the edge of his bed and scoops it up with his index finger.

Reads his own stitching on the bracelet, numb and disbelieving:

coeur loyal

January 4, 2017, Wednesday, 9:09 AM

Whitehall University, Student Log-in Homepage

Hello, BOLEYN, ANNE!

Class Schedule, Winter Trimester 2017:

ENGL 210: MODERN POETRY

PLSC 118: THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICS

CLCV 205: INTRODUCTION TO ANCIENT GREEK HISTORY

EEB 122: PRINCIPLES OF EVOLUTION, ECOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR

PSYC 110: INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY
From: Anne Boleyn
To: George Boleyn
Sent January 4, 2017, Wednesday, 1:00 PM
Did you know that Red Dragon owns the company you work at?

From: George
To: Anne
Do they? Who told you that?

From: Anne
To: George
I did some research. Why did you think someone 'told me'?

From: George
To: Anne
You…have too much time on your hands, sis.

From: Anne
To: George
Rude. And also not answering the question.

From: George
I just don't know why you would like, know that. Not surprising though, since Tudor owns almost the world entire.

From: Anne
Yeah, I guess. Weird, though.

From: George
You're weird.

From: Anne
YOU'RE weird.

From: George
[link] This is MORE weird.
From: Anne
Why…would you send me this?

From: George
Next time you think it's funny to PUSH ME OFF A DOCK, think about THIS!!!

From: Anne
a) We were at a lake, not an ocean, and b) I was ten! Let it go.

From: George
NO.

January 4, 2017, Wednesday, 3:00 PM: Cecily York's residence, Los Feliz, California
Margaret lays curled up on her side, facing the wall, butterfly-patterned quilt pulled around her shoulders.

"Katherine's not here, she's out."

"I know. I came to see you," Henry says.

"Grand-mère here, though. She wanted to talk to you. You should go talk to her."

She feels…listless. A funny word for an unfunny feeling. Listless. Lacking a list....

Margaret rolls onto her back, looks up at the ceiling, its smooth and undisturbed white.

There's only a lamp on, curtains drawn. She can't handle any more light than that.

"I already did. I came here to see you."

"Oh. I'm tired," Margaret says, but she doesn't feel like she said it because her own voice sounds foreign to her, her tongue feels heavy in her mouth, "and I hate lithium."

"I know. They told me it might take a while for you to get acclimated to the dose--"

"You're missing class. You should go."

"They don't start until Monday. I think you'll feel better if you get fresh air--"

"I can't. I already tried," she snaps, anger hot and tight in her chest but anger is a kind of energy, so it seems, because suddenly she's sitting up; even though she doesn't remember her body moving that way.

But the energy fizzles and crackles, and she doesn't fight when he pulls the covers off her lap.

And it sort of blurs because he has an answer for everything:

It's too bright out, she protests, I look terrible, but Henry slips a pair of Prada sunglasses over her nose. I can't stand up, and he says I'll help you. I look terrible, I don't want anyone to see me, but he eases her arms into his grey thermal hoodie, zipping it up, and counters that she'll look like an
incognito actress, that's all, that's all they'll think in this neighborhood (they're in Los Feliz, in between the loud brightness of Hollywood and Glendale, suburb of the studios, on streets lined with flowering and fruit-bearing trees).

And then she's embarrassed, except it's embarrassment as the vaguest of feelings, as if from far away even though the tears feel close to her skin:

I tried, I tried, I really tried, I did, I just couldn't tie my shoes, I kept trying, and Henry:

Shhh, I know, and laceless slip-ons slid over her feet and suddenly they're down the hall, just like that.

"I feel better," Margaret says, and she's only half-lying (the sun feels too warm and itchy on her skin and she has a bracing headache and each new flower they pass smells abrassively sweet, lilacs then cherry blossoms and it's endless…but he's holding her by the waist and she feels supported and it's enough to shuffle, albeit slowly, along the sidewalk, and it does feel better that she's moving even though it's not on her own).

"Good," Henry says, "I'm glad. Do you want to see the doctor tom--"

"Are you going to leave me?"

"No."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

December 3rd 2016, Saturday: Parish Church of St Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Giles, Oxford, England

"Is it wrong in the eyes of God to be engaged to one man but wish to marry another? Even if this is something that cannot be?"

"Dream of another? Dreams are innocent, my child. You must look to your spirit, not the leftover remnants of memories and experiences that become dreams."

"Forgive me, father, I have not made myself clear…while it is true that I dream of this other man at night, that my subconscious brings him to my dreams…I mean dream in the other sense, too. As in long for. While I am awake. Consciously."

"Pray for--"

"I feel myself torn by family duty…does God not say I must obey my earthly father?"

"Yes, but we must also--"

"If this is true…I have no choice but to marry his choice for me."

"Do you seek my counsel, or do you simply feel solace in knowing there is a holy man on the other side of this confessional screen?"

"I…apologize. It has been several years since I have even seen the man I dream of…I wish only to find peace."
i know it's been a while since an update! i'd like to say they'll happen more frequently but college currently owns my ass, so they might be less frequent than they have been.

♥
Chapter Summary

"Why are you writing your name in your book?"

Chapter Notes

"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable."
-- T.S. Eliot

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 27, 2016, Tuesday, 1:20 AM, Brooklyn, New York

Henry rips the scarf he had folded over his nose and mouth for the duration of the subway ride (his first-- his father had always spoken of the dirtiness of them, the break-downs and delays, the illnesses one could pick up) as soon as he ascends the stairs of the station to the street, taking in greedy gulps of cold, night air.

When he had rode his hand was gripped around one of the poles near the benches tight enough that it hurts now; both pain and crowding, competing thoughts keeping him company.

He'd awoken from the dream with a feeling of strange urgency, the words spoken by Beck and the sketch spooling and unspooling in his mind, felt a tug in this direction, towards this place, from what felt like some invisible string.

The urgency was for an explanation of some sort. It had been so great that it propelled him towards the train instead of calling their car service (the more familiar, comfortable choice, but he had only considered it for a moment before the thought of this can't wait for traffic, this can't wait at all smothered it entirely).

And so he walks towards the address for her apartment, glancing at a lined piece of paper with hastily penciled streets (his phone is tucked away in a pocket in the inside lapel of his jacket, where it'll remain until he's safely inside-- this is Brooklyn, after all, post-gentrification or no).

He knocks at the door to Elizabeth's apartment and waits, hands in pockets. Adrenaline pounded at him the entire train ride, fear of sickness and anxiety, propelled him all the way to the building but now that he's immobile it's falling away in waves. Henry fears that he'll crash.

His gaze flicks to cracks in the wall, fissures that splay around the ceiling above the tarnished copper doorframe, and he knocks again, impatient, setting his teeth on edge.
The door swings open when his fist is raised to knock again. He holds it, midair for a beat until he lets it fall to his side.

Elizabeth wears a nightgown that reaches her ankles, a robe over it that stops short of her knees. Her face is soft with sleep rather than wild with irritation (he wouldn't blame her if it was, expected it to be as the hour dawned on him and he was mid-knock).

But her blue eyes sharpen with clarity as she takes in his expression, and she gives an all-too-conscious smirk as she holds the sides of the skirt of her nightgown with tapering fingers and sinks into a curtsey.

**January 5, 2017, Thursday, 2:01 PM, Whitehall University**

"Is it the cashier on the far left?" Henry asks.

"Leo Gray? No," Lizzy says, flicking him on the arm with her student ID card, "why would you even think that?"

"Seems like your type," he says, shrugging.

They had run into each other at the student bookstore and decided to wait in line together. Mercifully (and uncharacteristically, actually) Lizzy hasn't mentioned or teased about the whole running in the other direction in Santa Monica thing.

_But, maybe that's to come._

"Why? Because he looks like you?" she asks, laughing.

"He wishes. He only kind of…but…well, that's not a stretch, is it? You _did_ sleep with me."

"Yeah, and?"

"Are you saying _I don't_ fall into your type?"

"I don't _have_ a type. You were just, you know…there."

"Wow. You hurt me."

"Please."

"It's okay," Henry says, making sniffling sounds and feigning wiping away tears, "I'll forgive you when you tell me who you're dating."

"No!"

"Why?"

"Because…I like, y'know," she says, nodding to him and gesturing to the line that's moving ahead (he's been _obnoxiously staring since the interrogation started_ and keeping in pace with it, "being mysterious."

"Lie," Henry says, flipping the cover of the Geography textbook on top of the stack she holds, "you're an open book."
"It's just private for now," Lizzy says, flipping it back shut, cheeks coloring, "okay?"

"You've been saying that for months; all you've told me is that you 'like them a lot'. Why is it like, a state level secret--"

"It's more."

"More than a state level--"

"It's…more than…"

She trails off, hugging the books to her chest. She twists a turquoise ring around a finger, a furrow in her brow where it is usually smooth as a mask.

"More than…what?" he asks.

"More than like," Lizzy says, quietly.

"Next!"

She visibly startles somewhat, books loosening from her grip, before righting herself and walking up to the counter, setting her stack down.

They leave the bookstore together, out into the bright sunlight, canvas bags with their purchases slung over their respective shoulders.

"So, when you say 'more than like', you mean--"

"The other -- thanks!" Lizzy chirps, taking a flyer pushed into her hand by a student along the pathway winding through the campus green without so much as a glance towards the paper, "anyways, the other four-letter word that starts with an 'L', yes."

"You mean," he says, eyes widening, "the word…'lime'?"

Lizzy rolls up the flyer, and turns mid-walk to thwack Henry on the chest with it. He doesn't even bother giving her the dignity of a fake yelp, actually has the audacity to yawn, of all things, so she retorts:

"You're carrying my books for that one."

Henry walks with two bags on his shoulder (because one on each would just look terribly uncool, and he prides himself on the being the opposite of that-- even though it seems threads of that façade are slipping, along with strange dreams that knot and tangle, and there's a thought to push away) alongside her in the direction of the Beta Thau house.

"So what's that like?" he asks.

"I don't know," she says, catching long strands of hair that whip around in the wind and holding them in between her fingers, "it's like…the world is…brighter, with them in it, somehow. Amplified. Warmer, maybe? I'm not a word person."

"Huh."
"I don't think I'm saying it right. It's more like they're the…focal point, I think," Lizzy continues, gnawing on her lower lip, "everything else is less--"

"The still point of the turning world."

"What?"

"Nothing," he says, shaking his head, then:

"It's T.S. Eliot. I'm taking a poetry class," he says easily, as if by way of explanation!

"Which hasn't started yet."

"I did some of the reading already."

"You? Really?" she asks, giggling.

"Yes. Shut up."

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It takes her a few beats to realize he's not walking alongside her anymore.

"Henry?"

He's standing still, behind her a few paces, adjacent from Hugo fountain. Lizzy walks back to where he stands, and follows the vantage point in view: the cluster of bulletin boards just behind the rim of the fountain, already covered in papers after the break.

A group of students stand together in front of them, and one among them is a girl with dark hair that spills to the middle of her back, back to them.

"It's not her," she says, softly.

"What?" he snaps, still not looking away.

"It's not-- c'mon, it's me. It's not her."

"Don't know what you're talking about," Henry says, yanking the falling straps of the canvas bags back up his shoulder, almost to his neck.

"You know how I know it's not her? She just Snapped me. She's with her brother, at his new job--see?"

Lizzy holds her phone out, screen tilted up, in front of him. The image on the screen is of Anne and George in front of a cubicle, her head on his shoulder, smiling, the angling of the photo awkward.

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Henry glances up from the Snap, back to where he was looking before.

There's a familiar figure sitting on the rim of the fountain. A boy, too young to be a student here, pushes a shank of dusty blonde hair off his forehead. The movement reveals that his sleeves are long, billowing and slashed on the side.

The boy locks a steely grey gaze, almost silver in the outdoor light, with Henry's, and shakes his head.
Henry squeezes his eyes shut, suddenly aggrieved with a thunderous headache, and rubs his left temple.

When he opens his eyes, the boy is gone.

"Are you okay?" Lizzy asks, voice wavering in concern.

She had watched his face become drawn and pale in what seemed an instant, an expression of disbelief had weighted his mouth open slack before it shut at her question.

"Yes, I'm-- yes. Let's get to your dorm--"

"'Cause you look wigged."

"I'm not--"

"You look like, maybe-I should-stop-dealing-to-you-wigged. It makes some people paranoid, you know--"

"I'm not-- really. You'll cut me off. And then wherever shall I go to buy weed, in Los Angeles--"

"Okay, point taken but--"

"On a college campus. However shall I find this incredibly scarce resource--"

"You had Weird Face on, okay--"

"Hey, does anyone have a joint?" he calls out, hand cupped over his mouth.

Three students in Rastafarian hats, of various ethnicities and in various spots amongst the courtyard, turn their heads towards Lizzy and Henry. One of three proffers a joint in hand, another of three holds out a cookie, and a student (not among the three) wearing nothing but the average t-shirt and jeans sprints away (most likely fearing…some sort of '21 Jump Street' situation, if Henry had to guess).

"Henry, do you know what 'point taken' means--"

"I'm fine. This is just heavy," he grouses, taking a few textbooks out of a bag and holding them in a stack in hand, "let's go."

January 5, 2017, Thursday, 3:04 PM

Henry hefts his bag onto his desk before sitting on the edge of his bed and pulling his shoes off, kicking them with socked feet towards his nightstand.

He lies on his back, checking his phone.

"So…what the fuck is this supposed to mean?"

Henry glances up at Brandon, bracelet hanging on the precipice of his index finger (considering the tone of voice, he wouldn't be surprised if it was hanging from a different one), standing next to his bed.

"I don't know," he drawls, looking back at his phone, "you're the one that made it. You tell me."
"You left it on my bed."

"Yeah? And?"

"So...that's it, then," Brandon says, with rough laughter, he slides the bracelet back onto his own wrist, "wow--"

"That's it' what, I-- Brandon," Henry snaps, throwing his cell down on his bedspread, sitting upright and templing his hands over the bridge of his nose, "I've had, like, eight hours of sleep, maybe, at most, collectively, in the past five days, so if you can't--"

"So it's-- we're done. Just like that."

"'We're done'? Christ, it's not like we were dating--"

"Guess this means I can forget the thing with my mom, then, huh--"
circles under them.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm-- none of your-- give me my book back, Brandon--"

"Why are you writing your name in your book?" Brandon asks, dodging him as he walks to the other side of the of their room.

"Because that's what you do when you get a book, you write your name in the--"

"And you write 'mine' in all caps to drive the point home, too?" he asks, laughing.

Henry wrests his textbook back from him, eventually (it takes him a lot longer than he'd readily admit…lack of sleep is weakening him, his muscles slip back and forth like ripples across puddles rather than up and down as taut cords), he throws it back down on his bed and Brandon retreats back to his side of the room, hands up in mock surrender.

A few minutes later the acrid smell of cigarette smoke clouds the room (and for once Henry's not the original cause).

"Are you going to be like this all fucking semester, or--"

"Won't have to share space for much longer," Brandon retorts shortly, "so don't worry about it."

"What does that mean--"

"Last semester's GPA was two point nine eight."

Silence.

Normally Brandon would revel in the reality that this is the first time Henry's had absolutely nothing to say in response, that he's deadened the air so swiftly…. Except the realness of his words aren't a reality he wants to live in.

But sharing has, at least, lifted the weight and pressure of a secret off his chest. He finally feels like he can breathe more easily, cigarette in hand or no.

His class schedule is blank, his classes effectively dropped (and he doesn't even know if the person at the registrar's office was a dick or if the news they delivered just colored his impression of them, could not tell you with a gun to my head) he somehow didn't get his grades in the mail, and everything's fucked, fucked, fucked and not being the only person that knows that anymore is freeing. He's beyond wounded pride, actually, it's about a state behind him now and it's almost better to tell someone that's not a friend because he thinks any trace of pity would literally make him scream.

"So," he continues, coughing before taking another drag as he lies on his back, watching the smoke curl outside his open window, "I don't have the tuition, unless I turn to like…drug dealing. Or prostitution."

"You'd make a decent prostitute," Henry quips, smirking despite himself.

Brandon snorts and fires back, immediately getting the reference (they marathoned Brooklyn Nine
Nine together after midterms, and there's what Henry thinks is some genuine indignation there, too):

"Fuck you, I'd make an amazing prostitute."

Henry laughs.

"Tough break."

It's more than that, of course, but he doesn't know what to say.

"Yeah," Brandon says, with no trace of affect, "thanks."

---

**January 6, 2017, York Place Apartments, 2:41 AM**

Henry's tried a cup of warm milk, hypnosis tracks from iTunes, a hot shower, a warm bath, an infomercial, and the first chapter of *War and Peace*, all to no avail.

Exhausted, he finally caves into the deal he made with himself to not drug his sleep any more.

The drugstore sleep aid liquid boasts 'non habit forming' on its label, but he has his doubts.

He's beyond caring, though, and eventually falls into a sleep as heavy as the medicinal syrup...

"Yes."

He doesn't know what he asked, but it's a room with an open window and it's cold and it's morning and she's here.

And it is a word that is joy, pooling, overflowing from a sink and spilling onto the floor in sheets, from her lips, softly.

As she goes into his arms, softly.

Her palms against his chest, tips of her fingers slip under the neck of his shirt, cool against his skin.

"Are you certain?" Henry asks.

Anne answers with a kiss that is snowfall, quiet and melting as it meets his lips.

The weight that comes along with carrying oneself as high as God allows is lessened, dropped and he thinks he has never known such relief, never known what it felt like to be without it; before this.

Sunlight streams in through stained glass, illuminating them, and then that vision collides with another:

He is older, he swings open a door and she is in bed.

Lying down on her back, eyes closed, wearing a long nightgown and yet the two of them continue to kiss standing, separate from that image. The pair of them are faint, the image grey in the corner of the room like a mirage, flickering.

He cannot walk towards the bed, as the unnatural stillness is one he's familiar with
although disbelieving of (her, her, her, the one who taught you what love was, who molded the world and took your hand as she showed it to you, to see her lie there pale, unflinching to all, the same yet different, flowers in her hair... as a child he fell to his knees screamed).

And her hair still curls against her cheek, a slick cape on the pillow. All he can see is dark hair and closed eyes and suddenly he's at the bedside.

Still: dark hair and closed eyes and unmoving and cold as he briefly touches the back of her wrist.

Gone, the impression of life only.

He does not fall to his knees, because he is not a child. His knees do not buckle underneath him, he remains upright despite the dizziness; sways only once before righting himself.

A high, keening sound startles him until he realizes its source is himself.

Looks, desperate, between the image on the bed and the corner of the room where they are together and alive but grey.

Grey and fading fast.

Dampness spills down his cheeks, from the corners of his mouth, in that way that is unique to panic and grief.

"How like you this?"

Henry whips his head to the voice, and sees Five, again, his hand wrapped around a post of the bed.

"You do not?"

Henry shakes his head, vehemently, small gasps leaving him as tears pour all the way down his neck; dampening the edge of his collar.

Five nods, is at the head of the bed in an instant, pushing Henry out of the way. He places his hand over Anne's forehead, his slashed sleeve weighing down upon her hair, and at once the bed is empty.

So, too, is the corner. The image of them entwined glimmered and disappeared until all that was left was the wall.

"What happened to--"

"Oh! Would you like that back?" Five asks, unsmilting though his voice is light and carefree.

"I--"

Five snaps his fingers, and the image returns, he watches as it comes to color (how strange to see yourself kiss someone while you stand elsewhere, apart from it).

But then he is there, instead, until he is waking up, lifting the sheet off his torso, blithely and blearily, and he sees her hand, brushes his own over it and finds it cold--
The unnatural stillness again, she is no longer there, this is not really—her.

"No, no, no, no…"

He has fallen out of bed, hurries to stand up from the floor and they're in the corner, grey and fading yet again.

While Five, vibrantly bright next to them, bright green cap in his hands, says:

"You cannot have one without the other."

"Stop."

Five shrugs before clapping, twice.

The image in the corner fades until it disappears entirely, and the bed is made but empty now.

"Her death is your cause. Do you understand now?"

Chapter End Notes

i promised this chapter AGES ago to a friend in exchange for her finishing her homework assignment but i'm Fake.

finally showing up with it, a million years late, without Starbucks.

want to thank, again, everyone who's stuck with it so far. the story as of today has 42 subscriptions and 198 kudos, which is incredible. i appreciate it all! 🌟‿ربية❤️

here are some edits/moodboards i've made for the verse, the prettiest/my favorite ones/with my favorite fancasts because...i can, lol:

henry:

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/153847200227/i-was-raised-in-a-mansion-at-least-try-to-come

gen (purple doc martens INCLUDED):

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/153505220942/a-myriad-of-ways-to-leave-a-myriad-of-effects-the

anne (as gen bujold):

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/153310008322/youve-told-me-about-your-past-but-not-your

henry:

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/153289673267/and-when-this-he-knew-the-heart-of-the-lion
henry/anne:

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/150195414622/that-one-could-meet-someone-and-that-that-meeting

one of my mutuals made one for elizabeth woodville which is so lovely:

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/151846952332/therealasr-ive-been-so-busy-at-work-so-i

the tarot card reading scene will be finished (next chapter?? i hope??), but in the mean time, here's a visual for it, for anyone that wants one:

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/private/153839159892/tumblr_ohdqzgYVtA1qc1yyx
"What was that?" Henry asks, his voice cracking on the last word.

"What was...?" Elizabeth trails off, standing upright now (her curtsey had been brief; but impossible to mistake for anything else).

His face is tense as he stretches his arm out, hand palm down as he pushes downwards, as if the air has some weight to it.

"Oh. Well, that's called a 'curtsey', I thought you knew--"

"Why, why, why," he says, running a hand over the back of his head (the quip has missed him, somehow, it hangs, unregistered, in the air), emitting a short and sharp laugh, "why would you do that?"

"You think highly enough of yourself to bang on my door when most holy people are sleeping," Elizabeth says, canting her head, "so I was being cute. Tongue-in-cheek?"

"Oh. Sorry," Henry mutters, lowering his chin.

"Would you like to come in?"

He nods, cheeks warming, and does.

Henry unsheathes his arms from his coat and puts it on the hook by the door. It's balmy in the apartment compared to the December chill he walked through to get here. By the time he turns around his grandmother is already a retreating figure, long white hair twisted in a braid down the length of her back, heading towards the kitchen with an unusual haste.

He walks to follow her but stills at the table near the couch.

The Scrabble board is still there, fully filled out. Immediately his gaze is drawn to the bottom of the board:

Destiny...so...now...awoken.

The dream: "I see her and feel...as if my destiny is...so now awoken."

The drawing he paid Beck for yesterday, and its inscription:
"Would you like anything to drink?" she calls out, "I think I have coffee for guests somewhere, I don't drink it regularly anymore myself--"

"Grand-mère, what--"

"I don't even have a coffee pot anymore, but I have some sort of maker, a gift, somewhere," Elizabeth mutters, rummaging around in the cupboard below her oven, appliances knocking together and making clanging sounds as she does, "usually I have tea but this...seems like the sort of night for coffee, wouldn't you say--"

"Why is all of this still...out?"

When he enters the kitchen, he finds the cards set on the round table there in exactly the same place: the seven cards she drew are still splayed in an incomplete Celtic cross spread, the three unread cards are face down.

"Hm?" she asks, distractedly, a glass device between her hands now as she pushes it onto the counter next to the stovetop.

"You left everything out from the-- why?"

"Well," she tuts, pulling a glass from the cupboard nearest the edge of the sink, shrugging a single shoulder as she fills it with water, "I'm not...much of a cleaner... you're not going to scold me for being a bad housekeeper, are you?"

"No, but I don't...think that's why you did," Henry says, and the words leave his mouth quiet but powerful; lilting yet strong.

His height almost fills her kitchen doorway, hands in the pockets of a Whitehall University sweatshirt.

Elizabeth measures him from where she stands, holding her glass with both hands. She considers how to respond as she takes a sip from it, then, with a shrug, admits:

"Maybe I had a feeling you'd come back for the rest."

"Maybe?" Henry presses, biting his bottom lip as blue eyes are made all the more stunning by the gloss of unshed tears.

He cried at almost anything as a child, she remembers-- for selfish and unselfish things, dropped ice cream cones and the last words of *Tuck Everlasting*.

"I thought-- I was hoping, maybe, that a night of rest would be enough to quell your curiosity. But I didn't count on it."

"Will you tell me the rest?"

It's a genuine question, a request rather than a command; but the colors of his aura are so intense there may as well not be a difference.

His is the expression of a boy lost; an unabated hunger for answers shimmers around him like a mirage.
"Yes...of course."

January 7, 2017, Saturday, Financial Aid Offices, Room 4A: Office of John Dinham

"Mr. Brandon, please do sit down--"

"I have most of it," Brandon says, landing in the wheeled chair across his advisor's desk squarely, with so much force that it skids at an angle across the linoleum floor, "actually, like, I don't know if maybe I need to drop a class? Or if it's possible to just leave what's here with you as a sort of hold, because--"

"Mr. Brandon," Dinham reiterates, startled enough to finally glance up from his desktop computer (Brandon had lurked in the doorway for a good few minutes before clearing his throat to announce himself, because, like…he made this appointment, and it got confirmed, and he was on time, and it's the first time since Brandon's arrival that he's broken a stare with the screen), "what are you--"

"All the credit card booths were out yesterday in the quad, and usually I just ignore them but they have this thing called cash advances…I didn't read the fine print," he says, chuckling as he unzips the backpack on his lap, "I know there's fine print, but I didn't read it, and they don't want you to, obviously, so it turns out that worked pretty well on both sides…anyways, I'm in dire straits--"

"Young man--"

"I actually don't even know what dire straits means! Couldn't give you, like, a dictionary def," Brandon continues, flipping out stacks of cash wrapped in rubber bands onto the edge of the desk, "but I know I'm in them, that's for goddamn sure--"

"We don't usually take cash payments--"

"It'll take an extra day to put this in my checking and shit, so if you could make an exception I'd really--"

"Wait, I-- I need to pull up your records," Dinham says, raising a hand up, "first name…Charles, last Brandon, correct?"

"Yes," Brandon says, cradling the back of his head with both hands and leaning back in the chair.

"Right," he mutters, squinting at his screen, "Brandon, Charles…you have a full courseload, and besides a late fee…no, that was also-- your tuition has been paid in full till the end of this semester."

"No," Brandon drawls, pulling a crumpled print-out of his empty class schedule out from the bottom of his backpack, "I'm not, that's what they told me when I asked about--"

"It was paid recently."

"By fucking…who?"

"I'm afraid that's confidential."

"Confidential?"

"Yes. 'Confidential' is when something is--"

"I know what confidential means," he sneers, gnawing on the inside of his cheek, "I got into this school, Jesus--"
"My mistake," the advisor says dryly, pressing the center button on the monitor and gathering his jacket from over the edge of his chair.

"It's 'confidential.'"

"Yes," Dinham says, pushing his arms through the sleeves.

"You can't tell me...who paid my tuition...to me?"

"Correct. Your scholarship, however, is suspended. I would recommend reapplying for the next year, and soon. It's a fairly competitive slot."

Brandon lingers, arms folded, cash still out on the desk. Dinham is already at his door, holding it open, turned towards the student at his desk.

"Mr. Brandon?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm leaving for my lunch."

"I already ate, thanks," Brandon says, making no motion towards exiting, rather he places an elbow on the desk, tugging a dark curl of hair away from his scalp with a middle finger.

"I'm not inviting you. You need to get out of my office."

Brandon slides one of the bundles of cash into his backpack, slowly, whistling.

"Oh for God's-- it's password-protected. Heavily. Let's go."

January 8, 2017, Sunday, Henry and Brandon's dorm

"You know...you haven't asked why I'm still here."

"What?" Henry asks, voice flat as his thumbs flit furiously over the game controller.

The sound of explosions fill the room, emanating from the television screen as Henry plays on the couch. Brandon can see the back of his newly shorn head from the way he's positioned his chair of his desk, glinting gold from a shaft of sunlight that spills through the window.

He gets up from his chair and walks over to the couch, sitting on the opposite end of it. Henry doesn't react visibly, except for somewhat settling his shoulders back as he continues the assault of his opponent on screen.

But it's better, actually, that he doesn't react, doesn't care enough to pause the game despite the leaden seriousness of Brandon's tone (as he would've in the past, from surprise at the tone coming from Brandon if nothing else). Brandon figures he'll get more honesty if Henry remains distracted.

"I'm staying. At Whitehall."

"Oh?"

"You don't sound surprised," Brandon says.

"I'd have to care to be surprised," Henry responds quickly, his accent stronger, syllables more
clipped and *proper-sounding* (more *Downton Abbey* than he's ever heard it, usually it's just the occasional British slang and a hint of rounded vowels slung around an otherwise American accent).

"You're not gonna ask how I managed to do that?"

"*Nope,*" he says, a tight-lipped smile turning into a grimace as his character gets annihilated on screen.

"Someone paid the balance."

"Mm. Guess you have a fairy godmother," he says flippantly, brow knit.

"Guess so."

He sits there for another minute in silence, checks his text messages (nothing, because he's sent nothing, but all his friends were Henry's friends first and he's not really sure they're his anymore, *so there's that*, too), an email from their lacrosse coach with a calendar for upcoming games in February, before he tonelessly says:

"I know it was you."

"*Don't* know what you're talking about."

"*Dude. I know* it was you."

"Know it was me, *what?*"

"You paid it."

"No, I *didn't,*" he snaps, *all crisp and Downton Abbey again,* then, seething as his character is shot and he attacks back, "*Goddamn* it! Stop distracting me!"

"Sorry. I know lying *can be* very distracting--"

"Shut the *fuck* up, I'm--"

"You *do* care, though. Because you did. *So...* I just wanted you to know that I plan on paying you back. I don't know how, because I gotta *use* the cash advances to *pay* the cash advances back, plus interest, first and...I don't know when, but I will--"

"There's nothing to pay me back *for,*" Henry yells, throwing his controller down on the floor and hunching his shoulders forward, jerking hands splayed in a snappy gesture of frustration, one shake of emphasis, "*because I didn't pay it!*"

"*Those,*" Brandon says smoothly, scooping the controller up from the carpet and putting it up on the rectangular table that separates the couch from the television set, "*are expensive.*"

"*I know,*" Henry groans from in between his hands, pulling a knee up to his chest, "*I know that.*"

"You shouldn't throw them," Brandon says, crossing his arms.

"Okay, *Dad,*" he says, rolling his eyes and moving to stretch his wrists, fingers intertwined as he does.

"Okay, first: *ew. Second,*" Brandon huffs, striding back over to his desk and pulling on a hoodie that he left on the back of his chair, "*you do* know, but you still don't..."
His hand stops and starts, he's trying to zip up quickly but his hands are trembling and it makes it a trickier endeavor than it normally would be.

"I don't…what?"

"You don't care," he says, laughing, then shrugs, "because you can just buy another one."

Henry jerks back, slightly, as if he's been slapped:

"Brandon…"

"Tudor. I'll pay you back."

A decision settles over him, easily, as he pushes their door open, with the easy steps he takes down the stairs (so, too, does the knowledge settle him over him that Henry's not going to follow him down):

Brandon won't broach the topic of a rehabilitation of their friendship.

If it's going to be brought up, it's not going to be by him.

---

**December 27, 2016, Tuesday, the witching hour, Brooklyn, New York**

Henry sits with his hands around a mug filled to the brim with strong coffee, made with his grandmother’s French press (*I don’t actually know how to use this*, she had said, and he had smiled despite himself at the memory of Anne’s teasing and said *I do, actually*).

“It was,” Elizabeth says quietly, hand steady over each card as she names them, “the Five of Cups, the Page of Wands, the Eight of Pentacles drawn reversed, the Two of Wands drawn reversed, the Five of Swords, the Three of Wands, and the Lovers drawn reversed is where we left off, the seventh card.”

“And the eighth?” Henry asks, a strange shiver cascading down his spine as he does.

“The eighth card represents the questioner’s house,” she explains, tapping her index against it, “your environment and influences…it encapsulates the people and events that surround you.”

She leans farther forward in her seat and flips the edge of the card over so that it faces him and announces:

“The Seven of Cups.”

---

**January 9, 2017, Monday, 10:49 AM: Humanities Building, Wing A**

Will Compton sidles up to Henry Tudor, currently sitting in the second row (*the second! row! among dozens! of rows!*), in the corner closest to the ajar door of the classroom.

"This is a joke, right?"

"What are you referring to?" Henry asks, pinching the bridge of his nose in one hand and cracking the can of an energy drink open with another.

"We don't sit in the front."
"It's not the front."

"Well, it's not the fucking middle," Will grouses, pulling a pen out from his backpack and scanning the other students, filtering through the door and taking their seats.

"You don't have to sit here if you don't want, dude."

"I can't read and listen to poetry if I don't have to someone to mock it with immediately afterwards. Otherwise it's just, like...gay."

"You are gay."

"No, I'm not-- New Year's doesn't count, Tudor."

"You made out with Thomas Tallis. I think that counts."

"At midnight. It does not count-- ooooh. Oh yeah...now, that makes more sense."

"What?"

Will had looked over his shoulder, only to glimpse a certain brunette wearing a yellow turtleneck, sitting several rows up and passing a pen to the girl sitting next to her.

Several rows up, near the middle. Thus explaining Henry and his jolt and sharp turn back near the front as he was walking up the rows with Will earlier....

The return of the Girlfriend coincides with the avoidance of the Boleyn-- of course.

Chapter End Notes

henry viii gave charles brandon the title of duke of suffolk in 1514, along with a castle. he ordered that his annuity as duke of suffolk "be paid in advance of three quarters in the month of his creation" (source is the book 'charles brandon: henry viii's closest friend' by steven gunn)

http://boleynqueens.tumblr.com/post/155005322537/is-angry-sex-off-the-table-charles
vigil

Chapter Summary

"It is neither as changeable or as fixed as people assume, it is far more grey than black or white. People tend to repeat their mistakes. It is far more exception than rule to not. To make different choices."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

December 27, 2016, Tuesday, the witching hour, Brooklyn, New York

A spread of cards lies upon the round table in Elizabeth Woodville's kitchen. It is framed by lit candles, there is a lamp she brought out from the living room for the remainder of Henry's reading, plugged in and sitting quirkily on her tiled kitchen counter, casting even more light on them.

The overturned card reveals the dark silhouette of a man standing in front of a cloud. The cloud is covered in seven golden cups, the background of the illustration a light blue.

"The cups symbolize sentiment and both positive and negative visions. See how each cup holds something different?" Elizabeth asks, pointing to each as she lists them off: "Here is a snake, for wisdom. A shrouded figure, representative of the need for self-illumination. A pile of riches, for wealth. A laurel wreath, for victory and honor-- but see, here on the front of this cup is a skull. It serves as a warning of the dangers that come with vanity and pride-- two things that often come with victory and success."

Henry picks the card up to examine it more closely: there is also a man's head resting in one of the cups, it reminds him of paintings he's seen of David and Goliath.

But she moves quickly, his thoughts snap back from their wandering path as she continues:

"The ninth card represents the questioner's hopes and fears-- this is the Five of Swords."

He puts down the former card and focuses now on the latter, which she has pushed towards him: a man holding three swords looks over his shoulder at two retreating figures, their backs to him, facing the ocean. Two swords lay upon the shore, pointing two different directions, two different paths.

"This one is...conflict, loss, defeat. The concept of winning at any cost, but also...betrayal. It's also your second card of with the quantity of five," Elizabeth explains, pushing the first card of the reading (the Five of Cups) down the table so that it is parallel with the ninth, "which usually suggests vigils in the questioner's...near future."

"Vigils...night prayers?"

"No, not quite-- more in the definition of periods of wakefulness that result from the inability to sleep. Something with less choice, will, than prayers."

"I've had the opposite problem this semester, actually," he says, smirking, running the pad of his
fingers over the rim of his coffee mug, "I kept…oversleeping, past my alarm. I'd fall asleep while doing homework, wake up in the morning in my regular clothes."

*It was those damn dreams* that tangled him up in drowsiness, dense like thorny thickets that he had to use all his willpower to cut himself awake from…they were so deep that he often found himself waking in the morning as if his sleep had been drugged: slowly, reluctantly, hazily.

"Vigil isn't certain. Only if everything *else* remains as it is in the reading," she says, sweeping a hand over the cards, the bell of her sleeve almost brushing the table, "will the details align and become true."

"I can change my 'fate', then?"

"There is fate, of course, but there is also choice. The future is not a permanent fixture, it is malleable to a certain degree. Only the past remains unchangeable."

"A 'certain degree'? Is that all?"

Elizabeth shrugs, runs a strand of moonlight (*or what looks like it, in the dark-- maybe she really is a witch*, he muses, in a half-serious, half-self-jesting sort of way, *casting a glamour of sorts just for fun*) between her fingers.

"It is neither as changeable or as fixed as people assume, it is far more grey than black or white. People tend to repeat their mistakes. It is far more exception than rule to not. To make different choices."

"Did you know yours?" he asks boldly.

"My fate?" she asks, voice and manner suddenly airy; light as a spool of silk.

Henry nods, hands curved around each bicep assuredly, elbows on the table, a stance he has often found grounding.

"I did. I saw…what would happen, to my sons. I was so vigilant after it came to me in a vision, and yet it still…happened. But that isn't to say the same is true for you."

"And it isn't to say it isn't?"

She skirts the question, looking down at the spread and turning the remaining card over:

"The World, reversed."

"Wasn't there a different card that was--"

"The Lovers," she says, moving her index along the column of cards on his right, bypassing the previous most recently drawn to the one closest to him, "was also, yes."

"Is that significant, somehow?"

"They are both connected, yes. The Tenth Card is actually, arguably, the most important of the reading; the one which connects to all others. It is representative of what is to come for you. It is what I, as the reader, am to focus my intuition on, and the lens with which I am to interpret the rest of the reading."

"And?"
"Give me a moment, my rose," she chides, smiling at the expression of consternation her childhood nickname for him elicits, "patience."

*Patience was another thing he struggled with as a child,* Elizabeth recalls (he would find the pop of color of a plastic Easter egg within tufts of grass and open it immediately; whereas Arthur saved his for the last possible moment) as she lays both hands against the soft, worn material of the older cards (the feeling akin to the rub of a paper towel), divining whilst she hums and closes her eyes…

"Whoever this is about," she says, finally, firmly, with an equally firm tap on 'The Lovers', "and you know who it is about; is….connects to this…"

At 'this', she makes a chalice around 'The World' with her hands:

"As long as you and her are 'upside down', as it were…not righted, not together…so, too, is your world upside down. With her you reach your full potential, and I know this because The World in its upright position stands for success, journey, flight. Reversed it is stagnation."

"In more exact terms…?"

"Paired together," she says, moving 'The Lovers' and 'The World' so that they are side by side, the edges overlapping, "and parallel to the rest of the reading: this is the kind of love…that will change the world."

That has changed the world.

"I don't…*love* her, though," Henry says, shrugging (his hands are trembling, but it's because he made the coffee too strong, probably… shaking like they were after their first kiss, and every time he sent a letter, and when Anne found out he had lied about Katherine), "I-- honestly haven't even known her for very long."

"Do you have anything she's maybe…touched, with you? Anything of hers, maybe?"

He bristles so visibly, and it is an expression that is such a twin of his father's (the shoulders move back defensively, the mouth flattens, his eyes are lit with a quick fire) that a laugh escapes her despite herself, she claps both hands over her mouth.

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"So…you do?" Elizabeth giggles, knowing full well he wouldn't have startled half so ferociously if he hadn't felt called out by her inquiry.

"Not on purpose," he says slowly, "I just never took it out of my coat pocket-- she didn't accept it, or anything, it was an…attempt, at a gift."

"Did she touch it? Wear it?"

"Yes, both, actually," he groans, rubbing closed eyelids with both hands, "may I ask *why*?"

"It might help me get a sense of her, is all. A read on her, on…your future."

Elizabeth excuses herself and comes back with a scarf that looks…*familiar,* to him -- one he *may have had as a child?* It stirs the vestige of some memory within him, but he pushes it away, even as he hone in on the pink material as she sets it down, billowing in the air, over the spread of cards.
Henry hands the necklace he retrieved in her absence (he's come out all this way after all, he might as well-- he's not dying of curiosity or anything like that, and still doubting what led him to her doorstep with questions again, but he is curious-- it's a morbid curiosity, really, if anything at all…).

She pulls the chain over her index and clasps both of his hands over the scarf, it hangs between two of their palms.

After a beat, she smiles lightly and says:

"You gave her two choices, two options. She said no to the one you offered, the one you asked her to say yes to-- she doesn't like either choice; neither are what she wants."

"What--"

"Shh. She is on….the verge. Of asking you; for what she does want. If she asks, you will say yes. It will feel like breathing, to you, to say yes. You will not be able to help it; it's what you truly desire as well; even if you have yet to admit it to yourself."

Her brow is creased in concentration, he feels discomfort mount over him like an itch.

"And now," she says, letting go of his hands but keeping the necklace on her finger, placing them palms up on the table, "the past. Palms down on mine."

"Put them down…backwards?" he snarks, even while obeying, the tips of his fingers overlapping her wrists, "Is this how you 'read palms'?"

"Not usually."

_________________________________________

“I see…dark hair…a falcon…”

Henry resists the urge to roll his eyes, his grandmother’s hands still holding his across the table. He only agreed to this to humor her; he believes in the occult no more than he believes in the Tooth Fairy.

Besides which; the longer he entertains this idea, the more dregs of Catholic guilt are creeping upwards, whispering sacrilege, rosary, confession, and it's fucking annoying.

Like any good Catholic boy, he prefers his guilt to be the same way serial killers prefer their victims: deep and buried.

So he had a weird dream. So he woke up and didn’t forget it. He shouldn't have come here; it was an overreaction, his chest pounding from adrenaline when he realized the spoken words in the dream were the same as the picture Warbeck had given him. But, really, if he dreamt the words it's only because he read them today (destiny, now awoken) and they probably embedded in his subconscious or some other such psycho babble nonsense….

“The letter B…”

Huh…that’s weird. Still, it doesn’t necessarily mean…

“…B, in gold, hanging from a necklace…”

…what?

“…on a rather pretty neck, actually– oh!”
Elizabeth gasps and yanks her hands from his as if she’s been scalded, blue eyes suddenly bright and **wild** with—terror? **What does she have to be afraid of?**

"**Grand-mère**? Are you alright?"

She walks towards him, grasps his hands again. Scrutinizes him, her brow furrowed.

"I don't understand," she whispers, "I don't see that in you. Anywhere, at all."

Elizabeth squeezes her eyes shut as she squeezes his hands and is this what Alzheimer's is like or…?

"It's not coming to me," she snaps, impatiently, pushes his hands aside, "do you…do you have a pen, Henry, something else is…"

"Uh," he says, brushing the sides of the pockets of his coat, now hanging over the back of his chair, feels a lighter and his wallet before pulling one out, "yeah, here…"

She takes it from him and uncaps it, sits down in the chair across from him. Rummages around the table before her hand lands on a receipt, she flips it over and begins to write, reciting as her pen moves, tonelessly:

"The first you give a ring, the second, you give a crown made for a man-- a king.

You destroy the one you love the most and that; in turn, destroys you.

And when this he knew, the heart of the lion died, and the falcon: she flew.

The cub survives, then thrives, and thrives: let gold light sing."

"What did you see?" he asks.

Her reading was somehow both vague enough that Henry uneasily doubted any legitimacy to her visions and exacting enough (you gave her two choices….the color of her hair, the B initial from the necklace she always wore, the notable beauty of her neck) that he’s begun to doubt his initial doubt of them (again, as he did before coming here, again).

Elizabeth fidgets with the shawl draped over her shoulders, pulling it tighter around her arms, sticking her upper lip out farther than her lower.

Her gaze meets his, chin tilted upward as she answers:

"She dies young."

In a silence that feels thunderous, she sits and waits for Henry to speak; his face has turned colorless.

"**What?**"

The question cracks like a whip in dead air.

"In the vision of the past, and a possible vision of the…future, she dies--"

"Because she's with…me?"

"In a…yes. In a way."
"So if she's with me now…?" he prompts, fingers curled over the edge of the table, stiff and white.

"No, it doesn't have to be the way… it was--"

"It is more likely, though, if we are? Her... her d-- her--"

"Her, being in danger of that, yes. Remember what I said about, choices, though, Henry, and how the past doesn't--"

"Is there a future," he presses, leaning in now, "where it is certain that she does not?"

Tears fill eyes that have been dry for years, and she blinks them back, surprised, almost offended by their sudden, unannounced arrival.

"It's the one where we're not together," Henry says, understanding dawning before the dawn itself has come, "where 'the Lovers' aren't... right?"

She nods, swiping away at the dampness over her cheeks.

"Then I'm glad," he says, voice breaking, shaking his head, "that she said no... when I asked. The choices, like you said, I'm glad she said no."

"It's not that simple, Henry--"

"I think it is-- you said you saw the fate of your sons; and that choices play a part. So tell me: was there a future you could see, a future where it was certain they would never be lost to you?"

"Yes," she admits, hearing the crack in her voice as she feels one in her heart.

He hands her a handkerchief pulled from his pocket in a gesture she would characterize as impatient in any scenario but this one; she can see him wrought with emotion and focus in equal measure as he continues:

"What did you have to do, to make it happen? Or what did you see yourself having to do and-- did you do it?"

*He's deciding whether or not to believe.*

"No, it was too-- no, I couldn't, I'm ashamed to say--"

"What did you have to do?"

His voice is so soft, so high and clear, that he manages to make an interrogation sound like more like a melody (*there's a power in that, too, she thinks, more than he may realize*). She doesn't wish to lie to him, but she's struck with the knowledge that if that were her wish she may have been unable to:

"I had to leave your grandfather. For it be guaranteed, that it would never-- there is only one thing," she says, and there is such a release in the torrent of words she feels building up (there is so much, *so much* pressure behind the untold stories one carries) as it flows, a dam bursting, to share:

"There is only ever one thing you must do so something never happens. You can do a million things, Henry, a million variations of choices, where an outcome will be possible. But if you wish an outcome to be impossible, to never happen, it's much more-- precise, what you must do. And I couldn't, I loved him so much, I just-- even *thinking* of leaving him hurt me."

"And for the outcome you just saw... me and her... not being together.... is the guarantee for it to
never happen. Yes?"

She manages a nod, blowing her nose.

There is a preternatural calmness to him as he cleans her French press, spooning clods of ground coffee like damp earth into the trash bin.

"What did you mean when you said 'I don't see that in you', Grand-mère?"

"I don't remember," she lies, voice gilded as she sweeps the cards back into a deck, "the specifics. It was you doing something cruel, and I don't think you have a capacity for cruelty, is all, Henry."

"I do, though."

"I don't believe--"

"Summer after my year abroad," he says, over the sound of water flowing from the sink, "I work at Red Dragon. I beg my father to be more involved, for more responsibility."

Elizabeth blows the candles out, still somewhat shaken from her earlier confession, from her tears, dreading how this story may end.

"He says, fine. Here's a list of people we need to lay off. You can do the honors."

"Oh, Henry--"

"And I did," he says, with shaky laughter that sounds more like tears, "I did, so--"

"That doesn't mean--"

"No one made me do it. I wanted to impress him, and so I did it."

"And how did you feel afterwards?"

"Afterwards? I felt like shit. Afterwards, I locked myself in the private bathroom of my private office," he says, hands shaking as he holds the glass under the water, rinsing it out, "laid on the floor, cried, and threw up. But that doesn't matter."

"No, Henry, it does--"

"It doesn't! How you feel after doing something doesn't matter half as much as the fact that you did it. It doesn't matter how you feel after a choice, what matters is what you do, what matters is that you made that choice. And I made that choice."

"Henry..."

"I did, I made the choice, so I am, I'm sorry, but I'm not what you think I am, I'm not what anyone thinks I am; and he's the only one that knows and loves me anyway, so I have to do what he says, even without all this, because who else would if they knew--"

"I do."

"N-no," he stutters through tears, flicking the sink off, turning so that his hip hits the side of it, arms crossed, shoulders hunched slightly, "no, you don't--"
"Yes, I do. Come here."

Elizabeth hugs him and he collapses into it with a grateful sigh; and while it does not bridge the gap of years spent apart (*no one gesture ever could*), she is glad to be of maternal comfort to him, in some small way.

Later, she asks if he needs to sleep over and he politely refuses. He has to look down at her to smile at her (*Edward also always had to*), as he explains that he told Margaret he'd be home by breakfast.

They leave things both finished and unfinished-- *he got the answers he came for*, she thinks, *whatever spurred him to my doorstep is quelled for now*.

But she leaves the lamp on in the kitchen; watches him standing in the streetlight and waits as he waits on the sidewalk below for a car to arrive.

And she worries about him, even as the car pulls up and he gets in.

She worries, as she watches the car disappear into the inky darkness of the night.

And as Elizabeth Woodville lays in her bed in predawn hours, she thinks that it may be time for her to move back to Los Angeles.

*The necklace that he sent as a gift still sits, over a scarf Henry used to own, at the kitchen table, next to all the blown-out candles.*

And there it remains, for several nights.

Chapter End Notes

> it wasn't everything i wanted it to be, but i tried <3
> hopefully it explains some things, and it should help explain what happens in the next chapter, which will jump back to january.
> thank you all for being so patient, and sorry if the timeline has been confusing. let me know if you have any questions.
Chapter Summary

"How would you know what I need?"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

January 9, 2017, Monday, 4:03 PM, Whitehall Library

Usually, when one hopes to run into someone, the opposite happens.

Usually, when one hopes not to run into someone, the opposite happens.

But in this case, Anne had figured the chances of running into Henry Tudor were pretty high. There's only a small amount of shock that occurs because his presence in the armchair at the end of this shelf is at odds with the sort-of-Murphy's-law.

The factor that made it more likely wasn't Murphy's law; but that she remembered something he told her when they were studying for finals together: that this floor was somewhere he went when he wanted to unwind after classes, a floor that remains deserted because of the age of its books (not only that; but its old newspaper articles are kept in compartments here, too...besides which, most things are in internet archives these days and you have to ask for the key to unlock them anyway). They even visited this particular place to review, together, back in December, and did so until she had asked for another coffee break.

The scent of dust and the fresh tang of the Swiss lozenge he sucks on is cut through by peaches and jasmine.

His neck tenses, he opens his eyes to the page of the open physics textbook he has on his lap, the one he hasn't been reading (he'd been trying and failing to nap for half an hour; the feeling of sleep continually teased that it was dropping over the edge and then pulled him right back up).

"You're not gonna run away again, are you?" she asks, smirking.

"I wasn't-- I didn't feel like talking," he says, placing an elbow on the arm of the chair, rubbing the bristles of his hair with the pads of his fingers.

"Sure," Anne chirps, easing herself into the chair across from him (there are two squashy ones in the corner here, it's why he likes this spot), "I actually, though...wanted to talk to you about something. Are you okay with talking, right now?"

She's almost obscenely vital, an energy thrumming off her (he had felt her presence before he had even looked up and seen her, truly) that reminds him of hers at the Virtues' Masquerade: present and persistent and glittering, eyes and cheeks glowing.

It's hard to put his finger on what the quality is, exactly until he realizes: she looks like she's slept well. This is the glow of several nights of decent rest; Henry feels a pang of envy with this...
realization as a flood of heat in his chest.

There’s a red flush to her cheeks that reminds him of how pale hers were in the dream, how she was the opposite of vitality within its realm.

_The first you give a ring, the second you give a crown made for a man…_

"Keep it. It looks better on you, anyway."

_She is…on the verge. Of asking you; for what she does want._

"I'd rather…not, actually--"

"It won't take very long, I promise."

He's not sure if he's squirming– he feels like he is, but panic is also making him feel…disconnected, somewhat, from physicality.

_If she asks, you will say yes._

"George was hired for a job, here, in L.A."

He looks utterly unsurprised by this; which is more or less what she expected due to her own deduction (she pressed George about how he got the job further when she visited him in person at his office and he had been…cagey at her line of questioning, to say the least, cagier still when she attempted to casually mention the Tudor influence over the company in person as well).

"Good for him. Was that all you wanted to share, because you could've texted--"

"I could've, but I wanted to see how you would react in person."

Henry shrugs, runs his hand over shorn hair (it's peach fuzz again; how it was during their first tutoring session), gaze flitting away from her.

"You don't seem surprised, is all."

"Were you surprised?"

"Well, yes, he's…never had a job in this field before, he dropped out of college--"

"Wow. Didn't know you thought so lowly of your brother--"

"I don't, but I can objectively see how an employer from a prestigious company with scarce internships might-- they don't even post online when they're hiring, I don't know how he heard about it--"

"I told him there was an opening. I gave him an email address. He must've sent a resume."

It's not quite the admission she's looking for, _but at least_ she's _closer_ and she's determined to _get_ closer as she pushes:

"And?"
"And what?" he snaps.

"And…is that why you've been avoiding me?"

"I haven't been."

"You ran away from me, on the beach!"

"I…why," he asks, pressing his thumb into the lower left corner of collected pages, "do you think I am?"

He can't tell her the truth. He can't let there be any chance, any chance that she'll want him (to be with him, still: she's on the verge of asking, that's what his grandmother said and even if it weren't true there's still: promise you'll do what he says, that's what Margaret asked of him, and he knows the pain of a sibling's absence too closely to ever, ever risk doing that to someone else, especially not his own, especially not his own who has been through that pain exactly already…).

"I don't know, I figured we haven't talked at all because…Katherine's here, maybe."

Henry knows he won't be able to live with the temptation, if there's any chance at all. He has to ruin that chance, utterly.

If he wants to resign himself to his fate and accept his future, start to get serious about Katherine, and reciprocate what she's doing for him (I have to try. And I have to be here to try); then he has to lie. It's his only chance.

But maybe he can tap into something real, too, to convince her, at least to start, and it's with this in mind that he leans in and begins:

"And if she weren't here…what would you have expected from me?"

"I don't know," she says, shrugging herself now, rubbing the goosebumps that have suddenly erupted over her arms, "I guess--"

"Let's recap," Henry interrupts smoothly, leaning back and clasping both hands together, "shall we? You kiss me. Then you say, 'this didn't happen'-- very affirming, by the way, a real confidence booster there--"

"Because you're so lacking in confidence that you need one?" Anne asks scathingly, matching his heat.

"How would you know what I need?"

His voice ends on a raw note, and she remembers his please don't cry and how he had kept her from falling when it was hard to stand.

It's one moment where he might have been vulnerable, she thinks, but it's erased by the majority of what she knows and sees now: his shoulders are held back, his head is held high aloft, even as he sits. His bank account is full of money and his phone is full of numbers and he gets a greeting from everyone he passes (and second and third glances from most girls that happen to be in his proximity, for that matter); so why would he need confidence from me?

"You have everything you could ever need."
"You're so right, I do. Anyway-- you interrupted so, to sum up: I figure, okay, this 'didn't happen'. Fine. And you don't text, don't Facebook message, don't leave a note at my door, and you don't swing by-- even though you know where my dorm is, and even though I'm pretty sure you still have my number. And you think I've been going out of my way to avoid you?"

"Yes."

"Because by any sane standards, that's a 'your move' deal if you wanted to make-- I'm sorry. Did you just say yes?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I think you got him the job. He told me you didn't, but he's a bad liar and I think you've been avoiding me because you are, too."

The situation and all possible routes out of it, to the outcome he needs, is becoming more compounded as the seconds pass-- like a knot that becomes tighter the more you try to loosen it.

She absolutely can't know that he did exactly what she thinks he did.

He knows he's weak-- he feels literally, physically weak but what's more is he's weak for her, he wants to say yes, I did, and yes, I did it for you and because I knew how much you missed and loved and wanted success for him and I didn't want you to know because I didn't want you to feel you owed me anything, anything at all, I just wanted you to be happy. And knowing I had something to do with that happiness, even though you wouldn't know I had-- that would've been enough for me.

And he can't.

Henry may have met Anne mere months ago, but he'd bet anything that she's never backed down from a question when she needs its answer. And knowing her sharpness, he'd bet the same that its answer has to make sense for her to accept it.

Invent something that makes sense out of thin air: that's his challenge, and it's one he must complete on exhaustion and it must be done quickly before he loses his nerve for it.

"Well, I didn't," he says coolly, resting his jaw against his curved hand.

"I don't believe you," she replies easily, still but not stiff in her seat, narrowing dark eyes at him.

"Believe whatever you want, I guess-- that's your right. But I think your belief probably stems from a falsehood."

"What are you--"

"Because the truth is, I don't care about you enough to do you any favors."

"What do you mean you don't...care," she asks, voice faltering, "that doesn't make--"

"I lost! Oh well. I don't like losing, but it happened. So there it is. I lost, but I'm over it. I suggest you get over it, too."
Anne feels like she just submerged herself into an ice-bath, the goosebumps on her arms have multiplied and tangible even under the long sleeves of her turtleneck.

"What do you mean, you 'lost'?'"

"You don't want to know," he says, scrunching his nose, "and I don't want to tell you. It'll just hurt your feelings."

There are so many angles to his face that are harsher without the softness of his hair to juxtapose them-- the elfish ears are stark, arresting, again, without it. She had been flustered the first time he came to her door, he had looked exactly like this minus the dark circles under his eyes, exactly like this but exuberant; with energy that was barely reined in as he bounced on the balls of his feet and fidgeted in her doorway."

She had told him she liked his hair longer she remembers, in a tease that had turned into accidental praise in this very spot a month ago:

'How much hair product do you use, exactly?' [her, slipping the nub of an eraser under the loop of a curl and then back out as he read her notes]

'None.'

'I don't believe you.'

'Believe it. I'm genetically blessed.'

'Will you keep it this length?'

'Nah, it makes it harder to run.'

'That's too bad…I like it like this.'

And his lips tipped up in a smile and--

Anyway.

His hair was still long when he visited her at Hever, and it was still long when she went to his party, and those three memories and his hair lengths in each feel like the most important thing right now but she's not sure…why.

'I don't care about you' + Henry taking the train to D.C. over break = ???

"I'm sure my feelings will be fine."

"Are you sure, because--"

"Stop fucking patronizing me. Yes, I'm sure."

"Alright. CliffNotes version…you were a bet."

His eyes are placid, the reflection of a flat lake in summer, a smile unfurls easily over his face.
"Excuse me?"

"We didn’t have sex by the end of last year; so I lost the bet."

Anne feels as if the bottom of her stomach has dropped out from under her feet.

"A bet between you and…?"

"Brandon, who else?"

"Since…when?"

"August."

"No, that doesn't…you didn't even know me then, you didn't know who I was."

"Yeah, I didn't 'know who you were.' Just like the dorm I live in was 'won' in a 'random drawing'. Just like the dance partners assigned at the masquerade were 'chosen by destiny', give me a break--"

"No, they were random, Jen told us--"

"Maybe for everyone else! Not for me; I bribed for it. I have to admit it was a stroke of luck; I hadn't even known you were on the list initially; I actually only asked for it because I didn't want to get paired with someone unattractive, or someone I'd already slept with, because y'know-- been there, done that--"

"You were mad when I told you about how Brandon acted at that party back in August, you were surprised--"

"So it was like: Lizzy, check, Mary, check, and then I saw your name and it reminded me! The tutoring thing was a stroke of luck too, I hadn't been trying to get a bad grade or anything, I wasn't that committed; but I guess there aren't many tutors in the program fluent in French--"

"I don't believe this, this doesn't make any sense."

I know you, she thinks, the words like the chime of a bell-tower as she stares at him, unable to accept his expression (soft pity, tilted head), I know you, I know you, I know you, I know you, I know this isn't you, except:

'…campus lothario…'

You're asking for trouble.

"What doesn't make sense?"

"If this is true," she says, laughing, shaking her head, "then how did it start? How did you even come up with--"

"Brandon talked about you the morning after that party, back in August, like I said. So we're talking about you-- covered from under your chin to your feet, in summer, at a college party, in L.A, and he's like: well, I should've figured she was a prude, that I wouldn't get very far. So I'm like, I bet I could've gotten farther…you know, sort of off-hand. But he was like 'want to make that bet official'?"
And so…we did."

"If you made a bet on me in August, then why did you wait till November to approach--"

"I was busy. And it was hard, surprisingly hard, to get to you. You always had guys flickering about-- God knows why, but, I had to be patient. And also I kind of forgot about it until I saw your name on the Virtues' list, like I said. Seeing you at tutoring wasn't planned, but it was lucky. That surprise was genuine."

_Genuine._

Anne won a spelling bee based on that word, knows its definition by heart:

_sincerely and honestly felt or experienced_

"So you're saying everything else…wasn't genuine?"

"Pretty much."

"The stuff about your brother, then, was just--"

"No, that was true. I wasn't _that_ upset about it, so I played it up for sympathy, but technically true."

"So when you told me that not even Brandon knew--"

"Of course Brandon knew! He's my best friend. But I wanted to make you feel special, so I told you no one else did, not to tell anyone else…and Brandon kept upping it, the closer I got. Said he bet I couldn't win if you knew I was engaged, so I bet that I still could and he told you I was."

"Your fight was…?"

"Staged, yes. I didn't really think I could take it as far as I did, but I'm more talented than I thought, I guess--"

"I wouldn't exactly call it 'talent',' she says, heat pushing under her eyes, throat tightening.

"You wouldn't? I would… because truthfully, very few people make the list of those I care about: my family, my friends, Katherine. This was really just a diversion for me, until she got here. A last hurrah, if you will, because I love her, and I won't be dating anyone else now that she's here. But… you thought you made the list."

She'd _rather die_ than let him see her cry right now, so she gets up from her chair.

There's literally nothing she can say that will equal this out: _it was all a joke to me, too, I never cared either?_

It's too late, she can't unsay all that she's said to him these past few months.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, really-- I just get intense about competition, winning. So I'm sorry if I did. I felt a little bad at the end, so I sort of tried to tell you, you know-- that I didn't have a crush. But you had already believed something so unlikely, that I should've figured it wouldn't work…"

"What?"
He tips his head to the side, blandly, one hand curled on the armrest, the other laying limply over the opposite:

"That someone like me would want to be with someone like you."

"Excuse me?"

"You said it before I did. It's usually something I'm too polite to bring up, but you weren't wrong. I'm a Tudor and you're a Boleyn, and our names mean something."

Henry unfurls his fingers from a clenched fist as he watches her retreating form, as he listens to the thud of her steps down the stairs.

He had been squeezing his ring of keys during the entirety of his story to distract himself.

He glances down to his open palm, glimpsing a line of slick red: one of the charms on the ring, cut in the shape of a dagger, is covered in it, and he must have pressed against it so hard that it broke skin.

It's the only time he's ever seen a wound without feeling any sting.

Whitehall University, Freshman Dorms

Anne slides down the length of her door after slamming it shut.

She had managed to keep the tears she felt coming sealed inside for the duration of her walk from the library to her dorm. They now spill, unfettered, down her cheeks, as her shoulder shake.

Whitehall University, Top Floor: Men's Dorms

{ Usually, when people parallel each other in different places, they're never aware...}

Henry's back drags down the back of his dorm's front door as well, his shoulders hunch forward once he hits the floor.

He sits, waiting for the pain to hit, but all he continues to feel is the wetness of his blood-covered palm and the dampness streaking under his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

dajfkljsdkhsdjfal okay WELL:

believe it or not this chapter (a very rough verision of it, but this scene, this dialogue, him
inventing a 'bet' to ensure that she would never, ever ask him to be w/ her (much less want to be around him, tbh) has been written since last year and it's been SO HARD to get to this point (i had to explain it and it sort of is in the next chapter...and i linked all the relevant parts)

sorry for the heartbreak but i do have a plan~~~

hope y'all don't hate henry rm (unrealistic, probably) and eh if you do...remember literally no one hates him more than he hates himself @ this point.

like, not that it excuses his behavior at all but something to keep in mind!

im expecting perhaps some emotional responses (probably?) re: this chapter and i understand that but keep in mind that i'm one of those rare authors that actually loves henry as much as i love anne (well maybe not AS much but like...close) so pls keep that in mind and don't TOTALLY rip him into shreds in the comments? werkwlkej just throwing that out there...

love you all, xoxo

❤️❤️❤️
duet

Chapter Summary

It doesn't fit her situation exactly-- but it's a duet that rounds out at nearly five minutes, rather than a pop song that rounds out in the average three and a half-- and it matches her gentle melancholy, and her fragile determination to push past it.

January 9, 2017, Monday Evening: Whitehall University, Top Floor: Men's Dorms

"The fuck happened to your hand?"

He hadn't heard a key turn in the lock to the front door (did I lock it?), or the knob turn, the door settle closed. Henry hadn't even heard or registered the footsteps that must've sounded for Brandon to be standing in front of him now, towering over his spot on the floor at the foot of his bed, where he sits, cradling his hand, palm upwards.

None of it had registered until the question; and so the voice startles him; he flinches as if hearing a gunshot in dead air.

"Nothing," Henry answers, settling back into stillness, resting his shoulders back against the mattress, leaning against it.

Brandon observes that he looks more exhausted than he's ever seen him (and he's seen him plenty exhausted: all wild hair and bloodshot eyes after cramming the rest of a project the night before it's due-- he doesn't even leave everything to the last minute, not like Brandon, it's just that he's such a perfectionist on the final details of…anything): the circles under his eyes are dark and creased under the light and brilliant blues, his face drawn and pallid.

"I'm not trying to be funny, but…you look like microwaved shit."

"Ha," he says, weakly and with little push behind the word, "you watch Skins."

"What?"

"That's a line from Skins."

"Well…you must've watched yourself; or you wouldn't have recognized it."

"Touché."

A heavy pause stretches, filled with Brandon, fidgeting with the strap of his book-bag as he stands and Henry, sitting and still as a pond on a windless day.

"You should take care of that; it's going to get infected," Brandon says finally, grimly.

"Mm."
Brandon sighs before walking away from Henry to unload his bag onto his own bed. He grumbles under his breath as he turns from his bed and walks to the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind him.

Henry finds himself unburdened with the loss of his immediate presence; and yet that feeling registers as heaviness rather than lightness.

He emerges minutes later with a square white bottle, grumbling still at such low volume that Henry can't make out the words (not that he's trying to particularly hard...'stupid ass hat' might have been among the phrases used, but he wouldn't bet money on it or anything...).

Brandon crouches down on the floor next to him and uncaps the bottle, tipping it onto a cotton triangle, which he presses over the wound.

Henry does not flinch, does not hiss, but he does ask:

"Why--"

"Shut up," Brandon says, brandishing the same treatment to another white triangle pad and wiping away at the excess of blood with no tenderness, "this doesn't mean we're friends."

The last time he was this intimately close to Brandon was when he had the collar of his shirt fisted in his hands; the last time their faces were this close a fist had followed.

"I took your advice," Henry says, impertinently ignoring the command (you speak too often when you're not spoken to, and other frequent requests to quiet down throughout his earlier years had engendered a knee-jerk response in him to ignore any variation thereof in his later ones).

"What advice?"

"Ignoring her didn't work, so I was...mean."

"Oh, right. That. Did it work?"

"Yes, it definitely--yes. I did you, better than you. I was brutal. She," he says, taking a sharp breath, "hates me. I can't imagine her ever talking to me again."

Brandon frowns, brow furrowed as he peels a large band-aid from its waxy paper cover-- the near-stupor Henry was in when he first entered their room and saw him sitting on the floor (which in itself was unusual-- he doesn't even sit on the floor when he smokes weed; he's occasionally sat on the ground on a blanket of some kind whilst strumming a guitar, but...that's about the extent of it) and the intensity with which he relays this to him doesn't really seem to match the situation he had previously described to him: a girl he hooked up with that he needed to push away...right?

Wasn't that it?

"And that's...what you wanted?" Brandon asks, pressing the band-aid onto the cut, carefully smoothing out any possible creases on the edges with one hand, holding Henry's steady with his other.

"Yes. Or...no," he corrects, shaking his head, "no, I don't...want her to, it's the last thing I want, actually. But I...needed her to."

"I see."
"Well, try not to hit anyone else for a while," Brandon says wryly, pulling himself up from off the floor, "you'll open it back up again."

"Thanks," Henry says, softly, tracing the outline of the bandage on his hand.

---

**January 9, 2017, Monday Evening: Whitehall University, Freshman Women's Dorms**

"Anne?"

Anne lifts one hand to wave at Anna over her shoulder, back to her, curled up on her side facing the wall.

"Are you okay?"

She rolls over to her back, blinking and wincing like the light overhead is harsh (only her bedside lamp was turned on when Anna had walked in, but she had flipped the main light on unthinkingly--habit, and also Anne's not really one for naps).

Her lips are a swollen and raw red, as is her nose, the skin under her eyes is puffy and blotched with small pink dots as well.

"I'm fine," Anne says, sniffling and looking up at her from where she stands by her bedside, "just homesick."

"Oh," Anna says, kneeling to the floor so that her face is more on level with hers, "okay."

Anne rolls to her side so that she's facing her:

"I thought you were going to be out all afternoon--"

"I was, but I left to grab something from the fridge--"

"Oh," she says, again, wiping at her cheeks, "you should head back, then-- isn't your study group thing till 7?"

"I'll stay, Anne, I can always just look at someone's notes tomorrow--"

"No," she says abruptly, lifting herself up by her elbow from where she was laying on her side (the mattress bounces slightly in the process, with a squeak that causes Anna to reactively cringe and back up), "you should go, it's important."

"I don't want to leave you--"

"I don't really want to talk about it, and I don't want company, so it's okay, it'll uh…pass," Anne says, scooting towards her bedside table to pull out its drawer and grabbing a folder within it, "really, I wasn't just saying that-- I'm fine, I'll…or, I'm not fine, I guess, but I'll: be fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah," she says, nodding as she sits cross-legged and opens the folder, "yeah, definitely, I'm just gonna-- try to distract myself."
"Alright," Anna says, lightly, doing her best to not reveal concern in her tone, "if you're sure-- I'll be on my way, then."

"Great," Anne replies, setting the phone atop her bedside up with speakers, "hope you have fun."

Anna pauses for a while at the open mini-fridge, as if considering what she wants (she already knows, but is trying to give her friend time to change her mind) as rain sounds (Anne's studying playlist) play gently in the background.

"Well," she says finally, placing the selected snack and drink atop the binder in her backpack, "text me if you change your mind, okay?"

"Will do," Anne says, gnawing on a pinky nail as she reads the pages on her lap, "bye!"

---

**From: Anna Seville**

**To: Mary Boleyn**

**Sent January 9, 2017, Monday**

Hey, can you come over?

---

**January 9, 2017, Monday Evening: Whitehall University, Freshman Women's Dorms** (later)

Lizzy listens to the tale (told dryly and matter-of-factly by Anne) with wide eyes and a single clenched fist, watching Mary's reactions to it carefully. She knows the telltale signs of her anger well enough to know that it is blazing, and can pinpoint the exact minute she tucks it away (for later, she's certain).

Mary called him a few, choice, HBO words during the telling, but stopped and backpedaled as soon as she realized this was triggering tears rather than laughter.

There is a long pause in which Lizzy struggles to think of anything to say.

"Okay," Mary says finally, taking a deep breath (they are all sitting on the floor, in a circle, Anne picking at the loose thread of a throw pillow that she holds in her lap) behind templed hands, "I... have some advice for you. I don't think you're going to like it, but--"

"I'll take it," Anne interrupts, "I don't trust...my own decisions, right now."

"I think it'll make you feel like your old self again, at least a little bit-- it's very organized, which is very you," Mary says, tucking a loose black lock behind Anne's ear with some tenderness and brushing a small dusting of mascara that dusts the top of her cheekbone with her thumb before her hand's departure, "normally I'd say Gilmore Girls rules, but this is...different, we're not in high school."

"Right," Anne says, with one firm nod, "so: no wallowing?"

"No, just less wallowing. Especially knowing you because you already...are kind of inclined that way?"
Anne scoffs, crossing her arms: *nuh uh!*

"Well, I'm sorry, sweetie, but you are! You pick at things. So you can take…an hour. Not a day, not just because of…the picking thing, but because this is *Whitehall* and you're smart but even a day can set you back *so much* here, and he's not worth it—"

"At all," Lizzy adds, emphatically (fairly angry herself, because she *knows*—more intimately than Mary—what his true feelings are, having heard them filterless, drunken and firsthand, *knows the ridiculous extent of the pining on his side*—although it's no excuse, and she won't bring it up again, as it might confuse Anne and her feelings even further—although she wonders, idly, if she remembers the confession Lizzy made in the car).

"At all, for sure, so I say-- pick one song. Not one you listen to a lot, but-- one song, to listen to on repeat, and feel-- everything you're feeling, until you get sick of it. Let it out, and we'll stay when you do-- if you want."

And so she does.

*It doesn't fit her situation exactly-- but it's a duet that rounds out at nearly five minutes*, rather than a pop song that rounds out in the average three and a half-- and it matches her gentle melancholy, and her fragile determination to push past it.

The piano is all heartbreak, tenderness and weakness, but it swells to strength and she listens to it, over and over, with her knees pulled up to her chest, tears slipping from the corners of her eyes and dampening the soft material of her sweatpants in a way that feels-- helpless, and pathetic.

But she surrenders to the feeling, for an hour.

By the end of it, she does feel better-- only marginally, but: *it's a start.*

They leave as soon as Anna arrives, both kissing her on the cheek before they go.

*Thank you for ignoring me and texting her anyway,* Anne says genuinely, and with no trace of sarcasm.

*Sure thing,* Anna replies easily, with a shrug, *I thought that maybe you just needed your sister, is all.*

She doesn't really want to go over *every excruciating detail* again, but she thinks she'll tell Anna an abridged version, just-- *later.*

They study in their respective beds, in quiet synchronicity, headphones in, in the meantime.

But…she *will be fine*; because she is *always fine.*

And anyways, she *can easily list a million and one things (just off the top of her head! just like that, really)* more worthy and deserving of her time than *Henry Tudor (and his stupid thick hair and his stupid blue eyes and his stupid long lashes and his stupid Michelangelo nose and mouth and the stupid way he kissed with it and the words he said with it and the stupid way both things make her felt, have left her wasted and wanting and in the end more of the former than the latter)…*

There are her studies, of course. Kitty Howard is someone deserving of her attention as well: *family.*
She’s *lucky* to go to college with her sister. She's lucky she *likes* her sister (she knows a lot of people that don't like their siblings, actually in her experience that seems more the norm than not).

Anne can be more supportive of her, surely.

She’s lucky her brother lives in Los Angeles now when there are so many families, scattered across the country and disconnected; she should hold onto that while it's still true, that they *all live in the same city*...

She makes a list, on the first page of a journal covered in soft green felt (a Christmas present from her father), balanced on the back of her thighs as she sits upright in her bed:

- write and schedule planner according to syllabi
- message Kitty again, arrange Starbucks date
- drop tutoring and find new extracurricular
- act as if Henry doesn’t exist until he doesn’t exist
- buy mouthwash
- laundry!!
- ask for more shifts at WH café

There. It's on her list (inconspicuously buried, because *really, it is of no more importance, or any more difficult, than any of the other things on her list*).

Anne has never, in the history of being Anne, not done something if it's on her list. Neither rain nor snow nor sinus infection nor insomnia has ever stopped her or got in the way of one of her bullet points.

She’s an innately, deeply, organized person (*really*— *ignoring the average state of her bed, she is*). Anna glances at the giant paper wall-calendar set above her headboard every so often and will ask, *serial killer, much?*

It's color coded, both in different-colored pens and a rainbow of post-its.

*So, there*, Anne thinks, popping the cap off her highlighter and starting in on the first syllabus on the stack on her table, *take that, Tudor.*

---

**January 10, 2017, Tuesday, Early Morning:**

*This just in:*

Apparently her dreams don't give a *shit* about her lists.

*Fucking...figures.*

---

**January 9:**

- write and schedule planner according to syllabi
- message Kitty again, arrange Starbucks date
• drop tutoring and find new extracurricular
• act as if Henry doesn’t exist until he doesn’t exist
• buy mouthwash
• laundry!!
• ask for more shifts at WH café

**January 10:**

• look into: dreamless sleep hypnosis
Mary Boleyn is not a morning person.

Perhaps it is because she is a middle child that was born late at night: she prefers to wake up before noon but truly thrives in the darkest hours (just not the wee ones).

Perhaps this is because, unlike her sister, she is not a daily-coffee person (rather, she is an occasional-mocha person, and she drinks it more for the splurge of sugar than the jolt of caffeine). There is nothing that perks her awake; she has no second sense for good news. It was always George that shook her awake when presents were out Christmas mornings, always Anne that perched on her back whispering excitedly into her ear: Mary, there was a snowstorm last night, school is cancelled!

Mary pulls the shoulders of her kimono robe tighter around herself, glancing back towards her bed to see if Lizzy is still asleep.

Lizzy very much is, lips parted slightly as she breathes heavily, and so Mary risks flicking on the switch that lights up the lightbulbs around the frame of her vanity.

She reaches for her bottle of primer, squeezing it out and dabbing it upon the canvas of her face. While she makes the repetitive circles, her thoughts still drift to her younger sister.

Anne, whose hard exterior belies her fragility.

Anne, who cried last night to the words over, I'm so over you like she didn't believe them, and didn't think she ever would…

And then Mary's motions pick up speed: she is tossing the robe over her wheeled chair, she is standing up in her underwear, flicking through her closet for a bra, hooking it haphazardly in the back before tossing a shirt over it, rummaging on the floor for a pair of jeans (they are Lizzy's-- her legs are much longer than Mary's-- but it doesn't matter, they'll do, she rolls them up and up and up), shoving her bare feet into a pair of shoes she knows give her blisters without socks, swinging a mostly-empty handbag over her shoulder--

"Where are you going?"

Lizzy sits upright in bed, yawning as she stretches her arms, mussed blonde head titled to the side.

The guileless look of her, that expression singular to the sleepy and just-woken, makes Mary feel guilty as sin.

"Getting a latte."

It was the first thing she thought, and probably patently untrue: as long as they've shared a room, that sentence has never been uttered by her.
Lizzy's brow furrows, and Mary slides her thumb along the side of the handbag strap, worried that she is transparent, that she will be caught in the lie when:

"For Anne?"

"Yes."

Why not?

"That's a good idea," she says, voice crackling as she yawns again, "can you get me a chai, too?"

"Of course," Mary says; an avalanche of relief washing over her, relaxing shoulders she had not realized were tensed.

Lizzy points to her cheek and Mary obliges, taking the few steps from the closet to the bed to lean down and place a kiss upon the apple of it. Lizzy giggles and turns her head until her mouth is hovering across from hers, and then kisses Mary on the lips, slow and soft and deep, before diving back under the covers, her head hitting the pillow with an oof!

Mary hovers at the doorway, sweeping her gaze over the figure of her girlfriend curled up on her side like a prettily golden comma one last time before she shuts the door behind her.

As Mary Boleyn is no more a morning person than she was yesterday, her reason for being awake is this: as it turns out, anger paired with a sister's instinctual protectiveness is nature's own alarm.

To have that pairing combined with a girlfriend's protectiveness is to have a potent trio indeed.

---

**January 10, 2017, Tuesday, Early Morning: Whitehall University, Top Floor: Men's Dorms**

There’s someone pounding their fist against Brandon’s skull.

He flips over onto his back groggily, part of the comforter has somehow twisted itself underneath him, enough so that he wraps two corners of it over his shoulders and then the rest of his body like a cocoon before flipping to the side, grabbing another pillow and shoving it over his ear (to pad against the pounding).

The fist feels more akin to a tiny hammer now, beating steadily against his forehead with evilly harsh kisses, and he figures he must be in the middle of a nightmare, one where he’s trying to sleep and one of the many politicians he wishes to set on fire is beating him with a tool and not allowing it, being loud as all-fuck…

He cracks one eye open, the curtains on the bed across the room aren’t drawn, it is empty and surrounded with tousled sheets and blankets.

It is then that he realizes there is no political figure at his bed and softly torturing him, that no one is pounding at his head, only that someone is pounding at the door so loudly that it feels like they might as well be.

Brandon sheds the comforter cocoon, wincing as the soles of his feet hit the cold floor, to confront whoever it is that thinks it’s okay to raise hell against the entrance of his dorm when the sun has yet to rise.

He cracks open the door, blocking most of the opening with his frame, to Mary Boleyn wearing a scowl and holding the strap of her purse like a loaded gun.
“Good morning, sunshine,” he drawls, wiping sleep from one eye, “are you lost—"

“Can I come in? Great, thanks so much,” Mary says, shoving herself into the small gap between the curve of Brandon’s bare shoulder and the door and effectively puntting it forward until she is inside.

“Jesus Christ,” Brandon says, wincing and rubbing the place she hit as she spins on her heels in the center of the room, “what the fuck do you lift, woman—"

“Where is he?”

“Henry? Fuck if I know,” he says, gesturing to Henry’s empty bed, “not here, it looks like, so if you want to leave so I can go back to sleep that’d be fucking rad—"

The bathroom door swings open, and with it any prospect of going back to sleep swings shut.

Defeated but also curious, Brandon crab-walks to the entrance and pulls the knob shut behind his back, watching the two of them all the while:

“Hmm,” Henry says, both hands in the pockets of his sweats, rocking back and forth on his feet, “déjà vu, am I right? To what do I owe the honor?”

“I have something for you,” Mary says jitterily, rummaging around in her purse (the whole picture of the two of them is surreal, like a Dali painting—Henry is the only one of the two with bloodshot eyes, and yet he is the one with the level voice, the polite manners and the wisecracking grin, while something about Mary’s movements remind him of a bottle of soda that’s been shaken up), “let me find it, it’s uh—oh, there it is!”

Life comes at you fast, and so does a fist on the heels of Mary’s words, which lands squarely on the middle of his face, and so does blood, it turns out. Indeed, blood comes fast and furiously down his left nostril and Henry wipes it away very slowly with the back of his hand; meeting the assailant’s stare dead-on from where she stands, chest heaving and head held high.

“Well,” he says primly, head slightly bowed so that he can meet her gaze, wiping the blood off the back of his hand on the front of his shirt, “was that all, or are there any more delightful surprises of that nature hidden in the recesses of your purse—"

“I want you to know that that wasn’t for Anne,” she says brightly, crossing her arms, “that was just from me.”

Henry takes a few steps back and she advances as he does so. He grips the edge of his desk, using the grip to stay upright as vertigo sets in (as it has been, for days now, along with its marriage to relentless sleeplessness), and nods.

“Because she’s not actually upset by what you said. She told me all about it, sure, but just matter-of-fact…no emotion. She couldn’t care less about it, but I care. I’m upset and I’m mad,” Mary says, sweetly emphatic with her hand over her heart.

“Yeah, I got that—"

“So here’s my rebuttal, as it were, when you said… what was it that she said… ‘that someone like me would want to be with someone like you’?”

He shrugs with one shoulder, hand braced against the cherry-wood surface.
“Someone like a Boleyn? Do you know who the fuck we are?”

“As you know,” he says, tilting his shaved head to the side, “I am somewhat familiar, yes—”

“You literally don’t know anything about me,” she says, voice heavy with scorn (the ‘anything’ was particularly scathing, emphasized by her squeezing her eyes shut and rolling both hands into fists on the word), “but even if I were the most unremarkable person alive—my siblings are geniuses! My father is an ambassador, do you think that’s an easy job to get?”

He shrugs again. There is no defense, or at least none he could give that would be believable to… anyone save himself, really—

“Why aren’t you defending yourself?” Mary asks, cocking her head to the side, laughing.

“Well, obviously I’m not going to hit a girl—”

“That’s not what I mean. I mean from what I’m say—are you a masochist or something?”

“No,” he says steadily, “honestly? I think I’m just bored—”

“You’re right! You are bored,” she crows, leaning forwards and clapping her hands together, “yes, you are bored, and you are boring…so who the fuck are you, exactly, to say ‘someone like a Boleyn’? What exactly puts you in the authority to make the judgement of my family as lesser?”

I don’t think that, none of what I said is true is there, heavily waiting on the tip of his tongue, but besides the disbelief this would cause and the explanation it would require, there is this: if it comes out it will go back to Anne in verbatim in the same way his words traveled verbatim to her sister, as sure as the sun will rise…and then all it took to say what’s already been said will have been for nothing.

And so he bites his tongue as her blue eyes burn him, shrugging yet again.

“As far as I can tell,” she says, lacing her fingers together and setting them in flat valley under her soft chin, “all you are is someone that goes to the best college in the country because of Daddy, someone who coasts on what appears to be rapidly declining good looks, someone who has never really gone through much of anything, because everything is just so…goddamn…easy when you’re you—”

“You don’t know anything about me, either!” he shouts.

Mary reels back mockingly, letting her hands fall from under her chin.

“And I,” she says softly, “thank God for that.”

With this she turns around, waving to Brandon (who sits, mouth slightly agape, on his bed) as she makes her way to the door.

“Oh,” Mary says, hand on the doorknob, turning back around to face the room, “and ‘been there, done that’?”

Henry says nothing, turns around and walks towards the open bathroom door.

“Die slowly,” she snarls, twisting the knob with a yank before slamming their door shut behind her.
“Dude,” Brandon says, knocking on the door of the bathroom, “what was that all—”

The sound of glass shattering, and a loud thump—so loud, in fact, that it startles him, as his ear is pressed against the door.

“Uh, Henry,” he yells, pounding on the door, “can you let me know if you’re alive?”

His request is met with silence, so he reaches for the doorknob which is… locked.

“Listen, I’m about to call the RA for the key, so if you’re alive and just did something really embarrassing like… punch a mirror or something, tell me right now, because she’s very hot and I’m gonna guess you don’t want her to see that shit—hello?”

As he waits for the RA to pick up on the other line, Brandon can’t help but wonder if Mary Boleyn is an actual, real-life witch.

*Maybe the real moral of *The Beauty and the Beast *is to not answer your door when any woman knocks upon it…*

Chapter End Notes

"spoiler alert" = despite brandon’s worries, he is, in fact, not dead ;-)

sorry it's been so long since an update, and sorry this one's a shorter chapter-- i hope to get a new one up before the end of this year <3 thanks for your support!!
he son of such a god

Chapter Summary

He can't fathom what it would be like to be the son of such a god, but...he does imagine that it isn't easy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

January 10, 2017, Tuesday, Early Morning: Whitehall University, Top Floor: Men's Dorms

The source for the sound of the shattering glass lies in shards on the tiles nearest the opened bathroom door, glittering like diamonds interspersed with the q-tips it contained when it was intact.

It is not the only bizarre thing about the state of the room; given that the bathtub is also filled with blankets and pillows.

Krista, their RA, asks Brandon a rapid-fire battery of questions as they move Henry from where he's fainted, curled up on his side on the shag carpeting, easing him so that he is lying on his back. The nature of the questions is blunt as she checks his pulse, the first of them being if he has OD'ed or taken any drugs the night before, the rest relating to his health.

Brandon finds himself short for answers on most, defending himself by mentioning that he's unaware because he's not here very often, that he signed the lease to a new apartment last month and has been staying there frequently.

After he has failed to regain consciousness by the timer she asked Brandon to set after calling her; she calls the local emergency number and Brandon locates a footstool to put under Henry's feet, and a blanket to throw over him upon her instructions.

January 10, 2017, Tuesday, 8:04 AM, Hospital Waiting Room

A trip here had been insisted on despite Henry's weak and feeble protests (he had regained consciousness shortly after their RA's barrage of phone calls — one for a fold-out wheelchair— there was, as it turned out, a 'safety' elevator that went to their floor, hidden behind a curtain he had never thought to check behind...it had a code that only staff knew, apparently, 'due to frequent misuse'— whatever that meant — another to a car service, a third call whose contents were inaudible to him) that he had just been tired, Krista gently informing him that campus health services did not have the technology or trained staff required for an EKG.

Brandon sits with the homework he brought only incidentally (crumpled, as it was, at the bottom of the shoulder-bag he'd grabbed before leaving); he's since copied the work of the proof he'd done onto a new, smooth sheet of paper carefully and in pencil with his elbow digging onto the armrest.

"You are Henry's roommate?"

Brandon glances up from his work and then moves it quickly, covering the row of magazines on the
table to his right with it, and getting up from his seat.

"Yes," Brandon replies, taking the hand the man he recognized immediately extended upon his answer in the affirmative, "and you are Henry Tudor, Sr."

"And how did you know this?" he asks, a small smile curling the edges of his mouth, still shaking his hand. "Pictures online?"

"No," he says candidly, shaking his head, "just from ones that he's showed me."

Tudor's cool and long-fingered hand stills within his the moment he finishes the sentence; the older man's eyebrows ratcheting upwards, then downwards in a furrow. Brandon watches (with no small amount of wonder at the sight) those notoriously steely eyes mist over; but he doubts the vision once he releases his hand from his, observing an armored quality yet again.

"May we sit?" Tudor asks, clearing his throat and gesturing to the padded chairs behind Brandon—he answers of course with deference, and they do sit, Brandon taking his original seat with much better posture than he did previously.

"Hopefully it will not, but," he says, pulling a card from the front pocket of his shirt and extending it to Brandon, "if anything similar happens again, you will call me, first."

He takes it and inserts the phone number written on the back of it into his phone, wryly noting the total lack of question in his phrasing:

"Even before the RA?"

"Yes," Tudor answers, leaning into the back of his chair and folding his hands.

"Although," he adds, turning to meet his gaze, "you have my utmost gratitude for doing so."

Brandon nods and grabs his work from the table, smoothing it over onto the book he's been using as a hard surface, glancing it over.

"What is this for?" he asks, leaned back again and gazing at the paper askance.

"My statistics class."

"Oh? And when is that?"

"Uh…in about an hour," Brandon says ruefully, worrying the back of his neck with one hand, pencil loose in the other.

"Well, then you should not miss it. I will call my car service, so that you may return to campus."

Then he is on his feet, phone pressed to his ear, striding away with a confident gait before Brandon can thank him.

Tudor returns to the seat next to Brandon after making his phone call, settling into the chair in a discomfited manner; placing an elbow upon the thin arm he has laid across his small and smartly-dressed stomach, then a thumb under a pointed chin, pressing two fingers to his jaw-bone.

"Well," he says, dropping that stance entirely and clasping his hands together (unadorned save for a wedding band on the left, one that is somewhat loose), "I suppose I shall also make my leave—I only came to see if he was alright, and they have told me that he is."
Brandon nods, once (in acknowledgement rather than agreement), bending down to lift his bag to his lap, pushing the sheet of paper carefully within his book before closing it.

"I hate hospitals," Tudor says idly, twirling the ring around his finger, "and I am sure a visit from me would not be...welcome, in any case."

"I don't know that it would be unwelcome," Brandon says, carefully considering his words as he leans forward in his seat, bending down to retie an errant shoelace, "He may find it...surprising."

"Mm. What.. is it that sons want from their fathers, exactly?" he asks softly, the elongated nose scrunched in its profile.

"Blind admiration, constructive criticism, attention...space? I have never been able to figure it out."

The top of the list strikes Brandon as odd—while people certainly admire Henry, he would not say they do so blindly.

He looks over his shoulder to Brandon then, eyebrows raised and eyes expectant on his, head canted to one side.

"Oh," he says, flustered, toying with the collar of his flannel, having not pegged that as a direct question, "right, um...I would not be the person to ask, sir. Having never met mine."

"You've never met your father?"

"No, since he has...never tried to meet me."

"I am sorry to hear it."

He shrugs, uncomfortable.

"I never met mine, either," Tudor says lightly, "if that is any consolation to you."

It is, actually...strangely enough, moored in a room milling with anxious people, sitting next to a man that has undeniably become someone, and having something in common with him...is a great comfort, indeed.

"Although in my case, that was ultimately for the best," he continues, levelly, "perhaps yours has not tried to meet you because he believes it to be for the best. Or perhaps he has tried, but failed."

"Yeah...maybe."

A chirp sounds, and Tudor pulls his phone from the front pocket of a cream-colored dress shirt, briefly checking its screen before placing it back.

"The car is at the drop-off area out front," he says, standing up slowly, "I hope you are not late."

"Thank you, sir."

"It is the least I can do. You would not mind...riding alone, would you?"

"No, sir."

As he sits on the wide expanse of smooth seats in the back of the luxury car, he finds that he has been left with a combination of feelings; half of him acutely nervous and the other half relieved.
Brandon feels as if he has sat alongside a god and passed all his tests—only, just barely.

He can't fathom what it would be like to be the son of such a god, but…he does imagine that it isn't easy.

January 10, 2017, Tuesday, 8:04 AM, Room 509, Wing A

Despite the catheter threaded to his arm, despite that he has recently been pricked for blood, despite being upright in a bed whose mattress, sheets, and pillows are undoubtedly, collectively, thousands of dollars less than Henry's own…this is the calmest he's felt all goddamn week.

He shifts his back and, feeling one of the pillows behind it start to fall, groggily opens his eyes to grab it and adjust it so that it is firmly behind him.

Henry turns his head to the left, originally set upon closing his eyes and resting again…ultimately, he does not, given that there is someone sitting in the visitor's chair.

"They did not tell me you were sleeping, I'm sorry if I've disturbed," his father says, one page of the opened magazine on his lap pinched under his thumb.

"I was only half-asleep, I didn't…know you were in L.A."

"I was in Santa Clarita," he says, looking down at his lap, "heading a conference."

"Who…called you?"

"Your RA. I am your emergency contact, after all."

"Right."

Tudor closes the magazine, setting it aside with the others in the plastic racks on the wall behind him, before standing up and walking towards him.

He slides one thumb under Henry's chin, pushing it up, peering into his eyes, scanning the rest of his face before arriving back at his gaze:

"Are you on drugs?"

"Thanks! No, I'm not."

"Don't talk back, Henry," he says, sighing and releasing his thumb before turning back around, back towards the chair, "it's tiresome."

"Will you be released soon? Have they found out why you fainted?"

Henry blinks, features impassive, paler than a ghost against those sheets— he makes no move to answer, does not even look as if he were thinking of one.

"Henry?"

"You said not to talk back," he says, voice lilting in pretended guilelessness, eyes wide.

"Would you have preferred if I had not come here?"
Surprised by the nature of the question, Henry shifts his gaze downwards, to the open palm atop the folded sheet.

"No, I...I don't know what to think about...that you came."

"I'll leave, if that is what you wish—"

"No."

Silence stretches between them like a taut rope; Henry looks up from his hand.

There is his father, still and...sitting still, but not upright, one elbow hanging off the wooden armrest, hands folded at the right side of his ribcage.

He is very small, very pale, very powerful. His face is bare, his hair black and silver, but distinguished and slicked back.

"They said it was probably a combination of sleep deprivation and dehydration," Henry says, pointing to the catheter, "hence...this. But they're doing blood tests to make sure, and told me I could rest here while I waited."

"You haven't been sleeping?"

He shakes his head.

"Why is that?"

"Just, like...stress, I guess."

"I know it's rigorous there, but...hasn't the semester just started?"

Henry shrugs.

"You know...if you tell me why, I might be able to help."

"I wouldn't know how to explain," Henry says quietly, worrying the plastic admission bracelet on his wrist.

"You could try," he counters, matching his volume and inclining his head, ever so slightly.

He doesn't make offers very often, and never with this softness—it is something of a wonder to him, that. It is so unbelievable that, had he not felt him lift his chin, Henry might think he were dreaming.

"I had a...problem," he says finally, squinting.

Tudor nods once and waves his hand, once: continue...

That too, is new to him, in recent memory, this...patience.

"And I solved it, so...I thought I would stop thinking about it. But the thing is...that me solving it, hurt someone, in the process."

His father's chin is cradled in his hand now, he nods again.

"So I've probably been having trouble sleeping because of that, and that I feel...guilty, about it."

Tudor tilts his chin back and forth for a beat, as if to his own silent tune, then stills and asks:
"When you met this person, did you set out to hurt them?"

"No."

_God, no…_

But that would be cold comfort to her, he thinks.

*And that is what she thinks, he remembers, because that is what I told her....*

"Were there other possible solutions to this problem?"

"I guess…there were."

"Was this the best solution to this problem? The most certain, the strongest, the most airtight?"

"Yes…I just wish it hadn't come at that—cost."

"Then I don't think you should feel guilty, Henry."

"But I do."

That's maybe the root of it, he thinks—maybe he hasn't been sleeping because he doesn’t feel like he deserves to.

"Look, Henry," he says, leaning forward in his chair now, "I don't take any pleasure in hurting people…despite what some would believe. But sometimes it's just unavoidable. That's why it's called 'the greater good', not 'the good'. Greatness requires sacrifice."

It doesn't make him feel any better about what he's done, but the fact that he tried to make him feel better…that does, on its own, so he nods and is rewarded for it by one of his father's rare, genuine smiles—closed, and small, but genuine nonetheless, the skin around his grey eyes crinkling like creased paper.

"Anyway," Tudor says, clapping his hands together, "I am leaving for New York today, and I was hoping to say goodbye before I left even…had this not," he continues, making a vague sweeping gesture to the bed, "...yes."

"Well, thanks for saying goodbye, then—"

"What else…that I am proud of you, for raising your French grade last semester. If I have not said so already."

He shakes his head, feeling his throat start to close up, clenching a fist around one of his blankets.

"Yeah, well, I had a good tutor."

"Yes, well...you *have* always done better under someone else's guidance."

Henry laughs in a burst, then wipes under his eyes quickly; just not quickly enough to staunch the arriving flow of tears.

"Good God—what could I have *possibly* just said that upset you so—"

"I don't think you've _ever_ paid me a compliment," he says, laughter fading to giggles (interspersed
with hiccups and tears, still), hand pressed against his face, "that wasn't backhanded in some way. Not since—"

"It wasn't a criticism, Henry," Tudor says, with a deep exhale, "merely an observation. I'm sorry you feel that—"

"Well, don't observe me, because I'm not a client," he says, with choked laughter, "and I'm not an employee, I'm your son. No matter what you ask me to call you—sir."

His eyebrows raise in incredulity at the tone on the last word, two spots of red appearing on his cheeks.

"When have I ever said that you are not?"

"It's not about saying whether I am or not," Henry says, yanking a tissue from the box set up by the bed, "it's about how I am that whenever it's most convenient to you for me to be so."

"I cannot have this discussion, as I do not know what you are referring to—"

"Am I your son, or I am the key to a contract you want to make?"

"Are you having problems with Katherine, then, is that what this is about—"

"No," he says hoarsely, but emphatically, shaking his head, "no, not at all, I just…I always am, I want you to know that."

"My car service is here," Tudor says, standing and buttoning the front of his suit jacket, hands trembling "we will have to pick this up another time—"

"I am always your son!"

He lingers, hand on the handle of the door, back to him— it will have to be now, it will not be 'picked up another time' (it never is), so this will have to be enough.

"And I wish you could see that," he continues, voice raw, "but I can't…make you. No one can make anyone see…anything."

*Look back, please, please look back…even once.*

*Just once.*

He doesn't want it to be like this forever; *inside he is again that twelve-year-old boy, knocking against a closed door, against reason and hope and sanity.*

*Open up, please open up…just once.*

"Goodbye, Henry," he says, coldly and clearly, his back rigid.

"Okay, have a safe—"

The door swings shut.

"…trip."
sorry it's been so long!!

anyways this one was...emotionally wrought. i am a wreck myself; but this will all be important later. stepping stones!!

next chapter should be lighter...i’m thinking like, two anne scenes and maybe the rest is just emails and text messages etc.

i finally met the 200k words mark, officially! i’m proud of myself, and i want to give a big thanks to everyone that’s supported me thus far-- and a big thanks to 63 beautiful subscribers to this story!!

at the risk of sounding sappy, i could never have dreamed that 63 people would want to know what happened next from this, which just started out as something i scribbled to distract myself from everything that was hard in my life at the time when i started to write ideas for it years ago...so it means a lot to have come this far.

happy april! <3
At its core, history is about people. History is humanistic.

The rose both white and rede
In one rose now doth growe...

-- John Skelton

From: L_vatican@parkerproductions.net
To: henrytudor@whitehalluniversity.edu
Sent January 11, 2017, Wednesday, 7:31 AM

Hello and Happy New Year!

This a courtesy reminder email of your waiver signing over the rights for the usage of your appearance for the film "Twenty-First Century Fairy Tale".

We are sending an extra reminder due to your prominence, as you are fairly featured (for an extra) in the final edit of the film.

---------

L. Vatican

EVP, Legal Affairs and Corporate

Office Phone: 323.956.1527 (ext. 33)

January 11, 2017, Wednesday, 9:35 AM, Whitehall University-- Humanities Building, Wing C

Henry, late as he is, sneaks into the back row of the lecture hall, half-emptyed can of Red Bull in hand.

"...I'm not really going to be going over the syllabus, because I'm assuming since most of you are here, you can read. But, please do read it, I'm not going to quiz you on it or anything because I think that's a waste of time, and frankly, an insult to your intelligences, but...if you ask me something later that is answered in here, I will be annoyed. So I don't recommend that, although you can, of course,
ask for me to clarify something on the syllabus-- I recommend my email, or my office hours, for that, which are also in there."

He gingerly takes a seat at the end, whispering his thanks to the person that passes over an extra packet.

Henry flips the first page, rubbing one of his temples. The words swim in front of his vision and he closes his eyes, wincing as he nurses the compacted effects of sleep deprivation, an un-tenderly handled nose, and something of an emotional hangover.

"Again," the professor says, sliding a metal pointer from the wooden dais at the right of the whiteboards, and extending it to the board, "I'm Professor Joanna Skelton, and this is 'Early Modern England: Politics, Religion, and Society', and the registration code was 5204, Section C-- if that's not what it says on your schedule, you're in the wrong class."

She takes roll call next, clipboard in one hand as she moves a step-stool to the front of the whiteboard.

He says here at Tudor, Henry, gives a shadow of a smile at the turned heads that elicits, a half-hearted wave back to Ella Carew, half-sister of the more notorious Bryan Francis.

All Tudor, Henry makes him think of is the other Tudor, Henry; who has the remarkable ability to hit too close to home even when he's on the other side of the country.

You have always done better under someone else's guidance is just another way of saying you can never make any decisions on your own, not without fucking up.

No man is an island, but apparently he's a failure for not being more of one.

No man is an island, but his father comes pretty close.

"Usually, the approach taken in history courses-- and, definitely, the approach that's most often taken in history classes in high school-- is to start with the topics, and then, eventually, focus on the individuals. The method is, typically, from the outside," she says, gesturing with her hands, palms out, then bringing them in, fingers resting at her clavicle, "…in."

Henry flips his notebook open, and jots down the date.

01/11/2017

Hist 251

"Now," Joanna says, taking a seat at the wheeled office chair at the dais, shifting some papers there, and leaning onto it with her elbows, "I, personally, have never found this method to be very conducive to memorization, to learning, and…most importantly, to interest. And I say 'most importantly'; because from what I've observed, when you're not interested, you're not learning."

"So, my approach is different. In this class, we learn about the individuals— the historic figures— first. Once we get to know them, we then cover the topics of this class: politics," she says, by now standing in front of the whiteboard again with the pointer, and moving it over the class name word by word, "religion, and society."

"Rather than the method of outside-in teaching, my method is…from the inside, out. I teach the course this way, and have for the five years I've taught it, because at its core, history is about people. History is…humanistic. That's why," Joanna says, gesturing with hands pointed upwards at the high
ceiling of the lecture hall, swirling both indexes around, "it's a subject of the humanities."

"Every historic figure you learn about ate, slept, drank, and bathed — well, some more than others," she adds, pausing to smile at the few chuckles that earned, "just like we do. It's easy to forget that, but we shouldn't."

"The pace of this course is fast. I recommend taking a lot of notes, and using your phones to record the lectures, rather than to check Instagram. I have the mic," she says, pointing to where it's nestled on her button-down, next to the collar, "so it should pick up on the...voice memos app that comes with the iPhone, you shouldn't have to download a new one if that's what you have; otherwise I think there are a lot of free apps that do the same. Students have told me that it's the easiest way to review after class, so it comes recommended."

Henry fumbles for his phone, unearthing it from his bag along with the textbook for the class, only to find it's dead. He sighs, fumbles around more for his portable charger, and plugs it in atop the textbook, pushing that to the side in favor of his notes.

"On that note, today we're going to begin with names of figures. These are pretty important to keep track of for this class, especially because with English history, there are a lot of repeating names, similar names, rhyming names, for people that are similar and lived in the same century, as well as for people that lived in different centuries. It's easy to get mixed up, and important to know the exact name and relative time frame for the exact person that's being referred to-- because there are definitely multiple choice questions like that on the quizzes and exams in this course."

"Let's start," Joanna says, uncapping a dry-erase marker and taking a few steps up the step-stool, turned on its side so that she partially faces the class, "someone give me a name. If you really get to a point where you can no longer think of one, doing a quick search on your phone is fine, but I'd rather start with the names that come to us organically, first— yes, go ahead, you don't have to raise your hand, you're all adults and I trust we can go one by one—"

"Eleanor of Aquitaine?"

"Great! Yes, that's a great one to start with," she says, writing it on the board, "because there are a lot of important names that are similar, can we name some of them?"

"Elinor Wydeville."

"Yes, good...that's one a few centuries after, but definitely important. And she married...?"

"Edmund IV?"

"Yes, and that's another one with a lot of different people attached to it, so I'm going to add those above his name, and also Aquitaine's spouse."

Edmund IV now has a column above it, starting with Edmund I and descending down.

After Edmund IV, she writes "Edmund V".

"Did not," Joanna says, underlining the last name in red, "go on to have a lengthy and illustrious reign, poor thing..."

The dun-dun sound effect plays on the speakers after she unearthes a small remote control from the pocket of her shirt and presses a button; a few students startle in their seats at the noise, a few others laugh.
"Sorry about that," Joanna says, laughing, "I promise I'll only do that, like...three times a class, max. Just checking to see you're all still awake. Alright. So let's do the issue of Wydeville and Edmund IV, because that name continues in significance for England, in a pretty direct succession. We have their eldest daughter, Elinor, another descendant for the Plantagenets," she says, drawing a dashed line between the couple, "who marries— anyone know? The less famed of the same name?"

"Eric Durot?"

"Yes, brilliant. A partly-Welsh nobody/somebody, depending very much on who you ask…son of an English noblewoman and the half-brother of the king, and nephew of the same king. A different English king than Edmund IV, as according to different people there were different ones, at the same time— gets a little messy, there," Joanna says, swirling a doodle of a tornado in red near his name, "but we'll get into that later. We're coming upon another famous repeated name, and another, soon— more famed of the same name."

She draws a line from the dashed:


Eric (Durot) the II

"And from here, we have a lot of marriage lines, so buckle in."

--- Catalina (of the house of Trasmatara)

--- Anna Ormonde

The lines go on, and she continues to speak, but the noise fades out as his focus hones in to what he's been writing on his own page.

D U R O T

T O R U D

R U D O T

T O D U R

T U D

O R

"…and from Anna and Eric, we have Elinor the I, another famous name. So the legacy of that name, as you can see, is long, and enduring. That's about all we have time for today, even though this goes on," she says, laughing as she sweeps a hand over her last addition, "and I haven't even gotten to the Richards, of which there are several, even though we will need to know them, as well. Please read Chapter 1 tonight, and we will continue tomorrow."

From: henrytudor@whitehalluniversity.edu

To: L_vatican@parkerproductions.net

Sent January 11, 2017, Wednesday, 11:02 AM

Well, thanks. I was only in the dance scene, but I can understand the legal team wanting to cover all bases, I suppose?
Anne's hatred for her work uniform is such that she will not even walk from her dorm wearing it. She refuses, on principle, to wear such an embarrassment to fashion for a second longer than she has to (ideally, not a second longer than she's paid to; but short of giving the public a free viewing of her undressing in front of the drip machine…such a thing is not really feasible).

So she changes in the bathroom stall of the nearest restroom on campus to the café; fifteen minutes before her shift, rolling her regular clothes up and shoving them into her satchel.

The seventh item on her list has been so easily tackled (in fact, the shift she's on her way to now wasn't even originally hers-- she'd added a post-it to the bulletin board with the shift schedule with her phone number, along with a note asking anyone to text her if they wanted a shift covered), and she can only hope the rest of the items will follow suit.

In Anne's experience, the more things one accomplishes on a list, the easier the rest of the list becomes, so she holds on to that best she can.

Anne loops her high ponytail through the back of her baseball cap, adjusting it in the mirror.

It really is the most god-awful outfit.

Last year, Percy had come in while she was working just once (not on purpose, or at least that had been what she'd assumed, going off his look of shock). He'd been cordial, considering, but the small talk was excruciating nonetheless given the circumstances (a few days after they'd broken up).

His parting words as he picked up the order she'd pushed onto the bar for him were, God, I'm sorry they make you wear that, with a barely-suppressed laugh.

It wasn't meant with ill intent (at least, she doesn't think so…although she rubs blusher into the apples of her cheeks a bit more fiercely at the memory), probably sympathy if anything, but it was absolutely the wrong thing to say.

Anne had already felt self-conscious about the attire before he brought it up, and after that her hyper-awareness of it had increased…tenfold.

And then someone had, surprisingly…said (or, written, rather) something that was the right thing to say.

Except…she can't hold onto that, either…considering.

Some of the things on her list are harder than others.

Knowing exactly what people want to hear, even if it's not true? He'd make a good politician…

God preserve us all from that fate!

"We hired someone yesterday, and I would loove," Nick (a Senior, manager here, poetry major… Anne's never been able to tell if he's gay, or just French, and doesn't really feel like it's her place to ask) says, tray of scones in hand, "you to train them, I was going to do it myself but I haven't been able to take a lunch yet."
"Sure," Anne says, sliding her timecard back under the till (if he didn't need a favor, she knows he'd be scolding her for tardiness right now), "when?"

"They'll be in here in a few minutes; when they get here you can switch the till over to Kaitlyn and start," he says, pushing the scones into the glass display, "just let him shadow you for a while, show him the basics. I'm gonna take my lunch now, though… *j'en ai marre.*"

Anne hums sympathetically, keying her employee ID and password into the POS system's screen.

Anne drops the change she was counting, startled by the splat she hears (*sorry, I didn't you see there*, from Kaitlyn, and a giggle from the same), scoops it up and recounts it before handing it to the customer.

She turns around to assess origin of the noise: Kaitlyn, holding one of the small metal pitchers they use to steam milk, a puddle of said milk on the floor, and Charles Brandon, wearing a grin and an employee uniform with an air of insouciance.

*Great.*

Coloring under Anne's stare, Kaitlyn quickly turns, pours what's left of the milk into the drink order, caps it, and sidesteps the puddle on the floor to walk to the bar and announce it.

"I'll grab the mop to clean that up," Anne says, "can you cover the till for me?"

"Oh, I can get it--"

"I have to train him, actually," Anne says, more firmly, gesturing to him with her thumb, "so it'd just be easier--"

"I don't mind training him," Kaitlyn says, sweetly.

Anne briefly imagines herself shaking her by the shoulders (*you should mind, he's the devil incarnate!*); then takes a deep breath to tamp down the thought-- *it's not as if she has asshole radar, either.*

"And as much as I wouldn't mind *that*…Nick asked me to do it, so."

That earns an eye-roll; but her coworker complies, scowling as she logs on with her own password.

"What did you do, anyway," Anne asks, wheeling the mop out from the closet down the hallway marked 'employees only', "*tickle* her?"

"Kinky. And *no*, I didn't. She's just skittish, I guess."

"Sure. Can you grab the 'caution' sandwich board, plea--"

"Already got it," Brandon says, shifting it under his elbow.

He continues in that solicitous manner behind the check-out counter and display, as well, *here, I got it*, taking the mop in hand and cleaning up deftly.

Kaitlyn gushes a *thank you so much* towards him while a customer is speaking to her, Brandon smiles towards her, and Anne wants to stab her own hand with a fork.
The annoying thing (besides, of course, the sheer injustice of it all—*this wasn't even supposed to be her shift!* about training Brandon is that, all in all, he doesn't give her much to complain about.

And Anne *searches* for things, vigilantly (although she, of course, remains polite, *even though this is much more than he deserves*—she's a professional, after all), to complain about. She expects rudeness, mouthy replies to her corrections, at the very *least* some mutterings under the breath; but apparently he's as much of a professional as she is.

Nick listens to her, and seems to like her (in a purely platonic way, of course), the two of them seem to have a certain affinity, she thinks this is, *perhaps, a French thing?* Or maybe it's something to do with her relative lack of dramatics compared to her coworkers, the fact that she's only ever called in sick once…whatever it is, she knows she doesn't lack influence with him.

If she told him Brandon was a slow learner, or rude, he would definitely take note.

But, tempting as *that* is, to do so would go against her own principles of honesty and integrity. Because, the truth is, in the remainder of her shift, he proves to be none of those things.

He proves to be immune to all her telepathy; the universe proves to be immune to her wishful thinking.

*You made a bet about me; all because you were bitter, all because I had the audacity to not want to fuck you after making out with you at some party, which, *hello*, is why parties were invented in the first place? Parties were *invented* so that people had an excuse to make out with strangers. You would know this, if you weren't such a dumbass.*

*You are a sociopath. You do not deserve this job. You do not deserve to stand next to me without me slapping you in the face. Burn the milk. Burn the milk. Burn the goddamn--*

"Great," she says, gritting her teeth, "that's exactly the consistency you want it."

He looks down at her over his shoulder, sharply, as if surprised.

"Now, for a cappuccino, you're going to pour that over the espresso shots…here, let me show you…"

---

**Whitehall University, Freshman Women's Dorms, Wednesday Night**

Anne sits on her bed, feet propped up over pillows at the end of it, her Psych notebook propped up, opened, over a throw pillow on her lap.

She doodles a cappuccino in a mug, then its rising steam, which becomes the word *sociopath?* in cursive.

She frowns, and crosses it out, tapping her pen on the margin.

For her own sanity at work, she's going to have to give him a clean slate, that is — judge him by what he does this year, rather than the last.

It's not something she particularly *wants* to do, not something she particularly feels that he *deserves*; but she's not going to be able to get through otherwise.

She knows that, and *hates* that she knows herself well enough to know that.
Anne sighs, throws the makeshift off her lap, and leans over to open the drawer of her nightstand, pulling out the journal with the list:

- write and schedule planner according to syllabi
- message Kitty again, arrange Starbucks date (next Monday? tentative)
- drop tutoring and find new extracurricular
- act as if Henry doesn’t exist until he doesn't exist
- buy mouthwash
- laundry!!
- ask for more shifts at WH café
- coexist with/ tolerate Sociopath Bet Bestie, Coworker (Narcissist in Training) of Dubious Morals

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, first of all, for 70 subscribers! And I'm sorry for the wait in between this chapter and the last.

I remember someone once said they read "Halsey" and "Haley" and thought I was doing a self-insert.

I won't, and Joanna Skelton is inspired by Henry VIII's tutor, John Skelton-- but she probably comes as close to a self-insert as I'll ever get.

Not that I teach a history class, but you know. You get me.

All the weird fake-history names are as close as I can get to...what I'm trying to do plot-wise, without breaking the fourth wall (altho Henry is, as we see, starting to be less skeptical of his grandmother's suggestions as time goes on-- the paranoia that lack of sleep can bring on certainly doesn't help).

"Nick" is based off Nicholas Bourbon, a French poet that Anne took under her wing when she was Queen.

"j'en ai marre" -- "I'm fed up"

"Ella Carew" is based off of Elizabeth Carew.
Chapter Summary

"Would hitting me make you feel better? That seems to be a popular choice lately."

January 12, 2017, Thursday, 6:00 AM, Santa Monica Beach

Pink fingers of dawn light the sky as Lizzy runs alongside the ocean's tide, feet pounding against the densely wet sand.

Her mind feels scrubbed clean when she runs, *tabula rasa (or whatever)*-- she likes it, and always has, that temporary emptiness; even as a child she would run whenever she could. Long legs made it easier, but she never joined track in high school, even though she was asked to during gym by the coach-- she didn't have any friends on the track team, and didn't like competition, besides.

And she likes to run unobstructed, too-- she never listens to music, doesn't like the weight of her phone dragging her down even with one of those special armbands, or the sweaty tangle of headphones that inevitably follow. Her phone’s locked in the glove compartment of her car, street-parked about a mile away, car keys stored in the pocket of her sports bra (mini pepper spray on that keychain).

"Lizzy!"

She glances over her shoulder and slows to a jog.

*If this were a movie, she thinks, I would sprint right now, taking advantage of my head start.*

Alas, the hindsight that would have made such an action possible is something she wasn’t afforded; as such she's already expended most of her energy and is out of breath, at the end of her run rather than its beginning, she has no choice but to slow rather than accelerate.

"Good morning."

"Can I help you with something?" Lizzy asks tersely, bending down to tie-- *no, untie, apparently* -- her laces.

"I can't say hi?" Henry asks, hands on hips, panting for breath.

"I am *so* mad at you right now," she says, nudging one sneaker off, peeling the sand-dusted sock along with it, "you have *no* idea."

"Ah," he says, sighing and unwinding his headphones back into his pocket, "well, I can probably guess--"

"If you *want* to keep talking to me," Lizzy says, scooping her pair of shoes together in one hand and pushing them towards his chest, "you have to carry these."

He rolls his eyes, but takes them, noting that *withering glare* is, indeed, within her repertoire of facial
expressions— he's never seen one before, not from her.

She walks in the opposite direction of her previous running path right up to where the tide comes in, splashing through the sheet of water as it spills with bare feet, golden ponytail swinging like a pendulum between tanned shoulder blades.

He follows, walking to the left of her, fingers tucked snugly into the collars of her running shoes.

"Would hitting me make you feel better? That seems to be a popular choice lately."

"I heard you threw the first punch."

Henry glances sideways at her, blue eyes narrowed.

"I didn't throw any punch."

"Right…so, you're just a liar, like…all the time, now?"

"I'm not-- you think I would hit a girl? Really?"

"Who said anything about a girl? I'm talking about Brandon."

"Oh. Then…yes, I did that."

"Someone else hit you?"

"More recently, yes."

"Who?"

"Does it matter?"

"I don't even know why," Lizzy says hotly, picking up speed, "I'm giving you the time of day, you're being such an ass--"

"Mary Boleyn."

She stops walking, standing still as the tide pools around her feet, then back again, turns sideways till she's facing the beach.

Henry turns around as soon as he figures out she's not alongside him anymore, a question in his gaze.

"You alright?" he asks, brow furrowed.

Lizzy crosses her arms, swallowing against tears that threaten release.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she says, wiping at one cheek, and starting to walk again, not looking at him, "nothing, just, she's…my friend."
"And Anne's my friend," Lizzy continues, her voice gathering strength and she goes on, "so tell me why I should still be your friend."

"You were my friend first--"

"Apparently not a very good one," she snaps, "I don't talk about my friends like you talked about me."

"It's not like I've made a habit out of it, that was the first time I'd--"

"'Been there, done that?' What, like I'm LSD?"

"Well," Henry says, chuckling, "I've never done that; actually--"

"Fuck you!"

She claps a hand over her mouth, as if surprised by her own outburst, and stills; stands, hand cupped over mouth and chin alike, eyes wide.

Henry sets her shoes on the ground before he walks over to her, standing so that he faces her. He puts both hands on her shoulders, looking at her intently, even as she avoids his gaze.

But she doesn't flinch; doesn't turn away. They're both tactile people by nature, and he knows it, wouldn't risk the touch if she wasn't.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean it-- any of it."

"Then why say it?" she asks, voice soft and intense, brows pulled together, heavy over the eyes finally meeting his (just as intently), gathering in a wrinkle on her forehead.

"It's…complicated. I had my reasons--"

"And you can't even tell me one of them?"

He huffs, shoulders slackening, and she slips her hands over his wrists so that he doesn't pull away, searching his face eagerly.

"I wanted to push her away," he says, eyebrows up, looking down at the sand underneath their feet.

"I figured as much-- but I still don't understand why you couldn't have told a less hurtful lie. I'm not interested anymore', or--"

"Anne wouldn't have believed it," Henry says, easing his wrists from her hold, pulling himself back, widening the space between them, "and I needed her to hate me."

"Why?"

"Because if she asked me to risk it all to be with her, I would. I would leave Katherine--"

"How is leaving Katherine 'risking it all'? I don't under--"

"I would get cut off…financially."

"Are you telling me you don't have any money in your name right now, because if so I don't believe
"No, of course I do, I have...enough to live comfortably. But I don't...have enough to make the kind of change I want to make. There's a lot I want to do with what I've been given; with what I will be given--"

"People that come from nothing change the world all the time--"

"No, they don't! No, they don't, not without the help of people with wealth, they don't, hardly ever--"

"Okay, maybe not all the time, but sometimes they do--"

"And for every one story," he says, passionately, emphatically, slamming one the edge of one hand into the open palm of another, "of someone that has; there are a million people that haven't. A million that are still stuck, that lost their dream."

Lizzy crosses her arms and shakes her head, lips pursed, then bitten. She looks upward, as if rolling her eyes, but then back down, the twitch of a grimace.

"You're disappointed in me," Henry says, softly, "I can tell. But I'm not wrong. I wish I was."

"There are still people that do--"

"Lizzy, I know that, but I'm not one of them. I'm not like other--I'm not good," he says, his voice cracking on the word (she wonders who the 'other' is that he's thinking of, as it's clearly someone, to be said with such emotional intensity it must be), "like that. I wouldn't be able to do it with less, I wouldn't be able to do it without."

"Why does it matter so much to you?"

"To...what? Make something of myself?"

"Yeah," she says, shivering, arms still crossed.

"It doesn't..." he pauses, unzips his own sweatshirt, and hands it off to her, "to you?"

"No," Lizzy says, taking it after only a moment's hesitation, and shrugging into it, "not really. I just want to...live, and like...be happy."

"I wish that could be enough for me, too," he says, and she thinks he means it; because his voice is thick, and the muscle in his jaw jumps, "but it's not."

"Why?"

"Because...the person I cared most about making proud...isn't here anymore. And I don't know why--"

"Oh, Henry--"

"No," he says, shrugging off her touch to his arm, the side of one hand pressed against the side of the bridge of his nose, quivering, neck craned down, eyes shut, "please--I don't know why...but there has to be a reason, right? A reason I'm still here, when she's...not."

She listens, swiping at the dampness under her eyes for the second time that morning:
"I don't think there's ever a reason for something like that--"

"Maybe you're right, and there isn't. It doesn't feel like there is. But I know that...if I didn't make something of myself, it would feel like it was for nothing. And that if I can't do great things, then it would be like she died for nothing, and I would never be okay with that."

"Okay," Lizzy says, voice breaking, wiping at her face with the sleeve of his sweatshirt, then taking a deep breath, "well, I know I didn't know your mom, Henry, but I don't think she would want--"

"Don't say it," he says vehemently.

"Well, do you think she would? To tell a girl that means everything to you, that she means nothing?"

"No," he grinds out, gritting his teeth, "of course not, but I didn't know what else to do."

She's never seen someone look so lovely after crying. It's an odd thing to think in such an emotionally raw moment, but think it she does-- his eyelashes flutter weakly as he winces, his mouth is a puffy, just-punched red.

If she knew him less, she might pity him more.

"That doesn't mean you couldn't have done something else."

The words are followed by an exceedingly heavy, silent moment, save the sound of the waves.

It's broken by two pedestrians they have to move out of the way for (Lizzy has to crouch down to pick up her shoes), after which he falls into the saving grace and icebreaker of old manners, asking her if she needs a ride.

Her car, it's determined, is closer than his, so she offers to drive him to it, and they walk the rest of the way to the street where she's parked in a remarkably amicable silence.

**January 12, 2017, Thursday, 7:01 AM, Santa Monica Beach Parking Lot**

"I have something else to say," Lizzy says, pulling into the spot next to where he's parked and shifting the gear to P, leaving the engine on, "but I don't think you're going to like it."

He turns his head to face her, lips blue from the Gatorade she offered from her cooler.

"Lizzy... really?"

"Yes," she says, running both hands up and down the sheepskin cover on her steering wheel, "I need to get this out, if we're to remain friends."

Henry sighs, leaning back in his seat, legs filling up the entirety of the length between his chair and the footwell, even reclined.

"I have a theory," Lizzy says, evenly, "about why you punched Brandon. I know I wasn't there at that party... but I think I am probably right."

He looks over at her, impassive.

"You hit him because you think that the way he treats girls is worse... than the way you treat girls."
"It is--"

"Tch," she scolds, one finger up, "don't interrupt!"

"In some ways, you are right," Lizzy admits, stretching her hands over the wheel, "and I know-- Anne told me, too-- that he's aggressive and…doesn't handle rejection with grace. And it's true that you're not like that."

"But in some ways…you're worse."

"How?!

"Because while it's true that Brandon, is like…a total dick…at least he doesn't lie."

"I don't lie either--"

"Henry! Yes, you do!" she says, emphatically, turning as far in her seat as she can without nudging the gear-shift, "This is what I'm talking about, you don't think you do, but you do--"

"I have always made it very clear to everyone I've slept with that I'm not looking for a serious relationship, including you--"

"But you didn't tell me that you were already in a serious relationship!"

"Well, I didn't...ah," he falters, fidgeting with the sun visor, "realize...you were mad about that."

"I did not realize I was mad about it, either," she says, the words sweetly-toned, graciously magnanimous in the tilt of her head, in the nod of acknowledgement she gives, "until Anne relayed...well, everything you told her. And I knew, obviously, that what you had told her wasn't true; because of everything you'd already told me…but, then I realized, that it wasn't exactly the first time you've lied."

"You wouldn't have slept with me if I'd told you?"

"If you said you were engaged but it was an open relationship, and she knew it was and was okay with it...sure, I probably would have. I was very attracted to you."

He smirks, playing with his sleeve.

"But that's not the point," she says, gently pushing at his shoulder, "the point is that...you didn't give me the option to make the choice. Because you didn't tell me that was the choice. You just made it for me."

"You're right. I'm sorry."

"I am right, and I believe that you're sorry. And I'm not defending Brandon-- he's not my friend, and you are. I'm just saying that I think you need to look to yourself before you throw punches at anyone else."

"And stop lying?"

"And stop lying," she confirms, nodding, "and that means to Katherine, too."

"I'm not lying to Katherine."

"So you've told her that if you weren't afraid, you would make a different choice than to be with
her?"

He exhales, heavily, and glares at her.

"Letting someone make a choice while withholding the truth from them is lying. Whoever you decide to be with, you should at the very least tell that person the truth."

"Is this another condition of your friendship?"

"No," she says, in a duh voice, rolling her eyes, "just don't lie to me again. But I do hope it's something you consider...for your own sake, at least. There's only so much one person can keep track of."
Chapter Summary

Getting numbers from hot girls, what are you doing here?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

From: L_vatican@parkerproductions.net
To: henrytudor@whitehalluniversity.edu
Sent January 12, 2017, Thursday, 1:39 PM

The dance scene, and also some on-campus clips.

Best,

L. Vatican

EVP, Legal Affairs and Corporate

Office Phone: 323.956.1527 (ext. 33)

From: henrytudor@whitehalluniversity.edu
To: L_vatican@parkerproductions.net
Sent January 12, 2017, Thursday, 5:47 PM

"On-campus clips?" At the risk of sounding blunt; I think you're maybe confusing me with someone else-- the scene I signed a waiver for was filmed at a hotel.

---

January 13, 2017, Friday, 4:29 PM, Whitehall Café

"I ordered a latte with an extra shot."

Brandon, a bit confused by the emphasis (as the guy that just announced this to him at the bar does, in fact, hold a paper cup in his hand), wipes his hands on his apron as he tries to formulate the appropriate response:
"Yes, I made that one."

The customer moves in closer to the edge of the bar (as close as he can get without actually flinging himself onto it), and uncaps the lid of his drink with the gravity of a detective unveiling a body at a crime scene.

"I can see white."

Brandon looks down at the foam, the dark rim around it, the white dot at the very center, considers it, and exhales heavily, nodding. He looks up; recoiling a bit when he finds the customer's been glaring at him the whole time, platinum brows ratcheted upwards.

"I. See. White."

"That's funny," he says, deadpan whilst looking at him dead-on, "so can I."

"What?"

"Nothing," Brandon says, shaking his head, running one hand over the top of it, "ah… it's…made with milk, so…if you don't want it made with something white; I can make one with almond milk--"

"I didn't say I didn't want it made with white," says Draco Malfoy doppelganger motherfucker, rolling his eyes, "I said I don't want to see white."

*Oh…my…God. Neither… do I.*

"Hi, I'm so sorry about that," Anne says, startling him (how long was she standing there?), reaching across the bar, "I'll toss that one out for you and make another right away."

The customer hands the drink over and she takes it, smiling. He returns the smile, eyes lighting up as he does so.

Brandon, with great effort, smiles as well, only to see the other's fall.

Again, with great effort, he leaves the bar and walks over to an open register without an eye-roll.

Out of the corner of his eye, he observes her pass the new drink back over, him drinking it and thanking Anne effusively, shoving a dollar into the tip jar and winking at her.

Brandon remembers how Henry did the same, with bigger bills, how they started coming here all the time last November, that he hadn't really realized how oddly amped he was beforehand, even pre-coffee, until near the end of that month. The edge of his mouth flickers, ruefully, at the remembrance.

It's unsettling to think of how much has changed since then. He's not used to it, and doesn't ever want to be.

*In any case,* the current latter is a pale imitation of the former, in more ways than one. Henry was *never bitchy to employees, for one*-- he always erred on the side of graciousness, sometimes even engaging some in conversation like they were lifelong friends. Brandon always got the sense he wanted to make their day better, not worse, and usually it looked like it worked-- the subjects of such attention couldn't keep the smiles off their faces, afterwards, and they looked more like smiles despite themselves rather than the purposeful ones typical to customer service.

*For another,* Anne herself was typically flustered, blushing, black eyes sparkling in such instances. And now she smiles, wanly, expression flat and face devoid of color, until he's turned around.
Anne returns to her own assigned register, logging back in.

Brandon waits until the door-bell rings before he says:

"So...*not* gay, then."

She looks over at him, forehead creased.

"Probably not," she says, dryly, "why?"

He shrugs, fidgeting at the wrist he'd been resting at the counter.

"I could let the Nsync hair slide if he was, is all."

Anne lets out a huff, while smiling, a sort of closed-mouth laugh with a slight movement of the shoulders; but frowns immediately after, clearing her throat, looking down at the watch on her wrist.

The café is empty besides the two of them, their manager is on lunch and the last difficult customer had been the last of the former line.

That *Chainsmokers* song that he heard played *almost every goddamned day last summer* is playing on the station picked by whoever the manager is (today, some Junior girl with a weird name he can't remember-- *he should probably get on that*).

He whistles, drumming fingers against the countertop, watching students pass the window, their hair lit by the sunshine.

"So," he says, sighing, turning his head back to her, "how exactly did you manage to make him a superior drink? I'm just *dying* to know."

Anne *really* wishes he would stop being funny (it makes it that much harder to remember that she hates him), and her fingers stumble over the knot at the back of her apron as she nearly chokes from the effort of suppressing another laugh.

"I didn't, really," she admits, coughing, walking behind him to put the apron on a row of hooks on the left wall behind the counter (Charis will be back any second to give Anne her ten), "I just knew the code."

"'The code'?"

"Here," she says, gesturing for him to follow her to the espresso machine by the back window, "it's slow anyway and I'm making myself a drink for my break, so I'll just show you what I did."

"My brother," Anne says, gaze focused on the task at hand (pouring frothed milk on top of one shot of espresso, angled towards him so he can view each step), "was a bartender for awhile, in Berlin."

Brandon nods, trying to be pretend to be interested.

His eyelids feel heavy, and he's tired.

He knows who to blame, also: a *sometimes-roommate* that *tends* to sporadically get out of bed late at night to:
a) leave, keys jangling

b) take every single pillow from his bed and bring them into the bathroom (because…? honestly, fuck if he knows)

Add that to Brandon being a light sleeper and he's amazed he manages to suppress a yawn right now.

"And he told me that when patrons would complain about a mixed drink not being strong enough," she adds, after pulling another shot of espresso, "he would make another and float," she says, tipping it over the foam, "a shot on top, at the surface."

Anne stirs it, only on the surface of the drink, before capping it.

"He didn't care about 'seeing white.' He just meant the drink wasn't strong enough for an extra shot," she says, shrugging, "saw a spot of white on top, and decided that confirmed his suspicion. And it probably would've been, had he kept drinking. He just didn't taste it in the first sip."

"Then why didn't he just say it wasn't strong enough?"

"Because," she says, wrinkling her nose, "some people like to make you guess!"

From: L_vatican@parkerproductions.net

To: henrytudor@whitehalluniversity.edu

Sent January 13, 2017, Friday, 4:41 PM

I can assure you I am not. You signed a waiver permitting any footage of you on-campus (outdoors, that is) to be used for the duration of the fall semester at Whitehall.

L. Vatican

EVP, Legal Affairs and Corporate

Office Phone: 323.956.1527 (ext. 33)

(Sent from iPhone)

January 13, 2017, Friday, 4:45 PM, Whitehall Café

The place became slammed while Anne was on her break. Brandon’s at the register, so Anne joins Charis in the process of churning out drinks in the back.

“Listen,” Charis yells, over the sound of the blender and the general packed clamor, “I kind of need a favor.”

*Why is it always the mean ones that end up asking for favors,* Anne wonders, releasing the button and pouring the blended drink into a plastic cup.

*Charis Stanhope,* Anne had said, reading her nametag while shaking her hand on her second day here, slightly intimidated (Charis was willowy and tall, with a glossily auburn ponytail that hung
straight to her waist, regally poised and sharp-eyed), oh, like the—

Yes, she’d filled in, acerbically, like the Iliad. I already know that you got into school here.

“Sure,” she says sweetly (she is her manager, despite all that), filling the domed cap up with whipped cream, “what do you need?”

“I kind of have to…go.”

Anne announces the drink name, puts it on the bar, and returns to their station.

“Okay, for how long?” she asks, assuming the hesitancy to name specifics has something to do with, like… a monthly problem.

“The rest of the shift.”

“What?” Anne hisses, looking pointedly over her shoulder, to the line extending nearly to the door, then back.

“Yeah, it’s an emergency—”

“Okay, well, who’s coming in to cover you, and when—”

“I wasn’t able to find a manager that could,” Charis says, shrugging with one shoulder as she pours a pitcher of brewed tea over ice, “I was texting them all during my lunch, but no one’s responded—”

“What’s the emergency?”

“None of your business?”

“Charis!”

“Anne! I’m sorry, but you’ve closed before, I’ll leave you the key—”

“Yes, but with a manager—"

“I’m not asking permission—”

“Then what’s the favor?”

“That you will…not tell Nick?”

“I don’t really see any reason why I should do that,” Anne says, snatching the tea and the drink she just made herself, heapedly calling out the orders before placing them on the bar.

“Please,” she whines, hands in prayer position by the time Anne turns back around, following her, “please, I’ll let you keep all my tips from this shift—"

“I…”

Anne hesitates, wanting to resist but knowing that resistance in this instance would be futile. She can tell Nick of course, and Nick would likely fire her—unless she can provide proof of a legitimate family emergency, and she has an inkling this isn’t it, given her reticence on the matter, given that besides the uniform, Charis is dressed and made-up to the nines (even more so than usual)—but then he’d have to hire someone else, and they could be even worse.
She might as well get the most out of this situation that she can, even if that’s less than she’d like.

“Can I get that in writing?” Anne asks, head tilted to the side.

“Anne,” she whines, hangdog expression played up, “seriously? I have to go—”

“Depends on how badly you want the favor.”

Anne gets back to the order slips printing out (a fucking backlog from hell accrued while she was haggling), starting in on the next drink.

A minute or so after she’s made the first drink on the list, she notices a piece of paper underneath the elbow at her work station, and that Charis has already slipped away.

“Hey,” Brandon yells over his shoulder, throwing his voice, looking at the growing line with panic, “did one of the machines break or something, or—”

“No,” Anne shouts back, “it’s just me back here right now, is all.”

“What? Why? Is she already due for a ten?”

He puts a finger up to the person about to order and walks over to the bar, where she deposits four drinks from a cardboard tray, one by one.

“No,” she says, shortly, “she left.”

January 13, 2017, Friday, 6:20 PM, Whitehall Café

“Oh, my God,” Anne says, flicking the remote and turning the radio off.

It’s been a whole two minutes since the café finally cleared out, and Anne has been leaning against the shelf filled with ground coffee wholesale for all of them, elbows behind her back, numb as the adrenaline built up to accommodate a rush short-staffed ebbs away.

And the worst part of it is, they’re not even closed yet.

“Everyone at this school fucking sucks.”

Anne nods, in mute agreement.

She looks out the window, sees students faraway, like little dots on the green, and has a moment of sheer terror.

Because, at any moment, one of those dots could move closer, and walk to the doors, and open the doors, and that will mean she has to make another goddamn drink or pretend she cares about their paltry offering of conversation at the cash register and she just…physically…cannot do it.

Anne nods, again, more to herself than Brandon, and then she does something she’s never done at work before.

“Boleyn? Where’d you go?”

“I’m hoping if they can’t see anyone,” Anne says, her voice tinny and traveling upwards, “they’ll
think we’re closed.”

She sits on one of the rubber mats on the floor behind the counter, to the left of the glass display of pastries, her back against the shelf.

“Oh. That’s what’s up,” Brandon says, and he takes a seat across from her, against the cupboard underneath the counter where they keep the receipt rolls.

He angles his legs away from her, pulling a knee up to his chest, and leans his head back, arms crossed.

Anne sits with her baseball cap in her lap, black hair ruffled around her face and down her shoulders, a thin red hair tie taut against the bone of her wrist, rubbing one of her temples.

“Hey—what do you do if you drop something?” he asks, head canted to the right.

“What?” she asks, releasing the hand previously massaging her forehead to fan it out in gesture.

“Like…how do you bend down in that?”

“In…oh,” she says, laughing, pulling at the hem of her skirt, then tugging at her shorts underneath, “this? I wear Spanx.”

“Gesundheit.”

Anne laughs, briefly but audibly—her threshold for humor must be lower when she’s this tired.

Somehow, she’s only managed to get five hours of sleep in two days—classes have been near impossible. She can barely read her own handwriting in her notes afterwards.

“So,” Brandon says, taking his cap off his head, “that fucking sucked.”

“Yeah,” she says, wryly, “welcome to the real world.”

“What does that mean?”

“I mean…it’s not like you’re working here for the money.”

“Why else?” he asks, the skin over the bridge of his nose bunched as he spins the hat in his hands.

“I don’t know. That’s not what you told your friends.”

Yesterday it had been the pack of them, minus Henry—thank God—and Brandon, given his presence behind the counter, same as it was last year when they came in: Will and Anthony and various other lacrosse players, bursting in like they were on a God-appointed quest to, as a collective, make as much noise as humanly possible.

It had been a ‘what are you doing here?’ from them and Brandon hadn’t missed a beat:

*Getting numbers from hot girls, what are you doing here?*

And it had been their energetically violent (punching shoulders within their group, reaching across the counter to do demonstratively manly and intricate handshakes with Brandon himself) and enthusiastically loud and approving reaction to *that.*
And it had been Anne briefly picturing bludgeoning them all with a stapler that was handy—but that was neither here nor there.

“It was just something to say,” Brandon says, shrugging.

“Alright,” she says, gritting her teeth in annoyance, “fine. I only say things when I mean them, so I guess it’s just beyond my understanding.”

“I don’t owe them an explanation—whatever,” he says, pinching the bridge of his nose and inhaling, slowly, and dropping his hand before continuing, “not that it’s your business, but I am very well-acquainted with ‘the real world’. Probably more so than you.”

“You worked in high school? Because I did—”

“Yeah, I had jobs in high school. Why did you work? For spending money? To be able to go the movies and shit?”

“I mean,” Anne falters, “yeah, but what—”

“Because I worked because I had to. What I made went towards pitching in on rent, groceries, and bills.”

She doesn’t think he’s lying, really—he’s actually never lied to her, besides the bet, she supposes, he even copped to the wink-wink-nudge-nudge about Mary taking some cash from Henry when she asked—it’s just that….

It’s just that what she already knows doesn’t align with the new information presented.

But he does seem in earnest, blue eyes intense, and he’d nearly had to spit out the words, like they were wrenched out of him reluctantly.

“Then I’m sorry,” Anne says, surprised at how easy it is to say, shrugging with the ease of it, “for assuming otherwise. I’m just…surprised, then.”

“Why?”

“That Henry’s best friends with you.”

“I mean…we’re not really friends right now,” he admits, confused, “but that’s not why…Henry doesn’t really, like…care about stuff like that.”

“Sure,” she says, tone dripping with skepticism, shaking her head, “I don’t know if you think he hasn’t…told me, but he did. So…there’s no need to lie on his behalf.”

“I’m not…’lying on his behalf’. And what does that even mean, anyway?”

"The bet?"

Brandon looks at her quizzically, brow still furrowed, as if expecting her to elaborate.

And when she doesn't:
"What bet?"

She really, really gives up.

She also, incidentally, really, really doesn't want to talk about this, and bringing it up touched a nerve turns out to be more raw than she'd hoped.

"You know, I've been trying to get along with you, but…I give up. You are…the worst person in the world."

"Okay, whatever," he says, jaw tight as he rolls up his sleeves, "your sister seems to think differently, but--"

"What does my sister have to do with--"

"I'm just saying, she clocked Henry, not me, so."

"She…what?"

"She…did you not know that? Few days ago. She's got a mean right hook, I wouldn't want to get on her bad side."

Anne laughs, long and hard and loud, at the sheer ridiculousness of the image, from the shock of it, and because she'd rather laugh than cry.

Brandon joins in eventually, although he looks at her like she's crazy while he does so.

"Well," she says, after it's passed, thumbing tears from under her eyes, "I would say Henry's the worst person world, but…he has better hair."

"Actually, wait," Anne says, snapping her fingers with a giggle, "he doesn't, anymore. So I guess you're the second worst person in the world. You have that…dubious honor."

"Why do you talk like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like you're a 48-year-old politician, or…a Victorian novelist."

"That is so rude," she gasps, putting a hand over her heart, "and…specific?"

"What I'm known for."

"I'm surprised you used 'Victorian' in the right context."

"Me, too. Don't know what it means."

The bell at the door rings, and both instinctively startle, clapping hands over their mouths.

"Sorry, are you closed?"

Fuck, Brandon mouths, lifting his hand to do so, shoulders shaking with silent laughter, he gets up to kneel and offers Anne a hand to pull her up.
Henry frowns, tapping at his phone-- he'd opened a new email while waiting for a response, although he's just about to head out since it looks like they've closed and forgotten to lock up or something (although, he could've sworn they closed at 7 and the 'open' sign on the window was still lit up).

For whatever reason the signal seems to be shorting out, buffering on the message, so he gives up, pockets his phone and looks up too see two people have emerged from behind the counter, laughing slightly, dark heads of hair mussed.

They straighten out and both wear flushed, sheepish expressions as they look at each other, before they turn around to face him.

He inhales, but somehow the air he breathes is crisp and cold enough to hurt his throat, as if he were standing on a patch of snow.

Exhales, and it feels a bit better-- but not by much.

"Hi, what can we get for you?" Anne asks, impressed with how she manages to keep her voice even, strong, manages to keep her hands tremor-free as she keys in at the register.

Henry opens his mouth and takes one step forward, hands in the pockets of his letterman jacket. He looks unhealthily pale, she can see that even his mouth paler than its norm as he presses it into a flat line.

For a moment, he looks as if he's going to speak again, and it's at the edge of that moment that he turns abruptly, suddenly around and out through the door.

Chapter End Notes

Charis Stanhope = Anne Stanhope because...too many Anne's gets confusing.

Also both names mean 'grace', so.

Works inspired by this one: [fluorescent adolescent](#) by satterthwaite, [Queendom](#) by sempereadem

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